

BALANCING

or What to Do if the Opponents Stop Bidding

Most duplicate games are won on the part scores; therefore, fighting for the part score is most important. Anytime the bidding by the opponents proceeds as follows:

- | | | | | |
|-----|------------|--------------|------------|-----------|
| (a) | 1♥
Pass | Pass
? | 2♥ | Pass |
| (b) | 1♣
2♥ | Pass
Pass | 1♥
Pass | Pass
? |
| (c) | 1♦
Pass | Pass
? | 2♦ (weak) | Pass |

It means the opponents have found a fit and do not want to bid any further. They likely hold approximately 20 points between them; therefore, you and your partner also hold approximately 20 points between you. Therefore, it is your aim to push the opponents one level higher. If you hold a 5-card suit or longer, bid that suit. If you have no 5-card suit, double, requesting your partner to bid his best suit. Remember, if you are the partner of the doubler in this situation, you DO NOT JUMP to show extra values. Your partner is already bidding every point in your hand.

Some sample hands you might have when the opponents have bid as in (a) and (b) above:

1.	xxxx	xx	AQxx	Kxx	-	Double
2.	KJxxx	xxx	KQx	xx	-	2 Spades
3.	KQxx	Kxxx	x	Qxxx	-	Pass
4.	xxx	xx	AKxx	Qxxx	-	Double

With hand 3, the opponents are getting a bad break in trumps; therefore, if you balance and find a fit, you may also be getting a bad break, but possibly at the 3 level, or worse still, your partner may bid diamonds. So in the situation where you have 4 or 5 of the enemy suit, it is not mandatory to balance.

With so many people now playing 2/1, it is also sometimes difficult to know whether they have found a fit or not, as when the bidding goes:

1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♠	Pass
Pass	?		

So in these instances, proceed with caution, particularly if you are vulnerable and they are not.

On hands where the opponents bidding proceeds as follows:

1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass

Do not balance. The opponents do not have a fit; therefore you do not have a fit.

PASS-OUT SEAT BIDDING:

It is important that you and your partner have a reliable system of bidding to handle pass-out seat bids. The only reason for these bids is to protect your partner, who may be trap passing. The following system I learned from a book by Kaplan:

1♠ Pass Pass ?

1. If you hold a balanced hand with 8-9 HCP (or 7-9 non-vul), bid 1NT*. This bid does not promise a stopper in the enemy suit. It is up to your partner to decide whether to leave it in or bid a suit, which you will pass (Many people refuse to balance with an 8-9 point notrump, particularly when vulnerable. They say you must have 11 to 14; however, they are forgetting that the only purpose of this bid is to protect a trap pass by partner. If partner is trap passing, there are now at least 26 points in the first two hands and you will practically never have 11-14 points to balance in pass-out seat).

2. If you hold 8-9 (or 7-9 non vul) and a 5-card suit, bid your suit.

3. If you hold 10+, with no 6-card or longer suit, double; and REMEMBER, when your partner makes a pass-out seat double, DO NOT MAKE A JUMP RESPONSE. He may have the 10-point minimum and is already bidding every point he believes you to possess. If he is better than minimum, he will bid again to let you know that.

4. If you hold 10+, with a 6 card or longer suit, jump shift in that suit. The reason for this is that once you hold a lengthy suit, if you double and your partner leaves the double in, the odds are greater that the opponent will make his doubled contract.

5. If you are in pass-out seat and are sitting with:

x AKQxxx AKxxx x

Cue bid the opponents suit. This bid tells partner that you know he is not trap passing, but that you hold a strong 2-suiter in pass-out seat, and it is up to you and your partner to find the best fit.

6. If you hold 4 or more of the Opener's suit, then likely your partner is not trapping; therefore, make whatever bid you deem to be correct. Also, when the bid suit is a minor, use discretion when balancing--you may balance them into a far better contract!

* Many people are not so aggressive and will have 11-14 points and a stopper. Discuss it with your partner first.