

“TRAP-PASS”

A “*Trap-Pass*” is a “*Pass*” by a Player holding a strong hand, hoping the opposition will bid themselves into difficulties. It is usually made by a Player holding both length and strength in the suit bid by the opening bidder seated to his/her right. To trap-pass is oft times also called: “*Sandbagging*,” i.e. to bid weakly or to “*pass*” with good values, in the hope that the Opponents will bid beyond their capacity to fulfill their stated contract.

Example 1: Your right-hand Opponent opens the bidding with **1S**. You hold:

AK975 8 KQ82 A93

Under these circumstances, there is strong evidence, at least thus far in the bidding, that the hand is a misfit, and that it will pay to defend rather than to bid. Usually there is no alternative to a “*trap-pass*,” i.e., to bid in the same suit as did your Opponent, especially in a Major suit, is foolhardy. Conditions when a Minor suit is opened to your right, however, can be vastly different, as, oft times, Opener might hold as few as 3-pieces of the Minor and, under these circumstances, coming into the bidding may be appropriate.

Example 2: Your right-hand Opponent opens the bidding with **1D**. You hold:

A75 K7 KQT9852 3

In this scenario, an overcall of **3D** is not out of the question. Remember, a “**2D**” bid would have been a “*Michaels*” cue-bid showing 5-5 or longer in the Majors, very weak or very strong. The **3D** overcall, here, is regarded as natural, showing a 6-card or longer minor suit holding with 10 or more HCP’s; i.e. a “*simple, natural overcall*.”

The same principle of trap-passing applies in the “*balancing*” or 4th seat, as well. You hold the same hand as shown above in Example 1 above, with your left-hand Opponent having opened **1S** followed by your Partner and RHO both having passed. If you, here, would “*double*,” Partner would necessarily construe it as a Take-Out. You have to “*trap-pass*,” and hope to defend.

Trap passes are also effective when the Opponents have suit misfits, often bidding beyond their attainable contract. A trap-pass becomes a doubtful proposition, however, when holding 18 or 19 HCP’s, and is customarily unwise when hold 20 or more HCP’s, as the danger in passing up a game in favor of a small penalty becomes too great. Alternatively, with a strong, but short holding in the enemy’s suit, it is often best to either make a Take-Out Double with appropriate support for the as-yet, un-bid suits, else to make an overcall of **1-NT** with balanced distribution, sufficient strength and at least one “*stopper*” in the Opponent’s bid suit.

When making a “*trap-pass*,” it is important and critical to pass “*in tempo*.” To hesitate and to then “*Pass*” is potentially detrimental for two reasons:

1. It is likely to be counter-productive to alert your Opponents that you have a good hand and likely length and strength in their suit, especially if you end up defending against a final contract bid by your Opponents.

2. Partner is not entitled to the information that would be conveyed if you were to pause followed by a reluctant and hesitant “*Pass*.” Under such circumstances, Partner may become barred from the bidding if such “*unauthorized*” information is disseminated by your hesitation.