



Protective Bidding Part III

IN the last two articles I have looked at the art of protective bidding, often passing on the first round and then entering the auction later when the opponents stop at a low level and you know partner is marked with some values. We've also seen how when the bidding goes 1x – Pass – Pass and you are thinking of bidding, you can 'borrow a king' from partner and add that to your point total in order to justify a call.

What about no-trump bids – do they follow the same principle?

Yes: when you overcall 1NT in fourth seat you are showing around 11-14 points, protecting partner's probable flat 12- or 13-point hand. (A common manoeuvre in expert circles these days is to play a 1NT overcall in fourth seat as 11-14 over 1♣/1♦ and 11-16 over 1♥/1♠, but for simplicity's sake I would suggest always using 11-14 as it is easier to remember).

The full range of no-trump bids in fourth seat would be this:

- 11-14 points = Overcall 1NT;
- 15-18 points = Double, then bid no-trumps;
- 19-21 points = Overcall with 2NT;
- 22+ points = Double then jump in no-trumps (I admit this is pretty rare).

(Readers familiar with the Unusual No-trump may be surprised that I am suggesting you shouldn't use it in fourth seat, but remember it is essentially a pre-emptive weapon and not normally needed when the opponents stop at the one level.)

How would you bid over such no trump bids? Well, when responding to a 1NT or 2NT overcall you use the same system as if partner opened with that bid, so Stayman and transfers apply. (If you double and then bid no trumps the bidding reverts to natural lines since the doubler's partner will already have indicated his suit.)

One of the key points to note about these no-trump bids is that you do not always need a full stop in the opponent's suit to make the bid.

Have a look at the following hands and imagine 1♠ is passed round to you:

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3
♠ Q3	♠ 10854	♠ 75
♥ Q54	♥ AQ	♥ AKJ6
♦ KJ97	♦ AJ72	♦ A432
♣ KQ43	♣ K32	♣ 763

On Hand 1 the best call is 1NT. With lots of 'soft values' (here, queens and a jack) you are suitable for playing in no-trumps and it is always advantageous to put the opening bidder on lead – he will have to lead away from his spade holding, creating a sure double stop when partner has A-x-x or K-x-x, quite likely on the auction.

On Hand 2 the only call you can really make is 1NT. You can't pass as game is possible and the alternative of doubling leaves you in trouble when partner bids hearts. If 1NT ends the auction you'll be in a sensible part-score, and if partner has the values to bid on he is likely to have a spade honour.

Hand 3 should double, as you are quite happy if partner bids no-trumps or a suit. Although the absence of a spade stopper shouldn't automatically stop you bidding 1NT, the fact that you are better placed after a double makes that call clear-cut.



Before we conclude our look at protective bidding, are there any situations we should be wary of? One situation you must watch out for is the *non-fit* auction, where the opponents are in a horrible mess and if you bid you too will be in one.

Consider a few of these auctions:

Oppo 1	Partner	Oppo 2	You
1♠	Pass	1♥	Pass
2♥	Pass	2♣	Pass
		Pass	?

This is *not* a fit auction. The opponents may only have seven hearts between them (5-2 fit, simple preference) and may each have a shortage in partner's suit. Leave them alone and pass it out. There is also less merit in protecting when the opponents have bid three suits as it is less likely that you and your partner will find a playable strain.

Oppo 1	Partner	Oppo 2	You
1NT	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♦	Pass	2♣	Pass
		Pass	?

Again, this is a misfit auction. The opponents have bid three suits and appear to hate each other's suits. There is little upside to bidding – only if partner is waiting to pass a double will it be of any use. Remember the 2♦ bidder will often have a singleton spade and the opening bidder will frequently have a singleton diamond, so even if you find an apparent safe haven in hearts the defenders will have an easy line of attack.

Oppo 1	Partner	Oppo 2	You
1NT	Pass	1♣	Pass
		Pass	?

Surprisingly this is a fit auction. Both players have effectively bid clubs (holding any other suit, your LHO would bid it) so the time is ripe to try and steal a major suit part-score. (If your opponents are playing a short or artificial club then this may not be the case – but with announcements you will at least know this.)

Let's review the Dos and Don'ts of protective bidding:

Do:

- Protect aggressively when a one-level opening is passed around to you; stealing the part-score is just as crucial as finding thin games.
- Remember that partner's 1NT overcall will have borrowed a king in fourth seat – he will have 11-14 points rather than 16-18.

Don't:

- Forget to look at the auction before you protect and see if the opponents have found a fit; if it is a horrible misfit auction with two players battling against each other, then just leave them be.
- Be worried about not having a full stop in the opponent's suit when you protect with a bid of 1NT as partner will normally have three or four cards opposite your doubleton.