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This Week in Bridge

(265) They Double Our Control-Showing Bid

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Level: 2

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

Control-Showing Cuebids are a large topic that we must spend some time making good agreements about with partner (our style – Italian, American, Modern). An additional level of complexity can be added to our auction if the opponents interfere. Since we may be in an auction where we are trying for slam and we are at a high level, it is unusual for the opponents to overcall into our auction, but the opponents may make a lead-directing double without taking much risk. Our goal here is to develop good agreements about how to use this lead-directing double against our opponents. Let's see how we can turn an opponent's effort to help their partner get off to a good opening lead into an advantage for us.

Direct Seat Actions After Opponent's Double

If we are in a slam auction and partner makes a control-showing cuebid that our right-hand opponent (RHO) then doubles, we want to have good agreements about how to handle the situation. RHO's lead-directing double has given us the options of pass and redouble that we did not have before the double. Our primary rule in this auction is that pass is our default action. This allows our side to make use of the bidding space that double gives us with the most common information. Let's look at an example to see how we define our bids in this type of auction.

Example 1

1♠	P	2NT*	P
3♣	P	4♣	X
___	?		

One thing that may affect our agreements in this auction is our cuebidding style. Here is a common set of agreements for the more difficult Italian-style cuebids.

- Pass Default action. Nothing else to say.
- XX 1st round control of ♣
- 4♦ 2nd round control of ♣ and a ♦ control
- 4♥ 2nd round control of ♣, a ♥ control, and no ♦ control
- 4♠ 2nd round control of ♣, no outside controls, usually good trump



Note: Playing American-style cuebids, an initial cuebid shows first-round control, so a XX in the direct seat shows second-round control and denies control in any other suit below game.

Balancing Seat Actions After Opponent's Double

After RHO makes a double and we pass this around to partner, here is how partner continues the bidding.

Example 2

1♠ P 2NT* P
3♠ P 4♣ X
P P ___?

- Pass (Extremely Rare) If partner has a large number of ♣, they may choose to play 4♣X.
- XX 1st round control of ♣
- 4♦ 2nd round control of ♣ and a ♦ control
- 4♥ 2nd round control of ♣, a ♥ control, and no ♦ control.
- 4♠ 2nd round control of ♣, no outside controls.

We have discussed the modern approach to this type of auction where pass is the default action, leaving room to communicate, and bidding 4♠ shows a good trump holding. Some partnerships may agree to play a Fast Arrival style where bidding 4♠ is the weakest action, but this makes it more difficult for Responder to further explore slam while keeping the auction at a low level.

Opponent Doubles Our Splinter

If we have an auction where partner makes a splinter bid and our RHO makes a lead-directing double, then we have a similar approach to how we communicate with our partner.

Example 3

1♠ P 4♣* X
___?

- Pass Default Auction, nothing to say
- XX 1st round control of ♣ (usually the ♣A)
- 4♦ ♦ control, no ♣A
- 4♥ ♥ control, no ♣A
- 4♠ No control to cuebid below game, no ♣A, usually good trump

If we pass this double around to partner, they redouble with a void (1st round control). Other bids show that they have a singleton for their splinter and are control showing cuebids. A bid of 4♠ then shows a singleton ♣ with nothing else to show.



Note: Some partnerships play fast arrival style in this auction (it is more common than the control showing cuebid auction); with those agreements, a 4♠ bid would deny the ♣A and show wasted values in the opponent's suit.

Conclusion

When the opponents double our control-showing bid (usually a control-showing cuebid), they give us a chance to better exchange information with partner. But if we are not on the same page with partner, instead of this double helping us, we can have a costly bidding mixup. The modern standard is to use pass as a default action in the direct seat, not promising anything specific about our hand. Whether you adopt this approach or a fast arrival approach, the most important thing is for you and partner to both know what you are trying to communicate to each other in this type of auction. You should discuss these situations with partner because though this seems like a simple situation, it has led to a surprisingly large number of bidding disasters.