

Protective Bidding

Objective – Protective Bidding

Protective bidding is bidding in the pass out seat when your opponents are about to declare the contract. The term 'protecting' is used in reference to the fact that you are often 'protecting' partner who may have values, but had no suitable bid. In this position we must bid on hands which we would not have considered bidding with, had it been your RHO who had bid (called the direct or immediate position).

Topics to be covered

The topics and conventions we are going to look at in this article are:

- Description of protective sequences
- Theory of the transferred King
- Protecting with NT bids
- Responding to partner's protective bids
- When to protect and when not to protect

The theory behind protective bidding

When the opening bid is passed out, or the opposition auction dies at a low level, our side must have a significant share of the points. It is therefore likely that we may have a cheap sacrifice against the opponent's contract, or even that we are making our own contract, and it is the opponents who have found a cheap sacrifice against ours. We don't need to see HCP in our own hand to know that our side have those points.

Assuming that the opponents will bid game with 25 HCP between them (and investigate game if they believe that they might have 25+), when they stop at a low level, they will have a maximum of 24 HCP, leaving our side with 16+. Even if the opponents open and respond (at the 1 level), they may still have little as 16 HCP between them, so we may even have the majority of the points

Protective situations

There are 3 basic protective sequences to consider. Although they are all examples of protecting, the tactics are different, and it is important to understand the differences between them

1. Responder passes the opening bid

e.g. (1♥)-P-(P)-?

2. The opponents agree a suit and pass at a low level

e.g. (1♥)-P-(2♥)-P-(P)-?

or (1♣)-P-(1♥)-P-(2♥)-P-(P)-?

3. The opponents have a 'preference' suit agreement, and pass at a low level

e.g. (1♥)-P-(1♠)-P-(2♣)-P-(2♥)-P-(P)-?

Let's be clear what are NOT protective positions

(1♣)-P-(1♥)-?

Protective is not the same as '4th in hand'. You usually are 4th in hand in relation to the opening bidder, but a protective position is one where there has been a bid followed by 2 passes.

Let's consider the 3 situations separately

1. Responder does not bid

This is the most important situation to consider. The bidding starts with 1 of a suit and is followed by 2 passes

E.g. (1♥)-P-(P)

Let's start with the points. Our left hand opponent has 11-19 points, our right hand opponent has 0 to 5. Giving the opponents 11 to 24, and leaving us with 16 to 29. Regardless of how many points we can see in our own hand, we expect this to be the case. We know that we have enough points to have a good contract at the 1 or 2 level (making or going down no more than 1). We may even have enough points for game. We also know that the opponents are in a very cheap contract. If they can't make, it will be a very cheap save against anything we can make.

The key point is that even if we can't see lots of points in our own hand, the auction has told us that our side has points, so if we don't have them partner has them.

Before we consider the bid in the protective seat, let's consider some hands in 2nd seat

<p>♠ Q6 ♥ KJ42 ♦ A106 ♣ KJ84</p>	Hand 1 : Your RHO opens 1♥
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What do we bid if the opponent's open 1♥? We have 14 HCP, but we have no suitable bid. We are not strong enough for 1NT, our club suit is a long way from being good enough for a 2 level overcall, and we don't have enough spades for a takeout double. In fact we have no available bid if the opponents open 1 of a minor either. If they open 1♠ we can double, but any other opening we must pass

Although this is obviously a constructed hand, with just 1 point more we could overcall 1NT, it is very common that after the opponents open we have a hand with good enough values to compete, but we don't have a suitable bid. Generally if we have 15 or more points in the direct seat we will be able to find a bid, but there are lots of hands of up to 14 HCP where we are stuck for a bid.

How much do we need to compete in the protective position

So the auction tells us that we need to bid; even though often we will have a hand which would not compete in the direct seat. How much weaker should we be prepared to bid? The guideline is that you should bid with 3 points less than you would in the direct position. 3 points being the value of a King, this is known as the theory of the 'transferred King'. The idea is that in the pass out seat you compete on about 3 points less than you would in the direct seat, i.e. the value of a King. Because you compete slightly weaker, your partner must take this in to account when responding. They take away 3 points (the value of a King), and respond appropriately (more of this later). I.e. the value of a King is 'transferred' from one hand to the other.

Let's summarise this by comparing bidding over a 1 heart overcall in the 2 positions

Bid	Direct position, (1♥)-?	Protective position (1♥)-P-(P)-?
1 level overcall	8-17 HCP	5-14 HCP
2 level overcall	10-18 HCP	7-15 HCP
Double (takeout)	11+ HCP	8+ HCP
1NT	15-18 HCP	11-14 HCP

Note that 'transferring a King' only applies to the points, the shape requirements don't change.

If it is easier, visualise one of your small cards to be the King (perhaps in your best suit), and bid as you would in 2nd position.

Of course, often you will be a passed hand (you will only NOT be a passed hand when the opening bidder was dealer). This limits your hand to less than an opening bid, and ensures that partner won't get carried away.

Suit overcalls. Suits do not need to be the same quality as you would like in the direct seat. More or less any 5 card suit is suitable, as long as your overall hand strength is suitable.

NT overcalls. For a direct overcall it is mandatory to have a stop in the opponent's suit, and ideally you would like 2 stops. This is less important in the protective position. If you have the values for a 1NT bid, then the opponent's bidding has told you that your partner has (something like 8-14). They are very likely to have sufficient values to have made a bid themselves. The reason that haven't bid is because they have length (and possibly values) in the opponent's suit. With a singleton or doubleton in the opponent's suit, partner would have the shape for a take out double, and probably have a 5 card suit they could overcall. They either don't have a 5 card suit, or if they do, their values are not in the suit.

Let's look at some example hands and consider what we would bid in the 2 positions. Let's assume the same start to the bidding in all cases. Our opponent opens 1♥, and we hold the following hands; consider what we would do in the direct seat, and in the protective seat

Hand	Bid in direct seat; (1♥)-?	Bid in protective seat; (1♥)-P-(P)-?
♠A10943 ♥743 ♦J63 ♣63	Pass, only 5 HCP	1♠, minimum, but sufficient in the protective seat
♠J6432 ♥AJ2 ♦Q73 ♣63	Pass, suit is too poor for a hand with only HCP (would overcall in a better hand)	1♠
♠52 ♥K32 ♦52 ♣AJ8432	Pass, not strong enough for a 2 level overcall	2♣
♠AK1092 ♥A2 ♦KQ4 ♣1095	1♠	Double, too strong for a 1♠ overcall. Bid spades on the next round

♠ KQ43 ♥ 94 ♦ A8765 ♣ K8	Pass, diamonds not good enough for a 2 level overcall, too few spades for 1♠, and not enough clubs for double	Double, too many points to let the opponents play in 1♥. You have to decide whether to pass or bid 2♦ over 2♣
♠ AQJ642 ♥ 94 ♦ A98 ♣ 86	1♠, (unless playing weak jump overcalls)	2♠
♠ KJ63 ♥ 8 ♦ A985 ♣ J532	Pass, too weak for a takeout double	Double, perfect shape, and sufficient points in protective position
♠ KJ6 ♥ J54 ♦ AJ42 ♣ Q65	Pass, wrong shape for a suit or double, not enough points for 1NT	1NT. Not essential to have a stop in the protective position
♠ 7 ♥ KJ10872 ♦ A75 ♣ QJ2	Pass, only suit held is the opponents	Pass. Too likely you will push the opponents in to a better contract

NT bidding

Consider various point ranges we could have, and how we would show a balanced hand in the direct and protective positions

Point range	Bid in direct position	Bid in protective position
11-14	Pass	1NT
15-18	1NT	Double, and bid NT
19-21	Double and bid NT	?

Because we now bid on a 11-14 point range, we can't show 15-18 with a 1NT overcall. Instead we have to double first, and bid NT on the next round. In the both the direct and protective positions, this shows a hand too strong to overcall 1NT in the first place. So in the direct position this shows about 19-21, and in the protective position it shows 15-18. How do we show this strong hand (19-21) in the protective position. We can double and then jump in NT, but this is unsatisfactory if partner has to bid at the 2 level. For example (1♠)-P-(P)-Double-(P)-?; partner is forced to respond, but any bid he makes will be at the 2 level, and jumping to 3NT may take you too high.

It is therefore usual to play a direct 2NT in the protective position as being natural, showing a strong balanced hand. In the direct position we don't use a natural 2NT bid, instead most people use it as a conventional bid, for example showing 5/5 in the 2 lowest suits (i.e. the minors over 1 of a major).

So if 2NT is natural, what do we do with a hand with 5/5 in the minors? The answer is that unless you are very strong, you should pass. If the opponents open a major and you are 5/5 in the minors, who has the other major? Not your partner, because we know they have some values, yet they could not overcall. So it is likely that the opponents have a fit in the other major. You bidding on a hand which would compete in the direct seat gives them another chance to bid. It is very likely that you will push them in to a better fit. This is an example of the opposite of what we have been

considering; this is a hand where we would bid in the direct seat, but the correct bid in the protective position is to Pass.

If we have a strong hand with 5/5 in the minors, start by overcalling 2♦, and bid 3♣ later if possible. Or if very strong, double and then bid one of the minors.

This is a general principle in the protective seat, we don't make pre-emptive bids. Pre-emptive bids work in the direct seat because they take away bidding space from our LHO, and make it more difficult for the opponents to find a fit other than in the suit opened. In the protective seat this is not necessary. If we Pass the opponents will pass; in fact pass is the best action to stop the opponents finding a fit in another suit.

When NOT to protect

There is 1 thing to be wary of when protecting in this position, allowing the opponents to find a better contract.

The opponents have only bid 1 suit, and it is very possible that they have a fit in one of the 3 unbid suits. If responder has a fit with opener, it is possible they would have raised, or bid, because they know of the fit. With a misfit it is more dangerous for responder to bid. Because responder has passed, opener has been unable to show a second suit, in which there might be a fit. If we bid in the protective position, we allow the opponents to bid another suit, and possibly find a better fit.

The ideal situation to compete is when we are short in the opponent's suit, and have length in the others. Now it seems that the opponents have already found their best spot.

Be very wary of competing when you are short in a suit NOT bid by the opponents. Let's say we have a singleton, who has this suit? Well there are 2 possibilities, the opponents have an 8+ card fit, or partner has 5+ cards in the suit. Remember when we are competing we are 'protecting' partner who we think has values but was unable to overcall. If partner has values and a 5 card suit, it is very likely they could overcall. Either partner does not have 5 (so the opponents have an 8 card fit), or partner is not particularly strong. In neither case is it right to compete.

Similarly if you have length in the suit bid by your opponent. If partner has 3+ then the opponents are in a bad contract. If instead partner has fewer than 3, then it is very likely they would have been able to compete if they had some values. Either with an overcall or a takeout double. They haven't competed, suggesting that it is more dangerous for us to bid.

That is not to say that we should never bid when we have length in the opponent's suit, or a shortage outside their suit, but we should be wary.

<p>♠ J8 ♥ 75 ♦ AQ1042 ♣ K852</p>	<p>Board 26 : Dealer East : All vulnerable</p> <table><tr><th><i>West</i></th><th><i>North</i></th><th><i>East</i></th><th><i>South</i></th></tr><tr><td>Pass</td><td>?</td><td>1♣</td><td>Pass</td></tr></table> <p>Here is a recent example which occurred in a local club duplicate. You are North and an opening bid of 1♣ is passed round to you, do you bid ? At any other time this is an automatic overcall of 1♦. But ask yourself who has the majors ? Partner couldn't overcall or double, so it is very likely that E/W have an 8 card major fit. The majors outrank our diamonds so bidding is far more likely to give us a worse score than a better one. On the actual hand opener was 4441 with a singleton diamond, and partner has a weak NT with 4 diamonds. Yes N/S could make 9 tricks in their 9 card diamond fit, but E/W could make 9 tricks in spades in their 9 card spade fit ! 1♣ was 2 off vulnerable</p>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>	Pass	?	1♣	Pass
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>						
Pass	?	1♣	Pass						

Responding to a protective bid

When we are responding to a protective bid, we use the same 'transferred King' that the overcaller used. I.e. this time we *subtract* the value of a King from our hand in considering our response. Let's again look at some example hands to illustrate this

Hand	Bid after direct double; (1♥)-Dbl-(P)-?	Bid after protective double; (1♥)-P-(P)-Dbl-(P)-?
♠ A109 ♥ KQ43 ♦ Q63 ♣ 632	2NT, showing 10-12 HCP	1NT, because partner is in the protective position, 1NT shows 10-12 HCP
♠ J62 ♥ 873 ♦ AQ432 ♣ K3	3♦, showing 8-11 HCP	2♦, not strong enough for 3♦
♠ 532 ♥ KJ932 ♦ A2 ♣ AJ8	3NT	Pass

1. Bidding when the opponents have found a fit, and stopped at a low level

The sort of sequences we are talking about is

(1♠)-P-(2♠)-P-(P)-?
(1♦)-P-(1♥)-P-(2♥)-P-(P)-?

This is another situation where it is important to compete. In fact there are good reasons why it is even more important to compete.

The opponents have found a fit, almost certainly an 8+ card fit. If the opponents have an 8 card fit, we are almost certain to have an 8 card fit ourselves.

So both sides have 16-24 HCP and both sides have a suit to play in. We know that just from the auction, without even looking at our hand. If we pass, it is almost certain that we will get a bad score. The opponents make when we have a making contract of our own or a good sacrifice; or the opponents are going down, for a cheap sacrifice against our making contract. It is vital to compete.

Here we should compete with most hands without length in the opponent's suit. Values are not important, because we know our partner has them. Particularly if we have a shortage in the opponent's suit, it is likely that our partner was not able to compete because that had an unsuitable hand shape.

Possible bids

Double – Suggests at least 2 places to play. 1 of which is the other major. We don't need a perfect hand shape here, 5422 for example is quite suitable (as long as one doubleton is the opponent's suit, and the other is NOT the other major).

2NT – Both minors (takeout without the other major). We only need 4/4 in the protective position. Note that in these sequences we have already passed, so we can't have 5/5

Responding to a bid

1. Do NOT raise unless you have a very exceptional hand. In these protective positions, partner has bid on your strength. In all these sequences partner has already passed. Partner is only competing the part score, not looking for game. Imagine the opponents had stopped in 2♥, partner bids 2♠, and the opponents bid 3♥. Even with a good spade fit you should not bid 3♠. Partner's bid is protecting, it is very likely that neither 3♥ nor 3♠ will make. Remember, partner did not bid 1♠ initially. If you would have raised 1♠ to 3S, then you are not good enough to bid 3♠ now. Bid 1 level lower than if partner had overcalled initially. So to bid 3♠ now, you need a hand which would have raised a 1♠ overcall to 4♠ (i.e. probably 5 spades)

Responding to a takeout double

1. Do NOT jump the bidding, whatever your strength. In protective positions, partner has bid on your strength. Partner is only competing the part score, not looking for game (remember we have 16-24, not enough for game)
2. You can use 2N as 2 places to play. The opponents bid 1♥-2♥ and partner doubles in the protective seat, we have 4/4 (or even 5/4) in the minors. Bid 2NT, remember partner may not have a perfect takeout double shape

Summary of Key Tips

1. Theory of transferred King. In the protective position, treat your hand as 3 points stronger (the value of a King), and bid what you would in the direct seat. As the partner of the protective bidder, subtract the value of a King and respond accordingly
2. In the protective position the 2NT bid should be natural (20-22), not a 2 suiter (e.g. the minors)
3. When partner protects, do not get over enthusiastic. Remember the transferred King. Our natural inclination is to bid as if they had overcalled (particularly with a fit). Do not try for game (unless partner shows extra values by bidding again)

4. Do not protect when you are short in a suit outside the opponent's suit. You may be allowing them to find a better contract
5. Protect aggressively if the opponents pass out after finding a fit. Find any excuse for bidding. You are protected by the trump fit as well as the points
6. If partner protects after the opponents pass out with a fit, you cannot have hand which will look for game. Even if the opponents raise their suit, and you have a good fit for partner, it is usually correct to pass. As a rule of thumb compete 1 level LOWER than if partner had made a non-protective bid.
7. If partner makes a protective takeout double after the opponents stop in a fit, do not expect a perfect double shape. E.g. they may have support for only 2 of the 3 suits. 2NT by the partner of the protective doubler, can be used to show 2 places to play
8. Be cautious to protect when the opponents have not confirmed a fit. Protect in this position only with a hand close to the values and shape to protect in a non-protective position