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Leaders in Bridge Entertainment and Education

PO Box 14915 ♠ Tallahassee, FL 32317

info@advinbridge.com ♠ 850 570 6459

www.advinbridge.com

(109) More Constructive Bidding: 2NT Trump Suit Game Try - 3344

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Level: Advanced

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

When the auction begins 1X – 1Y – 2Y we usually have 4-card support for our raise of partner's suit. But in some auctions, we don't have a convenient rebid and we are forced to raise on only 3-card support. For example, if we have 3-4-5-1 distribution and the auction begins 1♦ - 1♠ - then we will need to raise to 2♠ with only 3-card support.

Some players (a generally older fashioned approach) choose to raise frequently on 3-card support (even with a balanced hand) if they don't have a stopper in an unbid suit.

Example

♠xx

♥Axx

♦KQxx

♣Axxx

When the auction begins 1♦ - 1♥ - these players would raise to 2♥ with this hand. Most players would rebid 1N with this balanced hand, but players with the "frequently raise on 3-cards support style" would rebid 2♥ on this hand.

If we are going to raise Partner more frequently on 3-card support then Partner will need to have a way to find out what we have raised on (and even if we do so only rarely, this will be a useful tool). Let's see how this works.

2N Trump Ask - 3344

When the auction begins 1X – 1Y – 2Y (Example, 1♥ - 1♠ - 2♠) then any new suit (even returning to Opener's suit) is a Help Suit Game Try attempting to reach game in Y (our expected fit.) But if Responder has only a 4-card suit then they cannot be completely confident that we actually have a fit (we might be in a 4-3 fit). If Responder has less than an invitational hand they will just pass. But if they have an invitational or better hand they would like to have a way to find out if Opener is minimum or maximum and a way to find out if Opener raised on 3-cards or 4-cards. We will use a 2N bid as an ask ("Trump Ask") in exactly this way.



General Auction

1X - 1Y - 2Y - 2N* -

- 3♣* 3-card Raise, Minimum Values
- 3♦* 3-card Raise, Maximum Values
- 3♥* 4-card Raise, Minimum Values
- 3♠* 4-card Raise, Maximum Values

As you can see, Opener replies in steps showing 3-, 3+, 4-, 4+, telling Responder about their fit (3- or 4-card) and the strength of their hand (12 vs. 14). There is one additional call for when Opener is 4333 with 4-card support for partner and maximum values - 3N. In this case 3N shows the hand perfectly and allows Responder to pass and let play in 3N if they so desire.

Example

1♣ - 1♥ - 2♥ - 2N* Asks how many ♥ Opener has and if they are a min or a max (closer to 12 or 14.)

Is there a Downside to the Convention?

Whenever we add a new convention to our agreements it is good to think about what are we giving up by playing this. In this case, Responder is unlikely to want to make a natural 2N bid (that would be NF invitational). Thus, we are actually giving up very little by adding this agreement. Responder can still handle a balanced invitational hand by using our 2N convention and then offering 3N later.

Example

1♦ - 1♠ -
2♠ - 2N* -
3♠* - 3N

When Opener shows 4-card support with a maximum Responder will normally bid 4♠, but with the right hand (balanced with stoppers in the unbid suits) they can still offer 3N and see which game partner would like to play.

Conclusion

Using 2N as “a Convention not a contract!” is one of the themes of modern bridge – this is an example of that. We can use 2N (a place that we are unlikely to want to play) to simultaneously explore for a fit (ensuring we actually have a 4-4 fit) and quantifying Opener’s hand more specifically. With our 3-3+4-4+ steps we give away little information about dummy or declarer’s hand. Give this agreement a try and give yourself an excellent tool for exploring game!