

Traps for the Unwary

Responder's rebid

by Michael Byrne



IN LAST month's article we were considering which suit to respond when your partner opens the bidding. Sometimes you should respond in a major suit, sometimes in a minor suit. The key to having a smooth and confident auction is to consider how the rest of the auction will continue, concentrating on both the initial call and your rebid.

Changing the suit

Let's take a typical start to the auction:

West	North	East	South
1♣	–	1♠	–
2♣	–	?	

You have the following hands:

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3
♠ A Q 3 2	♠ A Q 9 4 3	♠ A K J 8 3
♥ K 8 7	♥ K 8 7 2	♥ A Q 10 8
♦ Q 10 2	♦ 9 2	♦ Q 6 4
♣ J 10 4	♣ J 10	♣ 6

Hand 4	Hand 5
♠ A Q 4 3	♠ A 6 5 3 2
♥ K 8 7	♥ K 8 7 2
♦ 4 3 2	♦ 5 4 3
♣ J 8 4	♣ J

The first thing to decide is what strength the hands fall into. Generally when your partner rebids his suit you should pass on poor hands, even if they lack support.

Hand 5 is a case in point – whilst it is possible that you have a 5-3 spade fit or a 4-4 heart fit (partner might have rebid 2♣ with five clubs and four hearts, lacking the strength to reverse), it is inviting trouble to bid on. Passing looks best, as even a 5-1 club fit will not be the end of the world. It is worth noting that partner should never rebid a five card club suit if he is shapely with three spades, those hands should raise to 2♠.

Hands 2 and 4 are invitational in strength, they want to invite game. Hand 4 has an easy raise to 3♣. Whilst it's true your likely game (if you have one) is 3NT, to bid 2NT will leave you in the wrong part-score if partner passes. 3♣ will end the auction if partner is minimum, but if he is maximum he can bid again, either 3♥ to show strength, 3♠ to show support (both of which will see us play in clubs) or 3♦ over which we can try 3NT.

Hand 2 should bid 2♥, forcing for one round. If partner gives simple preference to spades or rebids clubs we can pass, while if he raises hearts or jumps to 3♠ to show six clubs and three spades and a non minimum hand then we can go on to game.

Hands 1 and 3 are game-forcing hands. On the first, 3NT is the bid – don't think for a moment about only bidding 2NT. You hold two honours in partner's suit as well as a full stopper in both of the unbid suits. There is no need to consult partner. If he has either modest clubs and a stronger hand, or a minimum hand with good clubs you will have a play for game.

Hand 3 may well end up in 3NT but there is no need to rush. Your priority (as ever) is to locate a major suit fit. Many people would jump to 3♥, but that is too space consuming. A change of suit is forcing for one round so 2♥ is your best bet. A major suit fit will soon come to light or no trumps can be located.

Now let's give you a really tough hand to bid, again after the same start of 1♣ – 1♠ – 2♣:

♠ A K J 8 5
♥ 6 5
♦ A J 3
♣ 8 6 5

This is the sort that teachers dread their beginners picking up, for there is only one answer that does not always sit well with those that like simple rules.

First let's consider some candidates before dismissing them. A raise to 3♣ shows your support, but partner can (and often will) pass it. A bid of 2♣

is weak with 6 cards, and a jump to 3♣ is invitational with a 6-card suit, wrong on both counts. The second best bid is 3NT, but holding two small hearts the bid is unattractive, you might belong in clubs or spades – and you will invariably get a heart lead having bypassed the major. The solution is to bid 2♦, to suggest a forward going hand with five spades and four diamonds.

Although partner will expect a four card diamond suit there is no danger. If he raises to 3♦ you can bid 3♥ (4th suit forcing) and try and angle the partnership into no trumps. On the plus side, partner might support spades or go to No Trumps, and the right strain is reached from the right side - crucial if partner has a position stopper like K-x.

Responder's reverse

In all of the examples above you had responded 1♣, and a second suit you were considering bidding was lower ranking than your first. What about situations where you are considering a responder's reverse?

This time the auction starts in similar fashion:

1♣ – 1♥ – 2♣ – ?

Hand 6 ♠ A 10 8 4 ♥ K Q 10 5 2 ♦ J 4 ♣ 3 2	Hand 7 ♠ J 9 7 3 ♥ A Q J 8 5 ♦ 3 2 ♣ A J
Hand 8 ♠ K 7 6 2 ♥ Q 10 6 3 2 ♦ K 6 4 ♣ 6	Hand 9 ♠ 6 5 3 2 ♥ A Q 10 7 3 ♦ 6 5 ♣ A 3

Hands 6 and 9 are invitational in nature and want to explore game. On hand 6 a responder's reverse of 2♣ would force to game, not explore it, so is best ruled out. This is a relatively new shift in modern bidding, but there is little point in bidding a suit in which partner has denied four cards unless it sets up a game force.

Any rebid of hearts would guarantee a 6-card suit and suggests a weak hand, so that is out of the question. The least bad bid is 2NT, which projects your general strength and balanced nature. If

partner has 3-card support for hearts he can show it now, or he can rebid clubs as weak (to play), or raise to 3NT if he has enough general strength.

Hand 9 can't really bid 2NT with no stopper in either of the unbid suits so should raise to 3♣. It is true that this could be a 5-2 fit (if partner has four diamonds and five clubs) but it won't be a disaster as your hand is composed of aces, which play well in a suit contract.

Sadly hand 8 must simply pass – however unappetising – since game is not on the agenda.

And finally hand 7. This is a perfect responder's reverse, forcing to game and keeping every strain in the picture. And if the final contract is 3NT then it is partner, with the diamond stopper, who should be playing it.

Let's review the dos and don'ts of responder's rebid after partner makes a minimum rebid of his opening suit:

Do:

- Get out of the auction when you know game is not on and you sense a misfit.
- Raise 1M to 2M on minimum hands that have three-card support and a ruffing value, whether you are opener or responder.
- Feel free to introduce a three-card suit – particularly a minor – in a forcing auction if it includes strength and you are trying to explore the hand as much as possible.

Don't:

- Forget that a change of suit is forcing after partner rebids his own suit, there is no need to leap to the three level and consume all the bidding space.
- Worry about raising partner on a strong doubleton when he has rebid his suit. The odds are with you that he will have six and even when he doesn't it won't be a disaster. □