

What Is This Auction?

2C - 2D

4NT

- a) Regular Blackwood
- b) Keycard Blackwood
- c) Quantitative
- d) Balanced big hand showing 28 or more HCP
- e) Slam Invitation

To answer that, let us explore what these auctions mean:

2C - 2D

2NT

Alex and I like this to show 22-23 HCP and a balanced hand.

2C - 2D

3NT

shows 24-25 HCP balanced

We open 3NT with 26-27 HCP

Thus,

2C - 2D

4NT

shows a balanced big hand showing 28 or more HCP. (But you must agree with partner on this.)

Alex and I were both North South with different partners.

I picked up this hand

S AK4

H AK

D AKJ

C AK853

2C - 2D

4NT - 5D responded Marg, who assumed this was Blackwood. I was unsure what kind of Blackwood this was taken to be so I prayed a lot and bid 6NT.

At Alex's table, Nancy bid 2C also with the big hand. Alex had misunderstood what they were playing and he thought they were playing 2H showed a bust hand. He bid 2H. Nancy bid 3NT and Alex bid 4S. Nancy converted to 6NT. Nancy expected Alex to have 8 or more HCP and five or more good Hearts!

Here is the dummy that arrived:

S J109753
H 107
D 65
C 742

Declarer

S AK4
H AK
D AKJ
C AK853

Well, LHO led a Heart and when the Spade Ace and King were played, the Spade Queen fell doubleton. Huge sighs of relief ensued at both tables. Nancy played brilliantly and made a grand slam and I only managed to make 6NT, losing to the D Queen.

One week before leaving Toronto, Alex determined that he had lost both pairs of prescription glasses that we buy every year in India. We called our dear man, Dilip, in Mumbai and ordered two more pair. They arrived three days later. Top quality lenses and frames and they are excellent. This gets pricey when he loses them, so if you find one of those cords that hang around your neck that you attach glasses to...maybe your grandma's? ...please let Alex have one, if you can spare it. Maybe having new glasses was the reason for the strange 2H bid that he made on that hand above.

ALEX'S BRIDGE TIP

A) Your partner opens 1NT. The opponents compete to the three level and you have 7 or more HCP and a balanced hand. Double them. Your side has 24 HCP and they have 16. What are they doing at the three level? Teach them respect and collect your + 500 or + 800

B) Always remember what partner's opening lead was. If she led the 7 or higher of let's say Diamonds against NT and later followed with a smaller Diamond, (or discarded a smaller Diamond) it was Top Of Nothing. She has no interest in this suit. Don't automatically lead it back. Find some other source of tricks with which to try to defeat the contract.

C) What is the auction in the block below?

AUCTION C:

North	East (you)	South	West (YOU)
1H	Pass	Pass	2NT

What is the auction in the block below?

AUCTION D:

North (YOU)	East	South	West
	1H	Double	Pass
2NT			

In **AUCTION C**, your 2NT bid shows 20-21 HCP. If EAST had bid 2NT instead (in what we call the Direct Seat), it would have been the Unusual NT, showing at least 5-5 in the minors.

BUT in the pass out seat, we NEVER use the Unusual NT. This bid shows 20-21 HCP. Many do not know this so best to learn it now.

Remember it this way. It's Not Unusual! **It is the Tom Jones 2NT bid.**

<https://youtu.be/nagjPyNMu9Q>

In **AUCTION D**: This 2NT bid shows 11-12 HCP and at least one stopper in the suit bid. In this case: Hearts. It also denies holding four or more Spades.

In this auction, with no 4 card Spade suit and

8-10 HCP and a stopper in Hearts, bid 1NT

11-12 HCP and a stopper in Hearts, bid 2NT

13-15 HCP and a stopper in Hearts, bid 3NT

E)

This hand came up in Penticton, BC last week:

You have

S ----

H AKJxxxx

D Axxx

C xx

Partner opens 1NT. We think you should bid 4D which is a Texas Transfer showing 8 or more HCP and a six-card or longer Heart suit.
Partner dutifully bids 4H.

Now what? You only have 12 HCP but what shape you have!
You must not use any type of Blackwood as then you will find out how many Key cards partner has but you will not know which ones. We ought not to do that when you have a void. You really should make a control bid: 4S shows first round control of Spades.

1NT - 4D
4H - 4S
5C

Opener responds 5C showing first round control of Clubs.

Now what? I gave up and now bid 6H because the HCP just are not there for a grand slam. Alex suggests I should have continued showing controls and should have bid 5D next.

Here is his hand:

S AQxx
H Qx
D KQxx
C Axx

If I had bid 5D showing first round control of Diamonds, he would have been a very happy camper and would have then bid 7H.

So Moral # 1 is : Don't settle for less. We do tend to settle for small slams when sometimes Grand Slams are possible. When Alex bid 5C after my 4S bid, this shows he is very interested in a slam and so I should reciprocate and show another control if I have one. I was a wimp.

Moral # 2: Don't be a wimp!!!

HELP SUIT GAME TRIES
By DAVID TAYLOR
www.sevenotrump.com

It's not uncommon over the course of an auction that one person has a pretty good sense of where the auction should land. Once partner limits their hand, maybe we know that we should stop in a part score.

Or, maybe we know that we have enough for game but not enough for slam. In these cases, it's our job to choose the right strain (S, H, D, C or NT) and level and then put on the brakes.

When the auction starts 1S - 2S, we know that we shouldn't go higher if we (as opener) have 12 to 14 points. And if we have 19 to 20 points, we belong in game and we simply bid 4S.

Anything in between, we don't know whether or not we belong in game. Similarly, when the auction starts 1C - 1H - 2H, it's up to responder to decide what to do over an opener who is limited to 12 to 14 points. With a normal minimum 6 to 9, we simply pass and play in our part score. With an opening hand, we bid our game. If we have 11 or 12, we don't know whether or not we belong in game.

In these middle cases, we make a help suit game try. We make a bid to enlist partner's help in deciding whether or not we belong in game. Which Game Try? Once both partners have agreed on a suit (as in the sample auctions above), then we will agree that we'll always (for all practical purposes) end up in that suit. (One exception is when the opponents compete and we choose to let them play the hand.)

This agreement allows us to make more useful game tries rather than just asking, "Partner, are you at the top of your range or at the bottom of your range?" If we bid a different suit, once we've agreed on a suit, we're making a help suit game try. We're saying something like this: Partner, we may or may not have enough strength for game. To make game, I need help in this suit (my 2nd-bid suit). I may have something useful in the suit but I also have losers. Please evaluate your hand with this in mind, and let me know whether or not we belong in game.

From the great Max Hardy: "Opener's try for game should show where help is needed." If partner has honors in the help suit, partner should add value to their hand. If partner has shortness in the help suit, partner can add value, especially with extra trump length.

If we decide that we have enough for game, we should bid it. Otherwise, we should return to 3 of our agreed suit. Examples:

Opener has S AKQxx H Qxx D KQx C xx: Start with 1S.

Over responder's 2S raise, we might be able to make game if partner has useful cards. Bid 3H to show that we need some help there, i.e. we have potentially three losers in hearts.

Responder has S xxx H xxx D xx C AKxxx

With losers in hearts, game prospects are dismal. Responder should bid 3S.

OR Responder has S xxx H AKx D xx C xxxxx: The AK of hearts will cover partner's losers, so responder should bid 4S.

OR Responder has S xxx H Axx D xx C Axxxx: With the HA as help, I'd bid 4S.

OR Responder has S Jxxx H x D Jxx C Axxxx: We can ruff a couple of partner's heart losers, so game has a good shot. We should bid 4S, even with minimal HCP's.

LEARNING TO IMPROVE by LARRY COHEN

In this article, I wish to provide "universal" information on learning how to get better at bridge. Sure, you can take many lessons and read many books. A good memory is useful, but it is not the key ingredient to improving your bridge game.

Here, in a nutshell are my observations:

1) Concentration at the table is the number-one ingredient to playing well. Some days are just bad-hair days. Your brain won't be in high gear (personal issues, medication, aging, etc.). On those days, you will make errors. Just accept it. Some days are worse than others. When you are having such a day, stop lower in the bidding and hope the other players are going down in game/slam.

2) Logic is much more important than memory. Don't try to solve bridge problems by rote. Face each decision (in bidding, play, or defense), by using a logical checklist. It goes to the tune of, "If A, then B." "If not C, then D." Translated to bridge terminology, your thinking needs to go: "Since he bid hearts twice, he has six of them, so I should not insist on notrump." Or, "Since partner didn't lead diamonds, I doubt he has the ace-king, so declarer must have one of the high diamonds."

3) Memorizing and learning new conventions is not the way to improve your game. Sure, if you have a good memory and lots of time to thoroughly study and learn high-tech methods (and a partner who does the same), it will be a slight help. But, I see this to be a poor use of time and effort. It is much better to understand completely the most important conventions. Yes, you all know Stayman and Blackwood, but even those methods are often misunderstood and abused. Negative Doubles and even something as basic as Takeout Double and Responses are an important area to master. These come up lots of times every session. Thorough understanding of all doubles and basic bids on the one- and two-levels would be infinitely more useful than learning "transfer lebensohl" just to keep up with the Joneses.

4) At-the-table, attitude and demeanor are crucial to playing well. Keep partnership harmony. No faces. No negative comments to partner. Be nice to the opponents. Try to actually enjoy this great game. It will clear up your mind to think more clearly and logically.

5) When you do take bridge lessons (or read bridge), please be realistic. Be easy on yourself. Even a college student can't memorize tons of information and accurately recall it weeks and months later. When learning bridge, try to just grasp a few key issues clearly—don't bite off too much at once. When I teach a two-hour session, and give, say 15 "pointers," I'm happy if my students walk away and have learned 3-4 of them well. Until you've heard the same lesson over and over, it is not reasonable to expect to get it all.

There isn't much technical bridge advice in this article (there is tons of it at www.larryco.com if you wish to indulge). However, I feel that if you read #1-5 before each session, work hard at these concepts, and don't fall back into your old habits, you will get instant gratification. Your game will improve as will your experience. Good luck!

FINESSING

by Jack Brawner: St Petersburg Bridge Club

One of the first plays that we all learn(ed) is the finesse.

TWO finesses are better than one!

If you are missing one honor card, if the finesse works, it may be repeatable. You hold xxx, and dummy has AQJxx (or vice versa). You lead to the Queen (or Jack) and it wins. If possible, come back to your hand and repeat the finesse. Don't assume it will automatically win again -- some tricky players will let you win the first one, knowing you are likely to try it again! This is frequently a good play.

If you are missing two honors, it is usually correct (mathematically) to take two finesses!

You have xxx and dummy has AJ10. Lead towards the dummy and finesse the Ten (or Jack). It will probably lose. But then you are set up to do it again. If EITHER the King or Queen is "onside", you will take two tricks in the suit --roughly 75% of the time!

Curiously, even if you have as many as NINE cards in the suit, it is still right to take two finesses when missing the King and Queen.

xxxxx opposite AJ10x. Assuming the first finesse loses, it is correct to take the second finesse rather than hoping the suit divides two-two. The math is more complex than you might suspect, but think about it this way: 75% (one finesse will work) is better than hoping for the 2-2 split (originally about 40%).

xxx opposite AK109

Lead to the ten or nine, and assuming it loses, try it again. It is roughly 75% that one of the finesses will work -- much better than playing for a 3-3 break. And, once in a while, BOTH honors will be onside, which means you can take ALL the tricks (assuming you can get back to your hand for a repeat performance!) Work it out at the coffee table with a deck of cards sometime!

That leads us to the King and Jack missing:

xxx opposite AQ10 (either or both holdings may be longer)

The correct play is to take TWO finesses. Play to the Ten first. If it loses to the Jack, try again next time by playing to the Queen. 50% that exactly one will work, but here is the key -- 25% of the time, BOTH the King and Jack will be onside, and you do not need to lose ANY tricks. (If you start by finessing the Queen, it will win, but now you will lose an unnecessary trick to the KJ.)

TWO finesses are better than one!

POST-MORTEMS & POOR RESULTS

The latest issue of BBO's electronic newsletter carried a lead article by a semi-professional female British player on good and bad habits of tournament players.

She recommends always reviewing results in post-mortems with one's partner – and perhaps with a third neutral party present as well if such a person is available – to find out what worked well and what didn't, but to do so in a spirit of mutual learning, not of accusations and recriminations. In other words, be non-judgmental and don't make it a blame game.

She also recommended perhaps postponing the analysis until at least a day after actual play, to let the emotions of the moment subside.

Pieter VanBennekom

Ed Note: One top level bridge player teaches his students that when they have a bad result that they must leave the table and go and have a cold glass of water before returning to the table. This helps to reset the brain and one's attitude. He also tells them they must kick the bad result out of their minds or it will impact the next board and a few more after that. LET IT GO. IT IS OVER. And stewing about it compounds the error.

SUPPORT DOUBLES

	S J962 H A108 D Q1043 C 75	
S A87 H 543 DJ2 C AKJ43		S 5 H J9762 D AK65 C Q93
	S KQ1043 H KQ D 987 C 1086	

West	North	East	South
1C	Pass	1H	1S
??			

You must learn Support Doubles. If EW are not playing Support Doubles and West now bids 1NT and North bids 2S, what should East now bid with her 10 HCP only and not knowing that West actually LIKES Hearts?

West	North	East	South
1C	Pass	1H	1S
Double*	2S	3H	?

East-West can probably make 3H, although it is not without some challenges since NS will be leading Spades at every opportunity, making Declarer ruff in his hand (the LONG hand) and making EW lose control of the hand in this case. But now perhaps, at this point in the auction, what if NS now bids 3S, NS will likely be down 3.

But you must know the Support Double so that you are able to effectively compete in these auctions.

Click here for more info about Support Doubles
<https://barbaraseagram.com/pdf/SUPPORT-DOUBLES-2020.pdf>