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This Week in Bridge

(376) Opener's 3rd Bid with 2-Suited Hands

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Level: 6 of 10 (2 of 6)

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General

As Opener, when we have a 2-suited hand, then our rebid does not limit the hand to a small “bucket” of values. When we rebid a second suit without reversing, we can have either a small or medium opening bid (12 to about 17 points). When we are at the top of this range (“almost a jump shift”) then we try to take a third bid to show our extra values and hope to still reach game when we have 16-17 points and partner has 8+ points. Let’s take a look at how we make follow-up bids that express these extra values.

1NT Semi-Forcing Auctions – Responder’s Preference

When we open the bidding with 1-Major and partner responds 1NT Semi-Forcing then if we have a 2-suited hand with our second suit being lower-ranking than our first and extra values (15-17 HCP) we cannot make a jump shift into our second suit to show our extra values on our second bid. Instead, we must start by rebidding our second suit cheaply, showing 12-17 points, and then attempt to show our extra values on the third round of the bidding (if we get a chance).

Let’s consider hands where Responder uses their second bid to show minimum values, 6-9 points. If Responder shows more (by bidding 2NT or raising one of our suits to the 3-level) then it is straight forward for us to accept this invite and move on towards game). The first example we will look at is one of the most common auctions where partner first responds 1NT Semi-Forcing and then takes a preference back to our first bid suit.



Example 1

1♠ 1NT
2♥ 2♠
___?

Our 2♥ rebid showed at least 5-4 distribution and 12-17 points. Partner's 2♠ "preference" usually shows 2-card ♠ support and 6-9 points. If we have a maximum hand (about 16-17 points) then we want to play game when partner is at the top of their range (8-9 points). That means when we have about 16-17 points of playing strength (could be 15 HCP with some extra shape) we will take a third bid and investigate game. We do so by bidding out our pattern.

- 2NT Usually 5-4-2-2 or 5-4-3-1 with a singleton honor with 16-17 points.
- 3♣ 5-4-0-4 or 5-4-1-3, 16-17 points.
- 3♦ 5-4-4-0 or 5-4-3-1, 16-17 points.
- 3♥ 5-5 Majors, 16-17 points (could be fewer HCP if values concentrated in long suits).
- 3♠ At least 6-4 shape, about 16-17 points (fewer HCP if concentrated values).

These rebids of NT, our first suit, second suit, or a third suit have similar meanings when we rebid a minor (instead of ♥). After we make one of these bids partner then decide what to do – stop in a part-score or bid game.

1NT Semi-Forcing Auctions – Responder Rebids a New Suit

In a 1NT SF auctions when we bid two suits cheaply and Responder then rebids a suit of their own, we can "pattern out" to show extra values or even to try and find the best part-score.

Example 2

1♠ 1NT
2♣ 2♥
___?

- Pass Most minimum hands without 6-card ♠
- 2♠ 6+card ♠, usually 0-1 ♥, 12-15 points
- 2NT Usually 5-1-3-4, 15-17 points
- 3♣ 5-5, usually 0-1 ♥, some extra values, 14-17 points
- 3♥ 2-3 card ♥, 14-15 HCP
- 3♠ At least 6-4 shape with about 16-17 points
- 4♥ 3-card ♥, about 16-17 HCP

Again, we bid naturally and try to keep the auction low with a minimum hand and make a forward-going bid with extra values (15-17 points).



Conclusion

When we have a hand that is 2-suited and almost strong enough to make a jump shift, about 15-17 points, we cannot fully describe our hand with our second call. We must be patient and show our second suit at a “low level” first. We then use our third bid to further describe our hand both in terms of shape and strength (if we get the chance to do so). Hands like this can be difficult to describe and requires a delicate touch from both the Opener and the Responder. Make sure that you and partner are comfortable with these auctions and know how to describe your hands in them.