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This Week in Bridge

(385) Raising Opener's 2nd Suit

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Levels: 5 of 10 (2 of 6)

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

When the opening bidder shows a 2-suited hand then showing a fit for their 2nd suit can often be a challenge. We want to show partner that we have a fit for their suit, but we must balance that with keep the auction at a reasonable level. When partner shows a 2-suited hand then their possible values are often quite wide-ranging. We will need to take this into account when we are deciding if we should raise Opener or pass at a low level. Let's make sure that we are aware of our options for raising Opener's 2nd suit.

Raising Opener's 2nd Suit

When Opener shows a 2-suited hand (without jump shifting or reversing), they have from 12-17 points. That makes it difficult for us to describe our hand. When we have a minimum response, 6-9 points, we will frequently pass and keep the auction at a low level. With invitational values, 10-11 points, we will try to invite game, usually going to the 3-level. With even more, we will find a way to create a forcing auction.

Example 1

1♠ 1NT

2♥ __?

When we have 4+card ♥ fit then we want to be in ♥. Here are our options:

- Pass Minimum Hand
- 3♥ Invitational or slightly less values (raising in case partner has a max 2♥ bid)
- 4♥ Maximum in every way, 10-11 HCP with usually 5+card support.

Since the point range for partner's 2♥ bid is about 12-17, then we could have a game when we have as few as 8-9 points. This means that we sometimes need to stretch to raise to 3♥ when we have a bit less than the full 10-11 HCP. This lighter raise is called a *Courtesy Raise*. Unfortunately, in the above auction we do not have a way of differentiating these hands. We must raise to 3♥ with either an invitational hand or courtesy values.



In some actions, we have a gadget to help us differentiate this courtesy raise from a conventional raise.

Example 2

1♥ 1NT
2♣ __?

With a ♣ fit we have more ways to raise in this auction.

- Pass Minimum Hand
- 3♣ Courtesy raise, 4+card ♣, 8-10 points
- 2♠ Impossible Spade, usually 5+card ♣, good to bad 12 points (stronger than 3♣)

Game Forcing Raises

As Responder, if our first bid did not limit our hand, then it is possible that we have a fit for Opener's 2nd suit and game-forcing values – 12+ points.

Example 3

1♦ 1♠
2♣ __?

Here, with a ♣ fit we have the traditional raises from Ex.1 above:

- Pass Minimum Hand
- 3♣ Invitational or slightly less values (raising in case partner has a max 2♥ bid)
- 4♣ Maximum Values and a highly distributional hand.

With game forcing values and a stopper in ♥ we may bid 3NT, even with a fit for partner's suit. But we can also use 4th Suit Forcing when we have a strong hand and a fit for partner's suit.

1♦ 1♠
2♣ 2♥*

This bidding sequence is common when we have game forcing values and no stopper in the 4th suit or if we are interested in slam.

If partner continues with 2NT, letting us know that they have a ♥ stopper, a raise to 3NT lets partner know that we were just interested in getting to 3NT. But if we rebid 3♣, we show a ♣ fit and a slam try in support of partner's second suit.

1♦ 1♠
2♣ 2♥*
2NT 3♣



Conclusion

When we have a fit for partner's second suit then we won't get to show that fit until the 4th bid for our side. That means that our fit-showing bid is likely going to get the auction to a relatively high level. We are not going to have a lot of bidding space that shows a fit and keeps the auction from getting too high for us (either too high because we don't have many points or beyond 3NT). That makes raising partner's second suit a bit more difficult than raising their first suit. You have some standard raises (courtesy and invitational), but in some other auctions it is helpful to have some gadgets (Impossible Spade and 4th Suit GF) to help continue the auction and allow you to fully describe your hand. Make sure that you feel comfortable with using these tools and recognizing them when partner makes use of them as well.