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This Week in Bridge

(422) Bypassing 4-card Suits in 2/1 GF Auctions

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Level: 7 of 10 (3 of 6)

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General

2/1 Game Forcing auctions have lots of advantages over “Standard American” auctions. These 2/1 GF auctions allow for the use of powerful tools like Fast Arrival, Control Showing Bids, Delayed Splinters, and more. We want to get into 2/1 Game Forcing auctions as often as possible unless it is going to make the rest of the auction more difficult. Having said that, we do not want to make “fake” bids just to create a 2/1 GF auction. Partner will need to visualize our hand and it important for us to make natural bids. Here, we look at our options for getting into 2/1 Game Forcing auctions in a way that won’t mislead partner or make our future bidding too difficult. Specifically, we will look at auctions where we can choose to make a 2/1 Game Force instead of responding in another suit. Once we look at these great 2/1 GF auctions where we “bypass a 4-card suit”, then we will look at times when we may choose to bypass a 4-card suit once we are already in a 2/1 GF auction!

Responding to 1♥ Opening Bids

5-card ♠ Suit

When partner opens 1♥ and we have a 5-card ♠ suit, we need to respond 1♠ on most hands. If we do not start with a 1♠ response, it will be difficult to convince partner that we hold a 5-card ♠ suit. (A time where we might choose not to respond 1♠ is when we have 4+card ♥ support and plan to use Jacoby 2NT or a splinter bid. Another time we may choose to bypass our 5-card ♠ suit is when we have a big hand that contains 5-card ♠ and a 6+card minor.)

4-card ♠ Suit

When we are responding to a 1♥ opening bid and hold a 4-card ♠ suit and game forcing values, we have a choice between bidding 1♠ or making a 2/1 GF bid into 2-minor. Let’s look at some examples to see how we can make our best choice.



4-3-3-3

With a 4-3-3-3 hand we know we have a ♥ fit, so sometimes it can be easiest to look for the ♠ fit immediately (4-4 fits are generally better than 5-3 fits). With a minimum game forcing hand, this is a reasonable approach. But with most good hands the auction will be easier if we start by making a 2/1 GF bid. We will usually have a 4-card minor to make a 2/1 GF into, but in this specific case, where we are 4-3-3-3, we do not and thus we bid 2♣ on a 3-card suit, creating the GF auction.

Note: If we bypass our 4c♠ suit, it becomes our responsibility to show our 4-card ♠ suit later. Opener will not go out of their way to show their 4c♠ suit, expecting us not to have one.

4-card ♠ with 4+card Minor

Example -- Distribution 4-2-3-4

When we have this shape and game-forcing values we respond to 1♥ with a 2♣ bid. Since Opener has shown 5+card ♥, the rest of the auction continues naturally. If Opener rebids 2♦, 2♥, or 2NT then we later bid our ♠. Responder must show their 4-card ♠ suit if they bypass it because Opener may have chosen to rebid 2NT with a 4-5-2-2 shape.

Example Auction

1♥	2♣
2♥	2♠
2NT	3♥
3NT	Pass

After a 1♥ opening bid and a 2♥ rebid, Opener could still have a 4-card ♠ suit (they could be 4-6 in the Majors). Thus, as Responder we must now show our 4-card ♠ suit. After Opener's 2NT rebid we then show that we have a couple of ♥ by bidding 3♥. Opener can then decide if they want to play 4♥ or 3NT (partner promises a ♦ stopper when they now bid 3NT).

1♦ - 2♣ Auctions

When it comes to bidding the minor suits, these auctions become far more complex. There are a few different philosophies for dealing with the auction (and I outline my preferred approach in the TWiB on 1♦ – 2♣ auctions). We want to think of this auction more like an *inverted minors* auction (that happens to be game forcing) than we do like a 2/1 GF auction. The reason for this is that 1♦ - 2♣ auctions become complex if we are simultaneously looking for a Major suit fit, looking for stoppers for NT, and thinking about exploring slam. Therefore, it is simplest to play that the auction 1♦ - 2♣ generally denies a 4-card Major, just like 1♦ - 2♦* does.



Conclusion

Responder's job is to search for a fit, specifically a Major suit fit. In modern bidding, there are times where we need to bid our 4-card Major suit immediately and other times when it is best to "bypass" it for another suit, focusing more on showing the strength of our hand. This can lead to some complicated auctions, but the general rule is that we bypass these Majors only to make the future bidding simpler. If we bypass our 4-card Major, then it is our job to come back and bid it later. Having a good understanding of these 2/1 GF auctions, as well as other concepts like Walsh Style bidding, makes our communication with partner go more smoothly. Make sure you are aware of your choices as Responder and make the first bid that is going to make the rest of the auction go best!