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This Week in Bridge

(454) Partnership Bidding: Our NT Auctions

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Level: 5 of 10 (2 of 6)

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

An important part of a strong bridge partnership is having good agreements with your partner about the meaning of your bids. This means having a solid list of conventions that both you and partner play. Beyond that, it is vital to know how these conventions change in competition. Some of the most common bidding disasters happen when we try to use conventions in competition. In these cases, partner often thinks that our bids mean something different than we intended. In addition to having some solid agreements about conventions, and how they change in competition, we need to have some general bidding concepts that we fall back on when we encounter an auction that we have not discussed before.

All these partnership agreements are particularly important when our side opens the bidding with NT. For example, when we open the bidding 1NT we have a lot of conventions that we use with partner. This gives us a lot of good tools for communicating with partner, but it also means that we have a lot of opportunities to have misunderstandings with partner. Let's look at some of the areas where it is extremely important for us to have good agreements with partner.

Constructive Bidding

Most partnerships spend a lot of time talking about their agreements when partner opens 1NT (or even 2NT), but there are still some "basic" auctions that can slip our mind.

Example 1

1NT 3-Major

This is an auction that we should talk about with partner. Some "old-fashioned" players play it as natural and a slam try. Others use the Marty Bergen approach of playing these bids as 5-5 in the Majors. But the most common approach is to play it as a game forcing "worry ask" – showing shortness in that Major and length in the minors.

1NT 3♥*

3-1-5/4 with a at least 10+ points.



Another auction where we may have a mixup with partner is a jump to the 4-level after we make a Stayman bid.

Example 2

1NT 2♣

2♦ 4♥

What does partner intend with their 4♥ bid?

Most partnerships play Texas Transfers when they bid 4♦ or 4♥ directly over 1NT. But when Responder has 6/4 in the Majors, they will usually start with Stayman and look for the 4-4 Major suit fit, then later fall back on playing in the 6-card suit if Stayman fails. Some partnerships play “Delayed Texas” (my preference) where after a 2♦ response to Stayman, jumps to the 4-level (4♦ or 4♥) are still Texas transfers, showing a 6-card suit.

When we open the bidding with NT, another case where we might have a mixup is the use of other NT bids – particularly 4NT and 5NT bids can be confusing. Sometimes 4NT is used as a Quantitative bid (inviting slam), but other times it is used as Keycard in a suit.

Example 3

1NT 2♣

2♥ 4NT

What does 4NT mean here?

This 4NT rebid is filled with potential confusion. Some partnerships play this as Keycard (since the last bid was a suit), but most partnerships (standard bidding) play this as Quantitative. This bid implies a 4-card ♠ suit and about 16-17 points. If we want to Keycard in ♥, we must raise ♥ first – either with a splinter bid or a artificial bid showing a ♥ fit (many partnerships use 3♠ in this auction).

Competitive Bidding

There are even more opportunities for bidding misunderstandings when the opponents compete after we open the bidding 1NT.



Example 4

1NT X XX?

What is the meaning of this redouble?

The meaning of this redouble is a good partnership conversation to have. I personally like to base this redouble on the meaning of the opponent's double. If double is a conventional bid, then redouble is best used to show values, 8+points. If double is penalty, then we do not need a value-showing redouble, so it is best to use it as a runout bid – normally a relay to 2♣ to play in the places we cannot normally play -- either 2♣ or 2♦.

Example 5

1NT 3♦ 4♥

What does a 4♥ bid show here?

In competition, when do we stop playing Texas Transfers? Over a 3♦ jump overcall, usually we use 4♦ and 4♥ as still Texas transfers. If the opponent bids 3♥, then it makes no sense to play 4♦ as a transfer to ♥, but we still need to discuss with partner what a 4♥ bid shows – Texas transfer or 5-card ♠ and a 5-card minor suit?

There are many other auctions that you and partner should discuss, especially when it comes to NT competitive bidding.

Conclusion

NT auctions often involve a lot of conventional bids. This gives your side lots of opportunity to have bidding mixups. Make sure that you and your regular partners take the time to discuss these types of auctions. You can take a look at the Partnership Bidding Workbook (on my website at www.advinbridge.com) to get even more auctions to discuss with your partners.