This Week in Bridge

(150) Two Places to Play

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Level: 6

Robert S. Todd
robert@advinbridge.com

General

In some competitive auctions a Notrump bid (at a high level) is not natural and is an effort to compete in the bidding and properly show your distribution. With two equal suits, describing the hand is relatively straightforward – we bid the higher-ranking suit and then the lower-ranking suit and let partner choose. But when we have two suits that are not the same length it can be more difficult to show the hand effectively without getting the auction too high. Let's look at some of these auctions and a Notrump gadget to accomplish that.

Simple Two-Suited Hands in Competition

With a 5-5 hand in the minors we open 1♦, and if we have a hand that is good enough to compete in the bidding, we later bid ♣.

Example

1♦ 1♠ X 2♠
3♣

This sequence can be bid with longer ♣ than ♦ as well, 4-5 in the minors.

If the opponents preempt the auction to an even higher level, then we compete naturally to the 4-level or even 5-level.

Example

1♦ 1♠ X 4♠
5♣

This bid at the 5-level shows 5-5 in the minors with a strong hand, or an even more distributional hand like 6♦ and 5♣.

One-Suited Hands

With a one-suited hand that wants to compete in the bidding in this kind of auction, we just bid our suit at the next level.

Example

1♦ 1♠ X 4♠
5♦

More Complex Two-Suited Hands

With a two-suited hand with equal length, we start by bidding the higher-ranking suit and then bid the lower-ranking one. With two places to play but not equal length, we can make an illogical Notrump bid.

Example

1♦ 1♠ X 4♠
4NT

This 4NT bid cannot be to play because it does not make sense that we can have a large enough balanced hand to play in 4NT. Instead, we use the bid to show two places to play with a differential in length.

Example

♠ 8
♥ A7
♦ AKT965
♣ KQJ3

With this hand we bid 4NT, showing two places to play. Partner will assume that we have at least a 5-card ♦ suit and a 4-card ♣ suit, often 6-4 or even more distributional. Partner should assume that our second suit is lower-ranking so they do not bid too high. Partner will also know that our suits are not of equal length, since we did not bid 5♣.

Example

1♦ 1♠ X 4♠
4NT P 5♣ P
5♦

♠ 7
♥ KQJ8
♦ AKT965
♣ A5

With this hand we can also start with a 4NT bid to show two places to play. If partner bids 5♣, then we can correct this 5♣ bid to 5♦, showing that ♣ was not one of our places – thus we have ♦ and ♥.

Conclusion

Competing in high-level auctions where the opponents have shown a fit when we have a powerful two-suited hand can be complicated. With one long suit we just bid our suit, but with two suits we need to try to let partner know that we have a second suit and whether our suits are equal in length or if our primary suit is longer. We can use another conventional NT bid to do this. If we have two relatively equal length suits then we bid our second suit directly – letting partner choose whichever one they have a better fit for. But with two places to play of different length, we can bid Notrump (usually 4NT) and let partner know that we have a 5-4 or 6-4 shape – putting more emphasis on our first bid suit. Think about this kind of auction and see if you can use 4NT to help you make a better decision in high-level competitive auctions.