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This Week in Bridge

(456) Partnership Bidding: Our Major Suit Auctions

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Level: 5 of 10 (2 of 6)

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General

Opening the bidding with 1-Major allows us to find our Major suit fits more quickly. This type of auction is extremely common and that makes it an important one for us to have good agreements with partner. Let's take a look at some of these auctions that begin with 1-Major and make sure that we have good agreements with partner both in constructive and competitive auctions. Our goal is to avoid any disastrous mixups in the bidding!

Constructive Bidding

Even when the opponents stay out of our auctions there can still be some tricky bidding sequences after we open the bidding 1-Major.

Example 1

1♠ 1NT*

Are we allowed to pass?

Since most hands with enough values to bid game make a 2+level response, 1NT is limited to at most about a bad 12 points. That means that if we have a balanced minimum opening bid, it may be best to pass and play in 1NT. This 1NT semi-forcing (1NT SF) is the modern expert standard.

Example 2

Even if we play this 1NT semi-forcing

♠ A8654

♥ KQ3

♦ K4

♣ QT3

What should we do with this hand after a 1NT SF response?

1♠ 1NT*

___?



Here we need to rebid 2♣ – even though it is only a 3-card suit. If partner has an invitational hand, then we want to bid game with our 14 HCP (so we cannot pass 1NT), but we do not have another 4+card suit to bid and most importantly we cannot rebid 2NT – that would show a balanced hand with 18-19 points.

Example 3

♠ A54
♥ KQ83
♦ AJ4
♣ K43

1♠ ___?

What do you respond with this hand?

This is a problem shape for responding to a 1♠ opening bid. Even if we have a special tool to show 3-card support and a flat hand (like 3NT) this hand is too strong to use that bid. Instead, we just make a 2/1 GF bid into 2♣ and later support ♠. Remember 2/1 GF bids show similar length that most opening bids do, just at the 2-level instead of the 1-level (2♥ = 5+cards, 2♦=4+cards, 2♣=3+cards).

Another interesting question occurs when we are Responder to a 1♥ opening bid: when must we bid 1♠ vs. make a 2/1 GF bid?

Example 4

♠ AJ43
♥ Q
♦ 7634
♣ AK43

1♥ ___?

What should we bid here?

After a 1♥ opening bid it is Responder's job to search for a Major suit fit. We can simply do so by responding 1♠, but this does not communicate the playing strength of our hand. With this shape, it is often better to make a 2/1 GF bid (like 2♣ here) and later come back and show our ♠ suit.

We could easily picture the auction going:

1♥ 2♣
2♥ 2♠
2NT 3NT



Competitive Bidding

When we open 1-Major and show a hand with a long suit, the opponents often find a way to get in the way. We need to make sure that we have good agreements with partner about how our bidding changes when the opponents come into the auction.

One example of a common but not simple auction is when the opponents compete vs. our 1NT Semi-Forcing bid.

Example 5

1♠ P 1NT* 2♦
X?

What is this double?

A double by Opener is a takeout double – suggesting shortness in the opponent’s suit and a desire to compete in the bidding.

Example 6

1♠ P 1NT* 2♦
P P X?

In this auction, a double by Responder is more “card showing” and penalty oriented. Responder does not have support for Opener’s ♠ suit or a long suit of their own. Responder must have decent values (a good 8+ points) and some defensive strength.

There are a variety of conventions that can become complicated when the opponents come into the auction. It is important that we discuss with partner how these change!

- Is Drury on in competition? -- Over a takeout double, vs. a 1♠ overcall?
- How do we deal with Michaels or Unusual NT?
- What if the opponents compete over our Jacoby 2NT or splinter auctions?
- How do we use the opponent’s lead directing doubles (of artificial bids) against them – helping us better communicate with partner.

We should also make sure we have an agreement on something as simple as a redouble.

Example 7

1♥ X XX?

What is the meaning of this redouble?

This redouble usually means that we have 10+ points and not a great fit for Opener’s suit. We could have as much as 3-card support, but we do not have 4+card support (we would use Jordan if we had the known 9+card fit).



Conclusion

This discussion barely scratches the surface of what all we need to discuss with partner. One of the advantages of having a regular partnership is that you get to have more agreements and deal with difficult auctions in sophisticated ways. But our primary goal is to avoid any disastrous mixups in the bidding. Make sure that you spend some time talking to partner about the kind of auctions that might scare you --- or that might result in this sort of disaster. See the Partnership Bidding Workbook for some ideas of what might go wrong!