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This Week in Bridge

(458) Partnership Bidding: Our Strong Opening Auctions

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Level: 5 of 10 (2 of 6)

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General

When we open the bidding with 2♣, we accomplish the goal of communicating the strength of our hand. We have some work to do to then find our fit and communicate the shape of our hand. Working together with partner to do so, before the auction reaches 3NT, is an important partnership process. Let's look at some of the auctions where it can be a challenge for us to describe our hand below 3NT while trying to keep in mind what bids are forcing and when the auction can end.

Constructive Bidding

Opening the bidding 2♣ is not optimal. It eats up a lot of bidding space and does not describe the shape or our hand – and “shape is king”! Let's look at some of the agreements we need to have with partner to make sure that we do not have a bidding mixup in these auctions.

Example 1

We often have good agreements about the meaning of our bids early in the bidding.

Here, if 2♥ shows a “bust” – artificial, then what does 2♠ show?

2♣ 2♥*
2♠ ___?

This 2♠ bid shows a 5+card suit and is usually unbalanced – it is forcing for 1 round. Even if Responder has 0 HCP they must bid, as Opener may have 30 HCP!

Example 2

2♣ 2♥*
2♠ 2NT

What should Opener do now?

This 2NT bid shows 0-2 ♠ (often 0-1) with likely no 5-card suit and 0-3 HCP. This 2NT response is non-forcing! If Opener only has 22-23 pts, they can pass.



Example 3

2♣ 2♥*
2♠ 3♠

What does 3♠ show?

Since 2♥ shows a bust and 2♥ is forcing, then 3♠ is the weakest bid by Responder – non-forcing. This is either 3-card support or could be a doubleton with no other good bid.

Example 4

2♣ 2♥*
3♣ 3♦

What does 3♦ show?

This is a strange auction. 3♣ is a forcing bid, even after a 2♥ bust. Remember a 2♣ opening bid is forcing to at least 1-level below game (2NT, 3-Major, 4-minor). That means that 3♦ is also forcing, showing a 5+card suit. But it could be 0 HCP!

Example 5

2♣ 2♦
2♥ 3♥

It is important to know what 2♦ shows. Playing the style where 2♦ is game forcing, 3♥ is stronger than 4♥ – showing at least an Ace or King and some extra values; a jump to 4♥ would be weaker!

Competitive Bidding

When the opponents come into our strong auctions we need to have discussion to make sure we know what our doubles and other bids show!

Example 6

2♣ 2♠ X* P
___?

What does partner's double show and what do we do now?

Many partnerships (my preferred approach) play X = Bust, Pass = positive in these auctions. So, after a double here Opener bids as if Responder has bid 2♥. If Opener has a balanced 22+ pts and some length in ♠ they may even leave the double in – and convert it to penalty.



Example 7

2♣	2♥	X	P
2♠	P	__?	

Here the 2♠ bid is forcing, even though Responder showed a bust. Responder must bid again.

Example 9

2♣	2♥	P	P
X	P	__?	

What does this double show?

When partner makes a “value showing” pass then we are in a game forcing auction. This double is not a takeout double, it is a penalty double!

Conclusion

2♣ opening bids eat up a lot of bidding space. Make sure you have good agreements about which auctions are forcing and which can be passed. This is extremely important. Things get even more complicated (especially about the meaning of double) when auctions get competitive. Most importantly, you need to make sure that you have good agreements about when a double is takeout and when it is penalty.