

Bidding Your Suits III (and Bonus Problem!)

I. When you have support for partner

By Neil Kimelman

Before we continue with this segment, I received a comment regarding the following paragraph in Bidding Your Suits II:

'An important bidding principle is to try and show where your values are located. Sometimes there is a choice of suits you can bid. For example with ♠K98 ♥K3 ♦9872 ♣AKJ2, 1♣ is a better opening bid than 1♦. On offence partner will give greater value to any honors in your bid suits. On defence partner will often lead the suit you open.' The comment:

"I was taught to open 1♦ with 4-4 in the minors."

This is a good guideline. The reasoning is that you may not have a good rebid if you open 1♣. But on this example you can handle whatever partner bids:

- Over 1♥ rebid 1NT.
- Raise 1♦ to 2♦.
- Raise 1♠ to 2♠.
- Pass 1NT.

Had the hand been ♠8 ♥K983 ♦9872 ♣AKJ2 you are stuck opening 1♦ as you would have no good rebid over a 1♠ response had you opened 1♣.

Which leads me to reinforce an extremely important bridge bidding principle:

<p><i>Always consider what you will bid next, when deciding what to do now. Often you need to consider how the bidding will go, influencing your decision(s).</i></p>

Back to your regularly scheduled program:

This column is the third in a series of articles on guidelines for bidding your suit(s) in several common situations. To date, I have discussed the importance of showing where your values and/or length are located, so your partnership can effectively bid to the right level, whether the opponents compete or not. As with any 'rule' there are exceptions.

I. iii) When not to bid your own suit when you have a fit

The principle is simple: Don't bid your own suit if you cannot handle the rest of the auction. Generally these type of hands fall into two categories:

- 1) You cannot handle the auction because of the level. Either the opponents have preempted you, or you fear they will, or both.
- 2) You cannot handle the auction as you will not fully communicate to partner the strength of your support.

Before I expand on these two situations I would like to address one other less common situation. I will summarize it in a tip:

When partner opens or overcalls at the game level, new suits are cue bids in support of their suit, trying for slam.

As an example, let's say that both sides are vulnerable, west opens 1♥ and partner overcalls 4♠. 5♣ by you would be a cue bid trying for a slam in spades, not natural. The reasoning for this treatment is that partner has already shown a self sufficient suit, why look for a 2nd one? A good example of a 5♣ bid after partner opens or overcalls 4♠ is ♠xx ♥Ax ♦xxxx ♣AKJxx. The same rule would apply if west had passed, and north had opened 5♦.

What if you actually pick up ♠x ♥Kx ♦x ♣KQJ10xxxxx? Pass! Hopefully partner can make his game with his good suit, and only needing 10 tricks and not 11. If you want to play in your suit you have to *jump*. This wouldn't come up very often, but I guess I would bid 6♦ over 4♠ with ♠- ♥- ♦KQJ10xxxxx ♣AKJx.

Ok let's get back to our two different scenarios. First:

1) You cannot handle the auction because of the level

A general important principle is when you have only room to give partner one message, pick the one that is the most valuable. For example you hold ♠xx ♥KQ10xx ♦AJxxx ♣A with only N-S vul, the bidding starts:

West	North	East	South
-	1♦	3♣	?

What will happen if you bid 3♥? In a perfect world the opponents quietly allow you to communicate information. But more often than not the bidding will continue:

West	North	East	South
-	1♦	3♣	3♥
5♣	dbl	pass	?

Anything you do is a wild guess. Partner could have either:

a) ♠Axxx ♥A ♦KJxxx ♣xxx

b) ♠KJx ♥xx ♦KQxxx ♣KJx

If he has a) 7♦ needs only a 4-3 heart break, while 5♣ is off two or three. +2140 or +500 is a big difference. On the other hand if north holds b) this is the best place, as you can't even make game. Even if west passed and north bid 4♥, will be poorly placed to get to the right level.

Now look what happens if you bid 4♣. Partner knows you have a slammish hand with diamonds.

West	North	East	South
-	1♦	3♣	4♣
5♣	?		

With a) North will cue bid 5♥, and you will get to at least the small slam. With b) partner will double and you can comfortably pass knowing that you have more or less described your strength and diamond support.

In the above example the opponents have preempted you twice. Sometimes you still have a decision of whether to bid your suit, even when the opponents are silent.

2) You cannot handle the auction as you will not fully communicate to partner the strength of your support.

A lot of times you will have a distributional hand with good support for partner's suit and one or two side suits. These hands are tricky as if you start bidding your suits you may not get across how really good your support is, or get too high showing it. The latter is especially true when you have only moderate values.

Let's say as south with both vulnerable you pick up ♠- ♥KQ53 ♦KJ764 ♣K752. Partner opens 1♥, and the opponents are quiet. What now?

You have a great hand but only 12 HCPs. The best and most descriptive bid is 3♣, splinter. You get the essence of your whole hand off your chest in one bid. Partner should almost always make the right decision after this start. Bidding 2♦ will overemphasize your strength and diamond suit, and may make your heart support somewhat ambiguous.

One of the important criteria when trying to determine whether to show immediate support or show your own suit is the strength of your suit. In the above example your suit quality is poor. However if the actual hand was instead ♠- ♥KQ53 ♦AK1094 ♣9752 in my opinion 2♦ is a much better bid. Now you have a source of tricks and you want to communicate that to partner, and have them pay special attention to their diamond holding. If the bidding starts out:

West	North	East	South
-	1♥	pass	2♦
Pass	2♠	pass	?

Partner should be thinking slam with ♠Axxx ♥AJxxx ♦QJx ♣x, but not with ♠Axxx ♥AJxxx ♦x ♣QJx.


Lessons to Learn

1. A new suit after partner opens or overcalls in game is not natural, but a cue bid, trying for slam.
2. As a general rule it is better to respond with a good suit than to splinter.
3. Try to anticipate how the bidding will go, and the best time and way to tell partner of your strong support. This is especially true when enemy preemption is likely.
4. When deciding what suit to open, try and ensure you can handle any bid that partner makes.

Bonus Problem - Play or Defend?

Editor's note: *In these problems you must determine who will prevail if all sides play perfectly, declarer or the defenders?*

Contract: 6xCx by South.

	xSx 3	
	xHx K 6	
	xDx A Q 3 2	
	xCx K J 10 7 3 2	
xSx 7 6 5 4		xSx Q J 10 8 2
xHx 8 7 5		xHx A J 10 3
xDx K J 8 7 6		xDx 10
xCx Q		xCx 8 6 5
	xSx A K 9	
	xHx Q 9 5 4	
	xDx 9 5 4	
	xCx A 9 4	

Well, play or defend? Answer will appear in my October 1st article.