

A Spot 4 the Advancing Player

by Jay Apfelbaum

This is a continuing series of articles written for the advancing player. I welcome any questions or suggestions about future articles. Please send them to the publisher. Who knows? You may be mentioned in a future article! Since beginning this series, I have been asked about several conventions. Keep asking! Your questions give me direction about what the next article should be about.

With this article, I thought it would be a good idea to go in a different direction. So many players encounter auctions that are new to them (including me). Coming up with the right answer makes the difference between a good score and a disaster. I will not go into too many specific auctions; it would take too long. I will describe general types of auctions.

Let us begin with the competitive auction where both sides are at the four level or higher. There are two types of auctions for a partnership: bidding to make a contract and bidding to sacrifice against the opposition contract. It is important to understand the difference between these two auctions. If we are bidding to make a contract, either we will play the hand or the opposition will be doubled. If we are bidding to sacrifice, we must bid as much as we are willing and then not bid again after that.

The sacrifice auction is easy to see. We raise by jumping to a high level, such as bidding Four Spades when partner opens the bidding with One Spade. The bidding-to-make auction can be harder to spot. One way to show a strong hand is to cue bid the opposition suit. Another is to bid a new suit when our hand will be on lead. For example, our partner (North) opens the bidding with One Heart. East overcalls with One Spade. We bid Two Diamonds. West jumps to Three Spades (pre-emptive). After two passes, we bid Four Hearts. After two more passes, East bids Four Spades. A pass by us here is forcing because we were bidding Four Hearts to make. A double does not promise spade values; it only suggests that we cannot make Five Hearts.

In a forcing auction, the partnership can exchange opinions on bidding to a higher level with a Pass or a Double. A Pass in the direct chair suggests uncertainty about bidding more. It asks for partner's opinion. A Double is not for penalties; it suggests that we cannot make our own contract. The

player in the pass-out chair (after two passes) may double to suggest that we are unlikely to make our own contract or bid on.

By sharing our opinions, we are more likely to make a good decision about bidding on or defending.

There are a variety of ways for us to claim we are bidding a contract to make. A cue bid is a good option. A game-forcing bid (such as bidding Two No Trump to show four card trump support and game values) is another. A third way is to redouble when the opponents make a takeout double. Finally, there is the penalty double at a low level.

For example, suppose our partner opens the bidding with Two Spades. The next hand doubles. My preference here is to redouble with a good hand. Partner is now in a position to evaluate his offense and defense. The result has been that partner doubles the opposition when he has reasonable defensive values. I might not have the right hand to double without my partner's help.

Hands with freakish distribution are hard to figure, so do not expect to get them right every time. I find that, for the everyday hand, whenever our partnership has at least twenty-three high card points we must play the hand or double the opponents.

I suggest you and your partner talk about ways to show in the bidding that you are bidding to make your contract. Do not go into specifics. Just come to some general understanding. Then, when this type of situation comes up you will be the one with the good score.