

START WINNING

Chapter 5: Don't Overdo It

Too many newcomers to the game just don't know when to stop or how to stop. They learn basic things like what rebids mean without thinking about when it is not a good idea to make this rebid. That rebid often occurs in the same suit or in No Trumps. For instance, if you pay Acol, your rebid of 1NT shows 15-16 points and your rebid of 2NT shows 17-18 if partner has responded in a suit at the lowest level. But there are times when you should not do so because it is either risky or not necessary.

In my 'Simple' version of bidding, I like to think of No Trumps as a 'stopping station' rather than anything else. When you bid No Trumps, that basically means that you either can't, or have no sensible way of going any further. A bid of No Trumps at any level (unless it has some specific meaning that may occur at high levels, like the 4NT ace ask) should be there to tell partner that you have limited potential. Yes, when you bid No Trumps, not only are you warning partner that it could be futile to go any further, you are telling partner that you may not be able to find a suitable trump suit. Remember, finding a trump fit should always be your prime objective,

No Trumps, at this stage of your progress, is the 'default' alternative. It is only at game level that you might choose 3NT in preference to 5C or 5D, but when you have a heart or spade fit (at least 8 cards between you and partner) and sufficient high card points you should always play in 4H or 4S. There are times when it may not work out better than 3NT but if you start with your basic, and sensible way of bidding, that will be a great start.

Let's have a look at some hands from actual play. Once more the opponents will have the courtesy to remain silent while you discuss things with your partner.

a)

WEST

♠ KJ43

♥ AKJ4

♦ J9

♣ 874

EAST

♠ 9862

♥ Q83

♦ Q1087

♣ Q3

Here is my Simple sequence:

W: "1H. I have an opening bid and 12+ points and at least four hearts."

E: "1S. I have enough points to say something, and at least four spades."

W: "2S. I, too, have 4 spades so we have a fit."

E: "PASS. That's high enough for me, thanks."

Now for the Acol sequence.

W: "1NT. I have a balanced hand with 12-14 points"

E: "PASS. Lord help you partner, I won't have much help for you."

You will note that in this deal, opponents actually have the balance of power and 1NT is likely to fail. But then, so is 2S. Which contract will fail by more will depend on where the opponents' cards are and how the defence goes. I would certainly prefer to play these EW cards in 2S rather than 1NT. Take the queen of diamonds from the East hand and substitute it for the queen of spades, and 2S becomes a much better contract than 1NT. As against that, the 1NT opening may prevent opponents from coming into the auction and finding their own fit, in clubs.

There is nothing perfect in any system, as the man used to say: "You pays your money and you takes your choice."

Now let's take a look at some hands where the bidding is going to be the same to start with but where judgement and common sense may lead to a different end result

b)

WEST

♠ 843

♥ AJ932

♦ A

♣ K1086

EAST

♠ J62

♥ 76

♦ Q1087

♣ A432

West opens 1H and East has enough to respond, but cannot do so in his own suit: not enough points. East has a balanced hand and therefore responds 1NT. West could make a rebid of 2H, which many might do, but why be unilateral when you can give partner an alternative?

West bids 2C, which says: "I have 5 hearts and 4 or 5 clubs, and don't think between us we have anything that we can make at a higher level. You decide whether you want me to play in 2C, or prefer 2H." East passes, having found the club fit.

As you can see, neither 2H nor 2C is a great contract but the possibility of at least two heart losers makes 2C a better contract, even though 2H will score more if it makes the same number of tricks.

c)

WEST

♠ 4

♥ KJ43

♦ KJ972

♣ KJ2

EAST

♠ Q9732

♥ 72

♦ 1084

♣ A63

Some awful bidding coming up! West opens 1D and East responds with 1S. That is basic bidding, so far. What should West do next? Those Wests who now bid their heart suit, thinking they must show their second suit, are asking for a heap of trouble. You can see immediately just what that trouble is. West, in effect, has forced East to have to bid THREE diamonds if he prefers diamonds to hearts. Hearts is West's second suit and hence the shorter one, and only an ignorant East would pass 2H simply because they have nowhere else to go. That is the meaning of a 'reverse': you make life uncomfortable for partner because you have the strong cards to do so. West, for a bid of 2H, should have at least 17 HCP. The simple answer is that West should make the minimum rebid of 2D, confirming that he has five or more diamonds, and forget the hearts. East has bypassed the heart suit in bidding spades so there is no need to show hearts unless you have a far better hand and can afford to show the hearts. A reverse like that shows 17+ HCP and is forcing to 2NT. Just look at the two hands and shudder at the thought of East having to bid 2NT or even give West preference to 3D. A simple rebid of 2D by West, though, will ensure that the bidding goes no further and East happily passes and 2D is a comfortable spot.

Now let me show you a deal with a very similar West hand:

c)

WEST

♠ 4

♥ Q965

♦ KQ972

♣ AJ2

EAST

♠ KJ732

♥ A1084

♦ 4

♣ 653

West again opens 1D and East responds in his longest suit, which is spades. Always bid your longest suit IF you can do so. East can do so. West rebids 2D, having learnt that a bid of 2H would be a reverse. East, though, has more to say. East now bids 2H. That tells West that East has five spades and four hearts, and not enough points to want to go further. West is delighted to pass and let East play in a comfortable 2H contract. What would have happened if West had rebid 2H? If East had known the meaning of a reverse then East would have leapt to 4H. West would have struggled to down two, if lucky. Why make things difficult for yourself and partner by not understanding the need to bid properly and know the limitations of your combined hands?

d)

WEST

♠ 42

♥ Q96

♦ KQ972

♣ AJ2

EAST

♠ KJ73

♥ 1084

♦ 4

♣ K7532

West again opens 1D. East this time has no option but to respond with 1S, despite the fact that it is not the longest suit. Why? Because East does not have the points to go to the two level. 2C would be a “2 over 1” response and show at least 10 HCP. But East does have a four card suit and enough to respond, so 1S is the only option. West rebids 2D and that now has to be the final contract. That is if EW are playing Acol. If EW are playing the Simple version, West can also rebid 1NT, That cannot be done if playing Acol, because, as I have said before, you cannot make two bids that mean the same thing. In Acol, because you play a 12-14 weak 1NT, that would show 15-16 HCP. This particular deal gives a good justification to those Acol players who will open 1NT with the West hand. The choice of opening bid where you have a small doubleton in one major suit and a good five card minor will often depend on the vulnerability conditions and what position you are at the table, i.e. dealer, second or third in hand. But we're not here to discuss those things, that may come at the next level.