

START WINNING

Chapter 8: Jump shifts

Now that we have covered limit bidding and invitational sequences, we also need to talk about ensuring that the bidding can proceed to game level at least. In other words, you have to find a way to 'force to game'.

Let us talk about the most basic 'jump shift' of all. That occurs when there has been an opening bid of one of a suit and responder has a very big hand. Usually, responder will also have a very good suit. With such a hand, responder can make an immediate jump shift which describes such a hand. Normally, it will have at least 17 HCP but can also be made with fewer points if the hand warrants it. For instance, partner opens 1H and you hold:

S. AKQ1064 H.KQ10 D. A97 C.3:

An immediate jump shift to TWO SPADES says it all. You have a huge hand opposite an opening bid and you will go to game whatever happens, and almost certainly to at least a small slam. The only problem is, which slam will be best, will it be 6H? 6S? 6NT? 7H? 7S? 7NT? You will have plenty of time to investigate the best contract if you make the jump shift immediately. You will then not need to worry about any bid you make being passed short of game. That is the value of an immediate jump shift. Just how to get to the best contract we won't discuss now, that will come up when you see the reviews of actual hands that have occurred in actual play.

Now let's look at a jump shift by opener.

This occurs when opener gets a response from partner and has enough points to go to game, say 18 or more HCP. A jump shift such as 1C-1H; 2S is game forcing and ensures that responder knows that game will be the end result even opposite a minimum response. Once more there is now no hurry to arrive at game and the best game contract can be investigated without having to guess.

There is one situation worth mentioning. The newcomer will not be familiar with it but at times the suit that you jump shift to on the second round of bidding may have fewer than four cards. Remember, it is important that you communicate with partner as best you can. For instance, you might open 1H and partner responds 1S. You can force to game by jump shifting to 3C. Partner might expect you to have five hearts and at least four clubs, but there is little harm in bidding 3C if you have only three clubs, because partner is unlikely to support clubs in such a sequence.

In fact most advanced players know that the jump to 3C can be done more to elicit either three card heart support or a rebid of 3S if responder has five spades. If a 5-3 major suit fit can be found, it will probably be a better contract than 3NT.

To jump to 3NT when you hear a 1S response, if you think about it, is putting all your eggs in one basket, and suggests that there is no better game than 3NT. If you bid 3NT with a five card heart suit you will find that partner has three hearts, and if you bid 3NT with a three card spade suit you will find that partner has five spades and 4S is a much better spot than 3NT. The main point here is that when you can make life easier for your partnership, why not do so? A jump shift certainly does that.

Finally, allied to the jump shift, is another way of being able to force the bidding: "new suit at the three level". In nearly all circumstances, introducing a new suit at the three level is forcing, and because it is being done at the three level, it usually ends up in game, though it should not be strictly interpreted as forcing to game, certainly not a game in clubs or diamonds.

Bidding to the best contract is very important in the lower club grades because much of the play will invariably be below par, so being in the best contract will earn you a lot of match points. Once your declarer play and defence improves, you will be able to win in the lower grades and make rapid advancement to the higher levels.

In the next part of this book we will go back some twenty years or so and revisit my time with a group of learners. At the time, I used actual examples from play in the lowest grade at the club, and wrote a series of articles which I distributed to the group. These articles were done in story fashion, with the characters being fictitious. The major characters were Simon and Vera Simple and the system they were taught was "Simple". Keeping it simple was their motto. The series also featured other characters, and both Acol and "Simple" bidding. I hope you will enjoy a rerun of this series in the next chapters, which will be repeated in full and which will also be annotated after some of the deals have been reported. You will note that twenty years ago there was not the sophisticated computer technology that allowed instant scoring, and match points were calculated manually after the session. These days, we just put the contract and result into the computer terminal at the table and get an instant indication of how you have done on each board played. Things were different in the old days and any analysis usually took place after the session, hence the many post mortems. I hope you will enjoy the stories and learn from the highs and lows experienced by our characters in the sort of playing situation that you will also be encountering in your early visits to your bridge club.

The first story is called "Post Mortem". Back in the good old days when there was far less pressure to get home and get some sleep before another hard day's work the next day, there were many 'post mortems' after each session of play, with players discussing what happened and what they did right or wrong, what opponents did, and what could or should have been done. That was a very good learning experience for the newer player, and invariably made even more enjoyable thanks to a generous supply of available liquid refreshment of your choice. Those were the days, but read on if you want to take a visit to the old days. You may learn things that will interest you as well as give you ideas as to how you could improve your bridge and bridge results.