

START WINNING

Chapter 3: Bidding Made Simple

When you first start to play the game you are usually taught a 'system', and usually that system is ACOL. Earlier, I stressed the need to look for a trump fit. So, let me continue with that theme before we move on to specific systems. By first learning to bid in such a way that you will be able to determine your best fit for a trump suit, you will then find it easy to progress to any system you choose to play, or keep playing the "Simple" way.

As I have stated before, there is no restriction on which system you play as long as it is a) allowable by your bridge authorities and b) you play the same system as your partner. The latter is not a regulation but it certainly helps if you and your partner understand each other's language at the table.

Many new players are taught the basics of a bidding system but not necessarily taught that bidding is all about communication, and the simplest way to understand the 'rules' of bidding is to look at bidding as just another way of talking to your partner. Let me put it in simple terms: just like you would if you were able to say anything that you want, or need, to partner.

For instance, you might say to partner: "I have two aces, a king and a jack as picture cards, four hearts, three spades five clubs, and one diamond". That sort of language of course is not allowed in bridge, your language must be limited to bids that are allowed, which are of course a number followed by a designation, or X meaning DOUBLE and XX for REDOUBLE. But you would be surprised how the real experts at bidding, even in the lower grades, can get a lot said in the bidding boxes by writing only what is allowed. Not the exact cards but very meaningful nevertheless.

So that you can further come to understand about the different languages that can be used in bidding communication, let me briefly remind you of what bidding is about: it is an AUCTION in which you bid against your opponents, or on your own if the opponents don't wish to participate, in order to determine how high you can go and in which denomination. In other words, how many tricks you can make if your side becomes the 'declaring' side, because that is what will determine your score on any one hand.

You should know by now that there are bonuses for bidding and making your contract, be it a part score, game, or slam, and also for defeating the opponents if you are defending a contract bid by your opponents.

Therefore your bidding has to tell you how far you can go, either on your own in partnership with your partner, or in competition against opponents.

Before we look at some hands, let me just remind you of the guideline for the basic requirement for making GAME: a combined 25 high card points if the game is bid in No Trumps or 4H or 4S, and 28-30 if in 5C or 5D; or, if you have aspirations of a slam, at least 30 HCP if you play in a trump contract and have a decent fit, or 33 HCP for a small slam in No Trumps, or 37 HCP in 7NT. This is but a guideline of course, and in TRUMP contracts, FIT can make a huge difference.

Now let me give you some hands that you and partner might hold, and how the conversation might go if you were playing bridge and were able to make a bid and translate it into English language at the same time. I'm sure you understand the English language much better, but the language of bidding will become second nature to you if you think in those terms.

I will show you just the West and East hands, because this time NS will be silent throughout the bidding. Very nice of them, but believe me, many pairs will hang themselves without opponents handing them the rope.

West will be the DEALER in each case, and therefore the first to bid. Knowing how to bid when opponents give you a free rein will at least get you started on your winning ways. If you can bid perfectly without interference, you will then have to learn to bid perfectly when opponents also want to bid. That will be much more difficult.

So, let's start with the simple things first. Here, there will be no interference, and I will show you the perfect bidding each time, and do it in "English speak" with each bid.