

Learning Points on the Forcing NT

January 22, 2008

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E Deals

♠ AQJ98

NS Vul

♥ J95

♦ K3

Mike

♣ J92

Steve

♠ 32

N

♠ K10754

♥ AK102

W 18 E

♥ 4

♦ Q109764

S

♦ A

♣ Q

♣ A108763

♠ 6

♥ Q8763

♦ J852

♣ K54

Duplimate:

EW: 1N,

2♣, 2♦, 2♠

Mike and I played in the 2 session Stratiflighted Open Pairs in a tough B flight at the January Cleveland Regional. Here's a hand rich in bidding and play learnings.

We use Precision with 2/1 Game Force and open all 11's with a 5 card major. 1 NT is Forcing after partner's limited major suit opening. Since we open 16+ HCP hands 1♣, one of a major is 11-15 HCP. The range for 1NT shifts up to 7⁺-12 HCP. Compare this to 12-21 HCP and 5-11 HCP on our 2/1 card. We choose to open all Major + Club two-suited hands in the **major** to simplify our bidding after a Precision 2♣ opener (11-15 HCP and 6 clubs, or 5 Clubs and one four card major). Sometimes opening 2♣ preempts us from the best spot, as it would on this hand. Most 2/1 bidders would open East hand-11 HCP with 2.5 Quick Tricks.

East	South	West	North
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♥	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♠	Pass

South leads the 6♥

The expert consensus (Bridge World Standard 2001) treatment for 1NT is semi-forcing, where opener passes with any minimum not willing to rebid the major or raise a 3-card invitation. This helps with problem hand types like 4522 and many 5332 minimums.

Here's our thinking during the auction:

Steve (East)	Mike (West)
1) Shape, 2.5 quick tricks, 11 HCP. Bid 1♠.	2) Steve would probably take a 2/1 force bid here, but I have seen these hands play poorly if a misfit is present. This is a big hand for 1NT even playing Precision, but the ♣Q isn't pulling its weight. 1NT it is. If I hear 2♣ from Steve then my caution will be rewarded. 2♦ or 2♠ by Steve will allow invitational bids by me. 2♥ by Steve will allow me to raise to 4♥.
3) Partner has less than enough for game – we need a safe partial for an easy plus. 2♣ is enough with this minimum hand (11-13 HCP).	4) 2♣ limits Steve to 11 to a bad 13 HCP and confirms game is unlikely. Question is where's the best part score? 2♦ might be the best place because it will be easier to maintain trump control with a 6-1, 6-2, or 6-3 fit in diamonds versus 5-2 fit in spades. I have 2♠, 2N and 3♦ available as well. I choose safety over possibly more points for making spades because if I am right to stay out of game, we will matchpoint well on any positive score. If I am wrong and the game is there, my choice is irrelevant. Partner must pass 2♦.
5) Partner has no more than 1 spade since he did not raise my major. That leaves 6-7 cards in ♣ and ♥. The likelihood is almost 74% that he has at least 2 ♣'s. Partner should pass 3♣. He didn't bid 3♦, just 2♦.	6) Partner must be a maximum for his 3♣ bid (13 HCP) and has a diamond void. The ♣Q is working and my lack of diamond points is also working. Game may be there after all but which: 3N, 4♥ or 4♠ on seven card fits? I will bid 3♥ hope my partner realizes I am on a maximum with hearts and diamonds and see if my partner can clarify. I want to encourage game, but will accept 3♠ if partner rebids.
7) Extras, but I don't like 3NT. I can't bid 3♠ because partners 0/1 and I don't have 6. I'll rebid my six card suit 4♣.	8) 4♣ is not what I wanted to hear, however we should make the same tricks in 4♣ as we do in 4♠ so I will correct to spades and hope for the best.

The Play

South chose to lead ♥6 allowing a cross ruff. Before beginning a cross ruff, cash side suit winners you don't need for transportation. The ♥Ace was followed by the ♥King (pitching a club) and ruffing a ♥. ♣Ace and a ♣ ruff was followed by another ♥. North ruffed with the ♠8, and declarer over ruffed with the ♠10. The ♦Ace and a ♣ ruffed back to the board cleared ♣s. A diamond was ruffed to hand and good ♣ led. North ruffed with the ♠9 and led the ♠Q.

Decision time – I chose to play for ♠Ace to my left – down one. North was either 5323 or 4333 – if the ♦K was an honest card when I ruffed the first time then 5323 is right. If 5323 with AQJxx in trumps why didn't North double? South didn't lead a trump either.... Against 4♠ if South leads a trump instead of a heart – we're down two... If I cover North's ♠Q we would have scored a most unlikely game. Down one minus 50 got 6.5 Match Points out of 11 - a better result than we deserved. Had I passed partner's 2♦ we would have scored better. If partner had bid 2♠, we score even more.

Post Mortem – Defense

A trump lead by South is difficult but necessary. North must have a Spade stack on the bidding. After a heart lead, North must ruff in with the Ace and lead a trump to stop the 2nd ruff in dummy. This insures defeating the contract.

Post Mortem - Bidding

Needless to say we weren't quite on the same page. Mike expected that 2♦ stopped our auction – and in many hands it should. However Steve thought that 2♦ was weak and denied the ability to make a simple a preference to spades effectively denying 2 cards. Therefore partner rates to have 2.3 clubs in his hand. Steve didn't expect 3♣ would tempt partner to continue bidding but it did.

West's hand is at the top of the range for 1NT – so the rebid should be 2N or 3♦. 3♦ seems better on shape and honor concentration. However there are indications that 2♠ is the right call (singleton Q of clubs not pulling full weight, and we have a 4 suited misfit.). 2♠ is the preferred partial at Match Point Pairs (we'd have to make 4 of a minor to approach average and likely not outscore those EW pairs making 3♠), and we're reasonably sure we do not belong in game. No need to go beyond the 2 level. Partner will pass 2♠ and we'll gain a nice plus score. If your partner will infer a 2♦ bid means you can't have 2 spades, then bid 2♠ when you have them. If you have a partner who will infer a good 13 point hand for 3♣ rebid, then pass 2♦ or rebid 2♠ to force a low level black suit choice.

We agreed that 2♦ is a minimum bid, denying the ability to make a preference to 2♠. We also agree that 2♦ should be passed, even with the inferences available to East in Precision. We're working on what exceptions there are where bidding 3♣ makes sense. A 13 HCP 56+ seems right with all cards working.

East	South	West	North	For perspective, here's how our bidding might have gone using our 2/1 convention card instead of Precision. Note how critical responder's 2 nd bid is in either auction. Both pose valuation questions. A conservative approach wins. Would you find it?
1♣ [1]	Pass	1♥ [2]	Pass	
1♠ [3]	Pass	1N [4] !!	Pass	
2♠ [5]	Pass	Pass	Pass	

[1] Clubs longer than Spades, minimum opener; [2] 4 Hearts, Walsh style; [3] 4+ Spades minimum unbalanced hand; [4] Can't go past 1N with "10 HCP" hand. 2♦ is 4th suit forcing. 3♦ is possible, but unilateral with this misfit. We'd feel more comfortable bidding 3♦ if partner had bid 1NT not 1♠.

[5] Min 6-5. Some would bid this way with only 5-5. That's a topic for a different conversation.

East	South	West	North	
1♣ [1]	Pass	1♦ [2]	Pass	A more natural auction is possible for those bidding up the line: [1] ♣ longer than ♠, minimum opener; [2] ♦ are a dominant feature. Besides, if partner has 4 hearts he will bid them now (and declare); [3] Bidding out my minimum pattern; [4] might as well show 6 since partner can't have 4 hearts; [5] Completing the picture.
1♠ [3]	Pass	2♦ [4] !!	Pass	
2♠ [5]	Pass	Pass	Pass	

Scoring

Matchpoints puts a heavy premium on positive scores. A slightly conservative approach with West's hand will yield good results. In a team game however we'd be tempted to stretch for game, especially if vulnerable. You never know when you'll get a friendly lead.