

Learning Points – Let Opponents Make the Last Decision I

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March 10, 2012

Competitive Bidding Level: Basic / Intermediate

East Deals EW Vul MPs	♠ 10876 ♥ K104 ♦ KQJ1083 ♣ -	
♠ KQ ♥ AQJ8752 ♦ 42 ♣ 84	N W 22 E S	♠ 52 ♥ 6 ♦ A95 ♣ AQJ10753
	♠ AJ943 ♥ 93 ♦ 76 ♣ K962	

East	South	West	North
1♣	1♠	2♥	4♠
Pass	Pass	5♥	Pass
Pass	Pass		
North leads ♦K			

A/X Open Pairs, Qualifying, Indianapolis Regional Mike Ma is my partner. We play Precision.

A good strategy in competitive auctions is to force the opponents to make the last decision. Often they have to guess. This was the first board of the qualifying round against unfamiliar opponents. Can we take advantage of their not knowing us?

The Bidding

East's 1♣ opening bid is normal (2 ½ Quick Tricks and a 7-card 1-loser suit). South has a minimum overcall in ♠s and West has a normal freebid in ♥s. North has a 6-loser hand that values to 12-14 Support Points and a known 9+ card fit. This is a 17-trump plus hand (Law of Total Tricks). At favorable vulnerability North can bid: 3♣ (invitational raise), 3♥ (forcing raise), 3♠, or 4♠. Pass is out of the question. North chose 4♠ on fit and loser count (6) with no Aces. East and South passed. West bid 5♥. There's been a lot of bidding at this table.

The Play - North led the ♦K to establish side suit tricks. Holding ♥K10x and a ♣ void, declarer's ♠s were not going away on long ♣s right away. Declarer won the ♦A and took the ♥ finesse, losing to North's ♥K. Now the ♠7 (we play 3rd best) to partner's ♠A and a ♦7 return to the ♦10 meant declarer was down 2, losing 1 trick in each suit. NS earned 11 of 17 MPs. Doubling 5♥ would net 15 of 17 MPs for North.

Post Mortem

The jump to 4♠ gave West a hard decision. East could have helped. West's 2♥ freebid shows a near opening hand. West should have 2 defensive tricks. With 2 quick tricks and no desire to play 5♥, East should venture a Double. This would warn partner off bidding more.

This is not a Forcing Pass situation for East West, as they had NOT shown a fit. A forcing pass requires 1) a fit and 2) an Invitational or better auction. East West had the strength but not the fit. A Forcing Pass invites partner to bid on by showing no values lost in opponent's suit (♠s) or unmentioned extra primes.

Perhaps West thought this was a forcing pass situation and bid once more. West should have reasoned that partner shows 2 quick tricks for opening 1♣. Holding the ♥A and ♠KQ means 4♠ should go down. Double seems a bit better than 5♥ only because East has not shown a ♥ fit. Of course, if West believes North South are stealing, a vulnerable 650 beats setting East West for 100 (4♠ doubled down 1). This is Match Points after all.

CONT	By	NS	EW	N-S MPs	E-W MPs
5♥	W	200		11	6
4♠X	S		300	0.5	16.5
5♥	W	200		11	6
5♠X	S		300	0.5	16.5
3N	E	500		15	2
5♣X	E	800		17	0
5♣	E	200		11	6
4♥	W	200		11	6
4♠X	S		100	2	15
5♣	E	100		6	11
4♥	W	100		6	11
5♥X	W	500		15	2
4♥	W	100		6	11
4♥	W	100		6	11
5♥	W	200		11	6
3♠	S		50	3	14
4♥	W	100		6	11
5♥X	E	500		15	2

The 4♣ bid puts pressure on both East and West to make the last decision. South will not bid 5♠ without a useful void. East's final pass puts the burden on West. Sometimes West will get it right, but it's better to inform partner's decision. Otherwise partner might have to guess - just what opponents want!

North did not double 5♥ as the ♥K was not a clear winner (switch the red Aces between EW and give East 3 ♥s), and partner might not have tricks outside ♠s. Notice, if North doubles, then NS are taking the last decision. Doubling 5♥ is unilateral on the 1st board of the match, but might be the right risk if we needed a big score.

Learning Points

1. When competing, bid immediately to the right level. Encourage the opponents to make the last decision.
2. Continuing to the 5-level when partner preempts means you have a void, or unexpressed useful distribution. Leave the 5-level to the opponents.
3. Know the Forcing Pass. Decide what a double means at high level in a competitive auction.
4. When opponents bid 2-suits you can use cue bid of the lower suit as an invitational raise and the higher suit as a forcing raise for partner's suit.

Keywords: Bid to the right level immediately, Forcing Pass, Give Opponents the Last Guess.