

Daisy-Picking

Most players do far too much bidding on the way to the final contract. This is a legacy from the dubious teachings of the scientific schools, which maintain that accurate bidding can be achieved only by conducting a slow and deliberate investigation.

The scientists wind their way through a tortuous maze of approach forcing. Practically every bid they make is an inferential force, and they have therefore little use for a forcing takeout. A jump of any kind is regarded as a waste of bidding space and meets with pained disapproval.

Such methods show up to best advantage in the cloistered setting of bidding competitions. With no uncouth opponents to disturb them, the scientists can be as fancy as they please and are unlikely to be penalized for taking seven rounds of bidding to reach a simple three no trump contract. But in real life things are different. The opponents are there, awkward creatures of flesh and blood, eavesdropping on every bid you make, butting in, sacrificing, and generally making a nuisance of themselves.

The notion of bidding as a duet between partners for the purpose of exchanging the maximum information about strength and distribution is widely held but quite unsound. There are *two* pairs at the bridge table and they do not sing in harmony. Each pair is out to get the better of the other, and the one most likely to succeed is the pair that is prepared to sacrifice a measure of accuracy for the sake of obstruction.

Extra rounds of bidding do not necessarily produce better contracts—only better defence. This is confirmed by a report in the 1969 Annals of the International Bridge Academy. A study of

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1,556 World Championship deals revealed that the most successful contracts were those reached in the fewest bids.

The real aim of bidding should be to exchange the absolute minimum of information that will enable you to arrive at a reasonable contract. Of course there are some hands that require detailed investigation and your system must include mechanism to deal with these. But it is vital to keep such investigations to a minimum and to avoid using your machinery for the pleasure of hearing it whirr. As soon as you have a good idea of what the final contract should be, bid it without picking daisies on the way.

The big secret of effective bidding is to limit your hand at the earliest opportunity. Limit bids in no trumps and quantitative raises have the virtue of feeding partner the information he needs while giving little away to the opponents. They also have a valuable obstructive effect, and practical players usually prefer an obstructive to a constructive bid when they are given the choice. Quantitative sequences such as 1 ♠-4 ♠, 1 ♥-3 ♥-6 ♥, or 2 NT-6 ♠ may have an untutored ring to them, but they can be devastatingly effective. The times you find yourself going down after such a sequence are more than compensated by the times when a favourable lead presents you with the contract.

Bidding is not, and never will be, an exact science. It is a rough estimation of probabilities, and there is no reason for supposing that a slow approach will lead to a better contract in the end. Perfection in bidding is an unworthy target and an unattainable one. The best of contracts may be defeated by a bad break or a double-dummy defence, and while the blaster can hope for the compensation of a favourable lead there is not much chance for the scientists. He has told the opponents so much about his hand that it is normally a simple matter for them to produce the best defence.

Consider three different methods of bidding this everyday hand.

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♠ Q J 4	♠ K 9 6 2	♠ 10 3
♥ 8 3	♥ K 7 5	♥ Q J 9 6 2
♦ K 10 9 6 3	♦ Q 8 7 4	♦ A 5
♣ A Q 4	♣ 8 3	♣ 9 7 5 2

N	E
W	S

Love all
Dealer South

♠ A 8 7 5
♥ A 10 4
♦ J 2
♣ K J 10 6

(a) South	North	(b) South	North	(c) South	North
1 ♣	1 ♦	1 ♣	1 ♦	1 NT	3 NT
1 ♣	2 ♥	1 NT	3 NT		
2 NT	3 NT				

(a) A nice scientific sequence, but the contract is doomed even though East failed to overcall on the first round and failed to double the fourth-suit bid of two hearts. Warned against the other suits, West has nothing to try but hearts.

(b) This is better, for West is now more likely to lead a spade. But note that East had the opportunity to overcall on the first round.

(c) South limits his hand with his opening bid and North is able to place the contract immediately, giving East no chance to indicate a defence. It would be unnatural for West to lead anything but a spade or a diamond.

Clearly the limit bid gives away the least information, and this is one of the main arguments in favour of the adoption of the weak no trump. With a frequency twice as high as the strong no trump, it gives many more opportunities for limiting your hand on the opening bid.

The hands that follow illustrate some of the embarrassing things that can happen to the daisy-pickers. The first example comes from a team of four match.

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♠ A Q 7 3
 ♥ 9 6 2
 ♦ K 7 4
 ♣ A 9 2

♠ 9 8 2
 ♥ K J 8 5 3
 ♦ 9 2
 ♣ Q 7 4



♠ J 10 6 4
 ♥ 7
 ♦ A J 10 3
 ♣ J 10 8 5

♠ K 5
 ♥ A Q 10 4
 ♦ Q 8 6 5
 ♣ K 6 3

Love all
 Dealer South

		<i>Room 1</i>			
	South	North		South	North
	1 NT	3 NT		1 NT	2 ♣
				2 ♥	3 NT

In Room 1 West led a heart and the ten won the trick. South played a diamond to the king and ace, ducked the club return, won the next club and ducked a diamond. The diamond suit failed to provide the ninth trick, but after cashing his top cards in clubs and spades South was able to end-play West in hearts to make his contract.

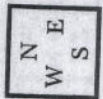
West in Room 2, warned against the heart lead, tried a club. The declarer ducked the first round, won the second club in dummy and ran the nine of hearts to the knave. A club came back, and South's next move was to knock out the ace of diamonds. East cashed his club for the fourth defensive trick and then led the knave of diamonds to the queen. After cashing the top spades the declarer was able to develop the same end-play in hearts, but that added up to only eight tricks.

Stayman should not be used on flat 4-3-3-3 shapes. There is little prospect of gain even if a suit fit is found, and the risk of giving too much information to the defenders is very real.

Two rounds of bidding proved to be better than five on this hand from a team of four match.

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♠ K Q 9 7 3
 ♥ K Q 7
 ♦ A Q 6 2
 ♣ 8
 ♠ J 8 5 4
 ♥ A 8 2
 ♦ 8 5
 ♣ Q J 10 4
 ♠ 10 2
 ♥ 4
 ♦ K J 10 7 3
 ♣ 9 7 6 5 2



Game all
 Dealer North
 ♠ A 6
 ♥ J 10 9 6 5 3
 ♦ 9 4
 ♣ A K 3

		Room 1		Room 2			
West	North	East	South	West	North	East	South
	1 ♠	—	2 ♥		1 ♠	—	2 ♥
	—	4 ♥	—	6 ♥	—	3 ♦	Double 3 ♥
	All pass				—	4 ♥	—
					—	4 NT	—
					—	6 ♥	All pass

In Room 1 the bidding was straightforward and sensible. North showed his full values on the second round with a double raise, and South accepted the slight risk that there might be two top losers in the hand. On the natural lead of the queen of clubs twelve tricks were there for the taking.

In Room 2 North's fatuous bid of three diamonds gave East the opportunity to double for a lead. The slam was bid in spite of this, West dutifully led the eight of diamonds, and the declarer was in trouble. He put up the ace of diamonds and played on spades, but when East ruffed the third round there was no way of disposing of the losing diamond and the slam went one down for a swing of 17 i.m.p.

Over-indulgence in cue-bidding can be fatal in another way, as the next hand illustrates.

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♠ A 8	♠ K Q 10 2
♥ K 8 7 4 2	♥ 9 5 3
♦ K 10 8 5 4	♦ 2
♣ 3	♣ A 8 7 6 5

♠ J 9 7 6 5 3	N W E S	♠ 4
♥ —		♥ A Q J 10 6
♦ 9 6 3		♦ A Q J 7
♣ Q J 10 4		♣ K 9 2

North-South game

Dealer South

South	West	North	East
1 ♥	—	4 ♥	—
5 ♦	—	5 ♠	Double
6 ♣	6 ♠	Double	All pass

Once West had decided against making a cheeky overcall on the first round, he and his partner were fated never to discover their spade fit on this hand. North came to their rescue, however, with a daisy-picking bid of five spades. This gave East the opportunity to double, and West did not waste his second chance.

Nothing could be more futile than North's cue-bid of five spades in the above auction. There could hardly be a grand slam on the hand, since South had denied possession of the ace of clubs when he bid five diamonds. What, then, was North trying to achieve?

What he did achieve was a paltry score of 500 points instead of the 1,430 that would have accrued if he had made the sensible and obvious bid of six hearts.

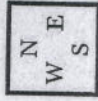
Against the spade sacrifice North led the three of clubs and eventually obtained his club ruff, but there were no more than four tricks altogether for the defence.

Trial bids are not without their dangers.

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♠ Q 10 6 2	♠ 8 3
♥ K Q 10	♥ A 9 4 2
♦ 5	♦ K 9 7 3 2
♣ K Q 9 5 4	♣ 7 3

♠ A 4	♠ K J 9 7 5
♥ J 8 6 3	♥ 7 5
♦ J 10 8 4	♦ A Q 6
♣ A 8 2	♣ J 10 6



Game all
Dealer North

North	South
1 ♣	1 ♣
2 ♣	3 ♣
4 ♣	—

The correct final contract was reached, but the manner of getting there was again to prove fatal.

On the normal lead of the knave of diamonds the declarer would have had no trouble in making ten tricks. But the wanton display of club support alerted West to his partner's shortage and enabled him to find the killing defence of the ace and another club.

South won the second round of clubs in hand and tried to slip the knave of spades through, but West went up with the ace and led his third club. East ruffed and cashed the ace of hearts to defeat the contract.

If South felt impelled to make a trial bid, three diamonds might have been a wiser choice. But there is not much of a case for a trial bid at all. It is a mistake to try to land on the head of a pin in such cases. South's cards are so nearly worth a jump to game that the sensible course is to bid four spades and accept the responsibility for the slight overbid.

A big swing was lost on the next hand when North stopped to admire the view.

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	♠ J 10 9 6 4		
	♥ 6		
	♦ A Q J 4		
	♣ Q J 2		
	♠ 7 2	N	♠ Q J 8 5 4
♠ 3	♥ A 10 7 3	W	♥ 2
	♦ 10 9 7 6 5	E	♦ A 10 9 7 3
	♣ K 5 4	S	
	♠ A K Q 8 5		
<i>North-South game</i>			
<i>Dealer West</i>			
	♥ K 9 2		
	♦ K 8 3		
	♣ 8 6		

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
—	—	—	1 ♠
—	3 ♦	Double	4 ♠
5 ♥	5 ♠	All pass	

After South's fourth-in-hand opening of one spade North felt that he was too strong for an immediate raise to four. Instead he showed where his values lay with a jump to three diamonds, intending to bid four spades on the next round.

East seized the opportunity to make a distributional double, and although South jumped to four spades the damage was done. West was able to judge that his high cards were in the right places and took the cheap sacrifice in five hearts. The best North and South could then do was to double and collect 100 points. In fact North pushed on to five spades and lost 100 when the defenders cashed their three winners.

The direct raise to four spades is, of course, the only sound action on the North hand. This need not inhibit South from trying for slam if he has a strong hand.

In the other room North raised to four spades and the opponents had no chance to enter the auction. A diamond was led and South made eleven tricks for a swing of 13 i.m.p.

A daisy-picking bid was responsible for another large swing on the following hand.

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♠ K 7 6 2
 ♥ 4
 ♦ K J 7 3
 ♣ A 8 7 6

♠ 5	♠ A K Q 10 8 7 3	♠ A J 9
♥	♥ A K Q 10 8 7 3	♥ J 6
♦	♦ Q 9	♦ 10 5 4 2
♣	♣ Q J 4	♣ K 10 5 2

N	E
W	S

East-West game
Dealer East

♠ Q 10 8 4 3
 ♥ 9 5 2
 ♦ A 8 6
 ♣ 9 3

	<i>Room 1</i>		<i>Room 2</i>	
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>
		<i>South</i>		<i>East</i>

1	♥	Double Rdbl	2	♠	4	♥	All pass
4	♥	4	♠	Double	All	pass	

Although his partner had passed, West in Room 1 for some reason considered his hand too strong to open four hearts. His one heart bid allowed the opponents to enter the auction at a low level. West jumped to four hearts on the next round, but the damage had been done and he was left with a choice between defending against four spades and bidding on to an unmakeable five hearts.

It takes an initial trump lead and smart defence to defeat four spades. In practice West began with a top heart, and South was able to make his doubled contract by finessing against the knave of spades and ruffing his third heart high in dummy.

In the other room West made the obvious bid of four hearts, which gave his opponents no chance to get into the bidding. Ten tricks were made for a score of 620 and a total swing of 15 i.m.p.

Here is a hand from a Camrose match between Scotland and Wales where a pointless cue-bid reduced the Welsh chances.

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♠ Q J 10 8 7 4 3

♥ —

♦ 9 5 4

♣ 7 6 2

♠ 5
♥ A K 9 4 2
♦ A Q J 6
♣ J 10 8

N	E
W	S

♠ —
♥ Q 8 7 6 3
♦ K 8 7 3 2
♣ A K 5

♠ A K 9 6 2

♥ J 10 5

♦ 10

♣ Q 9 4 3

East-West game

Dealer East

	West	North	East	South
	2 ♠	6 ♠	1 ♥	1 ♠
			Double	All pass

After the Scottish North's massive barrage the Welsh were on the spot. East, fearing duplication of the spade control, thought it best to indicate minimum values by doubling, and West was in no position to reverse this decision. Six spades went only two down, needless to say.

The situation would have been altogether different if West had forced with three diamonds instead of using the over-worked cue-bid in the enemy suit. Then East would be in a position to indicate his void by passing the six spade bid and West, knowing little could be missing in the other suits, might have found the courage to bid seven hearts.

South would no doubt have sacrificed to the limit in seven spades, but at least East and West would have reached their par on the hand.

In the other room Scotland was allowed to play in six hearts for a big swing.