



*Karen Walker*  
*kwalker@insightbb.com*

# Bidding Matters

## The 12 Habits of Highly Effective Bidders

### 7. They strive to be sensible, not brilliant (continued).

My first introduction to the concept of “playing with the field” was as a beginner, when a partner chided me for making an “anti-field” bid. “Just be normal on hands like this,” he advised.

I assured him that if I’d had any idea of what the normal (therefore correct) bid was, I would have chosen it in an instant. He smiled and nodded, and I made a mental note to ask him later exactly what “the field” was and why it was so important not to defy its judgment.

I learned that the advice wasn’t as unimaginative as it sounded. In constructive auctions, it essentially translates to “don’t sweat the small stuff.” Don’t over-analyze the obvious and, unless you have a compelling reason, don’t go for a top (or zero) by spurning the normal contract. If you declare the field contract, you expect an above-average score because no matter how easy it was to bid, there will usually be a few pairs who don’t find it.

### Competitive bidding with the field

The corollary is that you can expect a below-average score when you defend a normal contract. That’s why

it pays to take some risks when your opponents have the balance of power. Your goal is to make it difficult for them to find their best contract, but not to be so foolhardy that you mislead partner or give the opponents a free shot at a top.

Preempts and other competitive actions should be evaluated in light of the risks you expect the field will be taking. At favorable vulnerability, what’s your call in first seat holding:

♠2 ♥K 10 9 6 4 3 ♦Q J 6 4 ♣5 2?

It’s not a classic 2♥ opener, but that’s how the bidding will probably start at most tables. Those who are worried about the suit quality may pass. A few might decide the conditions are right for applying maximum pressure with a 3♥ opening.

Any choice other than 2♥ will increase the likelihood of an unusual result. In the long run, unusual results that are generated by your anti-field actions (rather than the opponents’ errors) tend to be bottoms more often than tops.

Wild distributions make it more difficult to guess what will happen at other tables. If you have a weak, one-suited hand, it’s usually wise to bid the full limit of your playing strength at your first turn. Two-suited hands offer more options, especially when you don’t yet know which side has the strength.

Neither side vulnerable, your right-hand opponent opens 1♦. What’s your call holding:

♠KQJ876 ♥— ♦J5 ♣KQ 10 6 2?

Some players will immediately fall in love with this hand and try a 4♠ overcall. A rogue or two might even risk an Unusual 2NT, hoping partner will figure out the distribution when they pull his heart preference to spades.

The field action, though, will probably be a simple 1♠ overcall. That allows partner to show his values and may give you helpful information about the opponents’ hands. If they start bidding notrump or clubs, you’ll be happy you took a slower approach.

### When disaster looms

When a calamity occurs in your auction, there’s a natural tendency to react with, “Why does this always happen to me?” If you’re convinced that you can’t possibly make the situation any worse, it can be tempting to indulge in heroics to go to a better spot.

Would you save partner on this deal, both vulnerable?

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♠	2♦	Pass	Pass
Dbl	Pass	Pass	?

You hold:

♠KJ75 ♥10932 ♦— ♣J764

It’s the auction you feared, but there’s no reason to believe it won’t be duplicated at other tables. You should assume that everyone at your table — including partner — is making the normal, “field” bid, especially early in the auction. If LHO has a real opener and partner has a sane 2♦ overcall, other pairs holding your cards will be in the same predicament.

An SOS redouble is almost never a field bid, and invoking it here could turn an average-minus into a zero. It’s unlikely partner has four hearts (no takeout double) and he could be short in both your suits. If you redouble and his pattern is 3=2=6= or 3=2=7=1, this may be your last session with him.

Trust partner, trust the field and accept your minus 800, then expect to find plenty of company when you check the recap sheet.