

Our Readers Ask



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Dear Eric,

In the Sept. 2005 issue you recommended overcalling 1NT with 2NT to show a strong two-suiter. I didn't understand the continuation explanation. What determines whether advancer bids 3♣ or 3♦?

Marion Gebhardt

While you could use any scheme that appeals to you for bidding over 2NT, it's most common to treat 2NT initially as minors *or* a strong two-suiter, whether using DONT or a different method. For example, with 6-6 in the minors you might want to bid 2NT to steal some space and ensure partner bids, while 2♣ (clubs plus another suit) could be a 5-4 hand or a weaker one.

Thus in reply to 2NT, advancer starts by taking a preference between the minors because "aggressor" (the 2NT overcaller) will more often have a distributional minor two-suiter. Over 3♣ or 3♦, it's easiest to continue as naturally as possible, as I described. Once aggressor bids again over 3♣ or 3♦, he confirms the strong type, so the bidding will not die prematurely:

| | | | |
|------|--------------------|------|-------------------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 1NT | 2NT ⁽¹⁾ | Pass | 3♣ ⁽²⁾ |
| Pass | ? | | |

(1) Unspecified two-suiter, very strong and/or very unbalanced.

(2) Requests further description.

- 3♦ = ♦ + ♥
- 3♥ = ♥ + ♠
- 3♠ = ♠ + minor
- 3NT = ♣ + ♦
- 4♣ = ♣ + ♥

Dear Eric,

Playing IMPs at unfavorable vulnerability, North holds ♠Q 10 7 5 2 ♥A K Q 6 3 ♦J 5 ♣Q.

| | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|------|---------------------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 2♦ ⁽¹⁾ | 3♦ ⁽²⁾ | 4♦ | 4♥ |
| Pass | Pass | 5♦ | Pass ⁽³⁾ |
| Pass | ? | | |

(1) Weak.

(2) Majors.

(3) Forcing?

Is South's pass forcing? Should North bid, pass or double?

Some suggest that a forcing pass does not apply if partner is limited. In the above auction North would have a maximum of, say, 17 HCP (else double and then take another call).

I am not sure if that is a good treatment, however, because even though *you* may be limited in HCP, he might have extra shape that would warrant bidding.

Greg Morse

Let's start with the idea that actions are limited by the failure to double. Whether or not a partnership chooses an upper level for an overcall (and your idea of 17 HCP is not high enough in the modern style), that notion is not relevant when the initial action is an artificial two-suited treatment. The reason is that aggressor can always show his hand type *first* and follow up with a double, a suit bid, or a second cuebid at his *second* turn when he has vast reserves of strength. When the initial action comes over a preempt, it is easier to show the two-suiter immediately and take further action over partner's bid, so 3♦ *may* be very strong.

Your partner's pass is forcing because (a) your side has voluntarily bid game in a non-save situation after aggressor showed strength and opener showed weakness, and (b) because of the nature of the opponents' bidding (East first suggested playing in a partscore, then changed his mind and bid

game). That forcing pass suggests doubt about whether to declare or settle for a penalty. As South is both minimum for his initial action and blessed with the least attractive number of diamonds, he should double to register his vote.

In my coaching program, competitive bidding is one of the main themes and forcing pass situations are explored in great depth, but the essential issue in starting any discussion can be reduced to answering this question: "whose deal is it?" For any partnership, determining "ownership" is essential to deciding whether it's necessary to buy the contract or double the opponents. You'd be surprised to learn that if you polled 10 of the world's leading pairs you'd be hard-pressed to find two whose rules about "ownership" are almost identical.

One thing to keep in mind is that only in special cases should vulnerability determine whether a pass should be forcing. For example, take this common auction:

| | | | |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 1♠ | 2♥ | 2♠ | 4♥ |
| 4♠ | ? | | |

Neither side has done anything to suggest it was bidding to make or as a save against the opponents' game. If North-South were vulnerable and East-West not, it