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Bidding Matters

The 12 habits of highly effective bidders

6. They make the bids that partner wants to hear (continued).

Suppose partner opens 1♥ and you respond 1♠ with a typical minimum such as:

♠KJ542 ♥43 ♦865 ♣A73.

If you made a list of rebids you'd most like to hear from partner, your top choices would probably be:

4♠, 4♥, 3♠, 3♥, 2♠, 2♥, 2NT, INT.

Your ranking would change somewhat if you held a singleton heart (or if you really wanted to be dummy). With the majority of responding hands, though, you're going to be most comfortable with auctions where partner raises your suit, rebids his own long suit or bids notrump.

These are the most desirable rebids because they're all value bids that pinpoint opener's point count and put you in charge. Unlike the alternatives — new-suit rebids of 2♣, 2♦, 3♣, 3♦ — the "old-suit" and notrump bids also confirm or strongly suggest a strain for the final contract, which usually simplifies the rest of your auction.

If you're opener, it's helpful to keep responder's preferences in mind when considering your rebid. When in doubt, choose a value bid that will

make it easier for partner to decide on his rebid or place the final contract.

Opener's rebids in Two-over-One

Opener's value bids can be especially important in the 2/1 system. One common misconception about these auctions is that after the forcing-to-game response, both partners should conserve bidding space by making minimum rebids.

This idea is only half right. 2/1 bidding is most accurate if you agree that responder does not jump with extra values, but opener may.

In most 2/1 auctions, responder is the captain or "asker" and opener is the "teller." When responder has slam aspirations, he uses forcing, low-level rebids to give opener room to provide information. Put another way, responder follows the principle of fast arrival — "fast" rebids (jumps to game) show minimums, while "slow" (low-level) rebids tend to show extras.

Opener, however, makes value rebids — he bids higher with stronger hands, lower with minimums. If opener always made a low-level rebid, no matter how strong his hand, responder would never be able to make an intelligent decision about how high to bid. For this reason, it's important for opener to define his strength at his earliest opportunity.

For example, you open 1♠ with:

♠AKJ1085 ♥A54 ♦KJ6 ♣J

and partner responds 2♣. Those who subscribe to the "never-jump" theory would rebid just 2♠ to keep the auction low, but they've concealed their strength. They've also increased their chances of scoring plus 680 when the field is making plus 1430. It's worth using up an extra level of bidding if it gives partner extra information, so the value bid of 3♠ is perfect with this hand.

The sooner you can make a value

bid — usually in your suit or notrump — the easier the auction will be for partner. It won't always be possible to show your exact strength with your first rebid, though. After 1♠ by you, 2♣ by partner, settle for a minimum rebid with hands such as:

♠KQ7643 ♥42 ♦AKQ ♣K4
 or

♠AQ985 ♥AQ105 ♦A102 ♣5.

Neither hand has a strong message to send about where to play, so don't waste space by over-emphasizing a weak suit or jumping in a new suit. Make your rebid at the two level and plan to show your extra values later.

Defining value rebids

Your specific agreements about opener's rebids will depend on whether you play a Max Hardy-style or a Mike Lawrence-style 2/1 system. In general, the Lawrence system emphasizes value rebids that define opener's strength. The Hardy approach includes more rebids that show distribution, but do not pinpoint strength.

Here's a quick summary of opener's value bids in the Lawrence system:

- Minimum strength: A minimum rebid in your suit or notrump (1♥–2♦; 2♥ or 2NT). Rebidding two of your major does not guarantee extra length (in Hardy, it does).
- Extra values: A jump in your suit or notrump (1♥–2♦; 3♥ or 3NT), a reverse (1♥–2♣; 2♠) or a non-jump bid at the three level (1♥–2♦; 3♣ or 3♦). (In Hardy, reverses and three-level bids do not promise extra values.)
- 18-plus HCP, balanced: Rebid 2NT, then show extra strength later (1♥–2♦; 2NT–3NT; 4NT).
- Other new-suit bids at the two level (1♠–2♣; 2♦ or 2♥) are natural, but don't define your strength. □