

# Bidding Matters

## The 12 Habits of Highly Effective Bidders

### 9. They analyze the auction from partner's point of view (cont.)

My old friend Dean Robinson of Indianapolis is a happy-go-lucky guy at and away from the bridge table. He's a serious competitor, though, and there have been rare occasions when a bridge result squashed his good mood.

One was from a long-ago club game, after he had declared 5♦ in his 3-1 fit. He was fuming but silent as he scrawled minus 600 on the traveler. His opponent, a soft-spoken lady who was craning to view the scores, finally asked, in a totally ingenuous tone, "Were other pairs making it?" Dean remained mute, but he rocketed out of his chair and the mangled traveler was found later in the hotel bar.

We've all experienced similar misunderstandings. An ambiguous or too-subtle cuebid can easily confuse partner, but he'll always bid again if it's clear your bid is artificial. Dean's disaster, however, was caused by the costliest of all artificial bids: the Auction-Ending Cuebid (AEC). The actual deal is forgotten, but it could have been:

N: ♠A Q J 10 9 7 ♥J 9 2 ♦K 7 5 ♣5

S: ♠K 8 6 3 ♥A K Q 5 4 ♦A ♣6 4 2

West	North	East	South
3♣	3♠	5♣	5♦
All Pass			

South had visions of a grand slam and a grand plan for getting there. He started with his assumption that

he had to be a control bid agreeing in spades. If partner rebid 5♠, South would cuebid 6♥, which would talk partner into bidding 7♠ if he had the

♣A or a club void.

It was an almost-perfect strategy, but South skipped the important step of asking, "What can go wrong?" If he had considered other ways partner might interpret 5♦, he would have seen the risk of his slam-going control bid becoming an AEC.

When in doubt about an undisclosed bid, expert players usually rely on the "game before slam" guideline, which emphasizes that finding the right game takes priority over searching for slam. This principle is especially important in competitive auctions, and it convinced North that 5♦ must be natural and passable. The hand he imagined was:

♠3 ♥A 5 ♦A J 10 8 6 3 2 ♣6 4 2.

If South had followed the same thought process, he would have chosen the safety of a spade raise. Although it sounds like partner has a club void, there's no guarantee. South's best course was to settle for a reasonable contract (6♠) instead of a perfect one (7♠), and to make one clear bid to get there.

The could-be-natural meaning can also create confusion with lower-level cuebids:

N: ♠K 8 5 3 2 ♥J 6 5 4 3 ♦3 ♣Q J

S: ♠J 9 6 ♥A 8 2 ♦K Q 8 5 4 ♣8 2

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	1♦	Pass
1NT	2♣	All Pass	

At equal vulnerability, North deemed his suits too weak for a Michaels cuebid (2♣) at his first turn. Later, emboldened by the opponents' lack of interest in the majors, he decided



Karen Walker  
www.kwbridge.com

his hand was perfect for a "delayed" Michaels overcall. He thought partner might be temporarily perplexed, but would surely work it out.

North was so proud of his clever invention that it never occurred to him there was already a standard meaning for his bid. The typical hand for his auction is:

♠A Q 5 ♥6 5 4 ♦3 ♣K Q J 10 7 6

and that's what South played him for.

N: ♠A 7 6 4 ♥3 ♦7 5 4 2 ♣Q 10 4 2

S: ♠K J ♥A J 8 6 4 ♦3 ♣K J 9 8 7

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♦	1♥
Pass	Pass	Dbl	2♣
Pass	2♦	All Pass	

North thought his 2♦ cuebid showed a good club raise. Perhaps it should, but he didn't anticipate the questions South might have about this particular auction. How can a twice-passed hand be so strong that it has to cuebid? Wouldn't partner just make a free raise if he had a fit and some undisclosed values? What would he bid with a misfit such as:

♠10 8 5 4 ♥5 ♦Q J 10 9 7 6 4 ♣2?

This talked South into converting the cuebid raise into an AEC, and the hotel bar had two more customers. □