

Bidding Matters



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The 12 Habits of Highly Effective Bidders

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

Last month, we looked at three popular approaches for defining when forcing-pass agreements apply:

- 1. It's our hand.** A forcing pass is "on" if your auction has shown at least invitational strength (23+ points).
- 2. It's our hand for game.** You must have promised game-level strength.
- 3. The caddy would know this pass is forcing.** Your auction has created such an obvious force that partner can't possibly misunderstand your intent.

The first two guidelines seem simple enough, but even practiced partnerships can disagree about which auctions meet the conditions. Many of today's experts prefer Approach No. 3. In practice, this means that no matter how convinced you are that a pass should be forcing, if partner might have reason to interpret the auction differently, then it isn't.

Here are some auctions where you might consider a forcing pass (in all, you're vulnerable vs. not). Put your-

self in partner's seat and decide how obvious your meaning will be to him if you've agreed on Approach No. 3.

Partner	RHO	You	LHO
1♥	1♠	2♠	3♠
4♥	4♠	?	?

If you aren't sure whether to double or bid on, a forcing pass would solicit partner's opinion. It would also allow you to make a slam try by passing, then pulling partner's double to 5♥.

The problem is that your 2♠ cuebid showed a limit raise or better, and partner won't know if you hold the "or better" hand. From his point of view, you might have a skinny invitation, and if his 4♥ bid was based on distributional values, he may fear 4♠ is making.

Merely bidding game doesn't create a forcing-pass auction. You must have freely bid game — not just been pushed into it — or made a bid that promised game-level strength (Jacoby 2NT, for example, or a higher-level cuebid).

Be wary of 4♠-over-4♥ auctions where it's unclear if the 4♠ bidder is sacrificing or bidding to make. If you use the more liberal 23-point guideline for forcing passes, consider playing that it applies over interference at the three and five levels, but not the four level.

You	LHO	Partner	RHO
1♠	3♥	4♠	5♥

Although partner made a free raise to game, it didn't establish a force. He had a 4♥ cuebid available to show a good high-card raise, so he's looking at modest (or zero) defensive strength. Partner will take your pass

as a minimum with poor defense, and he may pass, too. If you have a good hand for defense or offense, you have to bid or double.

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
3♣	Dbl	5♣	?

Pass is always forcing when the opponents are "obviously" sacrificing. Is that clear here? If you have some values, you may want pass to be forcing, but using Approach No. 3, partner will read it as weakness.

Some pairs define this pass as forcing if the opponents are white, but weak if they're red. That can be dangerous, as it presumes the 5♣ bidder will never have a big hand and you'll never be broke. Forcing-pass agreements shouldn't make you choose between minus 550 and minus 500. As Edgar Kaplan once said, "Just because they're non-vulnerable doesn't mean they can't make a five-level contract."

Partner	RHO	You	LHO
1♦	Dbl	Redbl	2♠ ⁽¹⁾
Pass	3♠	?	

(1) Preemptive.

Your redouble set up a force, but is it still "on" at this level? If it is, a pass encourages partner to bid and double discourages. If not, pass shows weakness and double is penalty.

A good agreement for this redouble is that it creates a force through three of opener's suit. If you haven't discussed this, though, you should assume that partner will rely on your when-in-doubt guideline (pass is not forcing). If you don't want to defend 3♠ undoubled, you have to bid or double. □