# MATCHPOINT SLAM BIDDING, II

## BY MARSHALL MILES

There have been varying degrees of success in trying to apply point-count to bidding slams with unbalanced hands, but another means of evaluation is much more practical. Controls and degree of fit have important influences in these slam decisions, but in general *slam requires one-and-a-half more honor-count than game.* Therefore, when you have one honor-count (sometimes called an ace-equivalent) more than what is required to reach game, you should consider the possibility of a slam and decide whether or not to suggest your interest. Partner, in effect being asked whether he has extra values, will tend to accept the invitation when he has one-half honor-count (a king-equivalent if you like) over his minimum.

Admittedly, this is a gross over-simplification of the problem. You may refuse to make a slam-try with considerable extra strength when you lack controls. Or, holding a freak hand, you may care less about the amount of strength than its location. The invitation may be accepted with less than one-half honor-count additional if there are favorable equivalent features. Nevertheless, the extra honor-count rule is a pretty good starting point.

Let's see how it works. You hold:

♠ A x ♡ K J x x ◇ A K x x x ♣ x x.

Partner opens one heart. If the ace of spades were a low spade, you would insist on reaching four hearts. With the extra honor-count, you have enough overall strength for a slam-try. Should you make one? Yes, because you have good playing strength and controls. Of course, a slam-try need not be made above the game level. Respond three diamonds, to be followed by four hearts, leaving the initiative with opener. Now change the club holding to king-low. With an extra one-and-a-half honor count (and the same general features), it is your duty to see that a slam is reached. If the black suits were ace-queen of spades and two low clubs, you would have the extra one-and-a-half honor-count but lack a crucial control. You should demand that opener bid a slam, even with no extra strength, if he has a club control.

Partner opens one diamond, then raises your one-spade response to three. You hold:

♠ Q J 10 x x x ♡ Q J 10 ◇ K Q ♣ Q x.

Here we see a limitation to simplistic general rules. There is lots of strength to spare, but some of it will be surely wasted. You are missing ace-king of spades, ace-king of hearts, ace of diamonds, and ace-king of clubs. Partner's bidding normally shows three-and-a-half to four honor-count. It is unlikely that he can take care of all those losers, or even all but one. Consequently, you should merely bid four spades. Rules can get you only so far; you must use them with judgment.

On the same auction, you hold:

♠ K x x x x x ♡ x x x ◇ K J ♣ A x.

By some measures, this is a weaker hand than the one given earlier. But now you have ample resources for a slam-try, and even a direct slam bid would not be a bad gamble. The reason is that here you have excellent controls.

Sometimes, you will know that partner cannot have any significant extra strength—for example, when he offers a game-invitational raise as a passed hand. In such a case, a slam-try suggests the need for strength in specific places rather than an extra king. Contrariwise, there are some cases where you need less than the usual extra values to suggest slam. Partner doubles a one-diamond opening and raises your one-spade advance to four. You hold:

♠ J x x x x ♡ A x ◇ x x x x ♣ K x.

Bid six spades. Don't worry about diamond control. If partner can bid four spades, not knowing you have any honor strength or even a four-card spade suit (although he would be justified in gambling on your having that many spades), you must be cold for six. You do not have quite one-and-a-half honor-count more than you have already shown, but the fifth spade is worth at least a plus value, and since partner must be distributional, you can promote your hand somewhat for having good cards (no wasted strength in diamonds). With the king of hearts instead of the ace, bid five spades. It is better to use this bid (by a weak hand) as an invitation than as a demand if partner has diamond control. The odds are at least 10 to 1 against his having two diamond losers.

Except for notrump slams based on balanced hands, we do not need 33 points in high cards. Usually, there will be two good suits for the preponderance of our tricks and controls in the other two. For slam purposes, we like our hand when its strength is in our side's two long suits or in side aces and kings, preferably aces. We dislike our slam prospects when a lot of our strength is in queens and jacks of the wrong suits. Suppose that partner opens the bidding with one club and raises our one-heart response to three hearts. The following hands are listed in the order of slam-worthiness:

♠ x x ♡ A x x x x x ◇ x x ♣ K Q x
♠ K x ♡ A x x x x x ◇ x x ♣ K x x
♠ A x ♡ A x x x x x ◇ x x ♣ x x x
♠ K Q ♡ A x x x x x ◇ x x ♣ x x x
♠ K Q ♡ x x x x x x ◇ K Q ♣ x x x

The first hand is excellent. Even seven hearts may be cold. The fourth hand is not worth a slam-try, while the fifth hand is not strong enough for a slam-try even over a raise to *four* hearts.

# IMPROVE YOUR DEFENSE

Rubber bridge; North dealer; E-W vul.

NORTH (*dummy*)
♠ J 10 7 3
♡ Q 7 3
◇ A K Q 5 4
♣ 8

WEST (*you*)
♠ K 8
♡ A J 8 6 4 2
◇ J 9 3
♣ J 6

| SOUTH | WEST | NORTH | EAST |
|---|---|---|---|
| — | — | 1 ◇ | Pass |
| 3 NT* | Pass | Pass | Pass |

*13-15 HCP

Heart six, three, ten, *king.*
Heart nine, ?

**Plan your defense.**

Speaking of triple raises, say you respond one spade to one diamond with:

♠ A J 9 x ♡ x x x ◊ x x ♣ A x x x.

Partner raises to four. According to the additional honor-count rule, you should make a slam-try. It is easy to get pessimistic about this type of hand. It is difficult to imagine how partner can dispose of all those losers. But counting losers is inappropriate; imagine how much worse your hand might be:

♠ x x x x x ♡ Q J x ◊ x x ♣ Q J x.

Those two aces are very important cards. Remember, also, that a slam-try is not a slam bid. You should show your ace of clubs by bidding five clubs, and leave the decision to partner.

When one partner shows a distributional hand, for a slam-try the other does not need extra values as much as sufficient strength in the right places. You raise one heart to two with:

♠ x x x x ♡ A x x ◊ K x x x ♣ x x.

## IMPROVE YOUR DEFENSE SOLUTION

*(Problem on page 35.)*

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                NORTH
                ♠ J 10 7 3
                ♡ Q 7 3
                ◊ A K Q 5 4
                ♣ 8
WEST                        EAST
♠ K 8                       ♠ A 9 6 4
♡ A J 8 6 4 2               ♡ 10 5
◊ J 9 3                     ◊ 2
♣ J 6                       ♣ Q 10 9 7 5 4
                SOUTH
                ♠ Q 5 2
                ♡ K 9
                ◊ 10 8 7 6
                ♣ A K 3 2
```

Can the defense run clubs? That is "impossible" on the bidding, and declarer, who would have taken a spade finesse if his clubs were very weak, has

Opener jumps to four diamonds. Bid six diamonds. You have two prime cards and four-card support for one of partner's suits. Opposite a two-suiter, for slam, fitting high honors are as good as side aces. Say you respond one spade to one diamond with:

♠ A x x x x ♡ x ◊ K x x x ♣ K J x.

There is a two-heart overcall, and partner competes with three clubs. This time, you can almost visualize partner's likely hand: five of each minor to the ace-queen and a doubleton heart will yield a laydown slam. He must have at least that much for his three-club bid; or, if he only has nine cards in the minors, he is pretty sure to have the king of spades or the ace of hearts as well. Yours is a good hand, whatever its point-count may be, because there are no wasted or doubtful values.

Similarly, when partner shows shortness in a particular suit (perhaps while only (at most) one spade, two hearts, and five diamonds in the other suits, so there is no urgency about clubs.

It is much more likely that declarer has both black suits stopped and wants to get hearts played before too much more is revealed about the closed hand. What might be revealed? A strong possibility is that diamonds are potentially blocked, in which case South wants to be able to throw a diamond from his hand on the third round of hearts. You can thwart this plan by making it expensive for a third round of hearts to be played, which can be accomplished by letting declarer win the second trick with dummy's queen of hearts.

raising one of your suits), a key evaluation factor is what you have outside the suit of his shortness. Opposite his short suit, the ace may be wasted (and is anyway worth less than a different ace), and any lower honor is likely to be unhelpful.

When the focus has been placed on a particular suit or suits, a high honor there may be a "golden card." You open one heart on:

♠ A x ♡ K Q x x x x ◊ K x ♣ x x x.

Partner responds three diamonds, then carries your three-heart rebid to four. With four critical honors, you have a monster and should try for seven (which will make opposite some hands that the authorities will tell you are not strong enough for a jump-shift).

## IMPROVE YOUR PLAY SOLUTIONS

*(Problems on page 33.)*

**Solution A**

```
                NORTH
                ♠ 4 3
                ♡ 8 6 2
                ◊ K Q J 7 5
                ♣ A 10 9
WEST                        EAST
♠ Q J 10                    ♠ 9 8 7 6 5 2
♡ 9 4 3                     ♡ 5
◊ A 10 9 8                  ◊ 3
♣ Q 7 4                     ♣ K 8 5 3 2
                SOUTH
                ♠ A K
                ♡ A K Q J 10 7
                ◊ 6 4 2
                ♣ J 6
```

Six hearts by South    Lead: Spade queen

Win trick one, draw two rounds of trumps, and lead a diamond up to dummy's honors. If that holds, return to the closed hand in hearts, draw the last trump if necessary, and lead another diamond toward dummy's honors. If that also holds, and West turns up with ace-fourth (or fifth-), cross in spades and lead up once again. Drawing trumps prematurely may deprive the South hand of a critical entry to play diamonds to best advantage.

From a deal by Alfred P. Sheinwold.

**Solution B**

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                NORTH
                ♠ 7 3
                ♡ Q
                ◊ A J 10 9 7 4
                ♣ 9 7 4 3
WEST                        EAST
♠ A J 4                     ♠ K 10 8 5
♡ J 8 6 5 3                 ♡ K 7 4 2
◊ Q 8 3                     ◊ 6 2
♣ K 10                      ♣ J 8 5
                SOUTH
                ♠ Q 9 6 2
                ♡ A 10 9
                ◊ K 5
                ♣ A Q 6 2
```

Three notrump by South    Lead: Heart five

If diamonds do not run, things will not go well; if they do run, and you take them immediately, you will need the club finesse—there will be no second chance, because the South hand will be squeezed on the diamonds. A better chance is to win trick one and to play back a heart. If diamonds run, this play can lose only if East can win the trick (unlikely, as West led low) and shift to a spade to let the defense take four tricks there (far from inevitable), and the club finesse is on.