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Bidding Matters

The 12 Habits of Highly Effective Bidders

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

In the previous issue, we looked at the disasters that result from unintentional use of the Auction-Ending Cuebid — a bid that you believe is artificial and forcing, but partner interprets as natural and passable.

The most spectacular failures occur when you're trying for slam, but low-level cuebids — even those in an opponent's suit — can be dangerous, too. Here are some situations where you'll want to think twice before you make an ostensibly forcing cuebid:

	LHO	Partner	RHO	You
(1)	1♣	Dbl	1♥	2♥
(2)	1♣ 2♣	Dbl Pass	1♥ Pass	Dbl 2♥
(3)	1♣	Pass	1♥	2♥

If you and partner haven't discussed the meaning of 2♥, don't try using it as an artificial force.

You can spot the potential pitfalls if you're aware of how other players treat these sequences. Many experts recommend that 2♥ should be a natu-

ral, limited bid in all three auctions. If partner has read their books or played with other partners who share that idea, he may assume the natural meaning is "expert standard." In (1), his picture of your hand will be:

♠K62 ♥QJ1092 ♦1093 ♣54.

In (2), your double is a frequent source of misunderstandings. If you intended the double as responsive (showing length in the unbid suits) and your 2♥ rebid as a force, it's possible that partner has missed both messages.

The conventional wisdom is that responsive doubles are "on" only when the opponents bid and raise the same suit. If that's partner's view, he'll take your double as penalty, showing heart strength, and your 2♥ rebid as natural with extra length. This auction is similar to (1), but by starting with the penalty double, you show more strength and invite game. In (2), the hand partner might expect is:

♠KQ2 ♥KJ1082 ♦J6 ♣543.

In (3), your 2♥ is popularly played as a natural overcall, showing a long, strong suit and good, but not forcing, values. Responder often has a weak four-card holding, so it's possible that his suit is your best contract and you need a way to get it into the auction. Unless you've previously agreed that 2♥ is a Michaels-type cuebid, partner may believe you're showing a hand such as:

♠J64 ♥AKJ1065 ♦KQ3 ♣8.

Even if you discuss these auctions in advance, there will always be new variations you haven't covered. When those happen, it's helpful to have

broader "default" agreements that can be applied to ambiguous bids. Here's a recommended when-in-doubt guideline for auctions where your opponents have bid two suits:

A bid of your RHO's suit is natural. A bid of LHO's suit is artificial and forcing.

Another way to think of this is that the "cuebid" is natural if you're sitting over the opponent who bid the suit (most of the outstanding trumps will be onside). It's artificial if you're under the bidder.

If you apply that guideline to the auctions above, your 2♥ shows hearts and 2♣ would be the artificial force. In auctions (1) and (2), your other option — and the one that will be easiest for partner to understand — is to just make a value bid in your own suit.

Like most bridge "rules," there are exceptions, and you'll sometimes have to trust partner's bridge logic to work them out. How would you expect partner to interpret your 2♣ bid in this auction?

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♣	Pass	1♠	Pass
1NT	Dbl	Pass	2♣

More about this and other cuebid dilemmas in the next issue. □