

# 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.)

You	LHO	Partner	RHO
1♦	1♠	2♥	4♠
?			

Vulnerable vs. not, what's your call holding:

♠A5 ♥Q9 ♦KQ742 ♣AK103?

Your choice may depend on whether you believe this is a forcing-pass situation. If it is, you and partner are both bound by the agreement that the opponents cannot play 4♠ undoubled. This gives you the option to pass and see what partner wants to do.

A forcing-pass auction allows you to describe a wide range of hand types. The standard meanings are:

- ❖ An immediate bid says you don't want to defend. It's usually based on extra playing strength, not extra high-card points.
- ❖ Double is the most discouraging action. It warns partner that your hand isn't suitable for the five level, often because you have two quick losers in the opponents' suit.
- ❖ Pass encourages partner to bid

and suggests at least second-round control of the enemy suit. If partner judges not to bid on, he must double.

- ❖ Pass and pull. You pass, partner doubles and you overrule his decision by bidding: This is the strongest auction. It's at least a mild slam try, promising more values than if you had bid immediately.

These strategies can dramatically improve your decisions in competitive auctions, but they're also a frequent source of misunderstandings. By far, the most difficult aspect of the forcing-pass structure is knowing when it applies. A forcing pass can be a spectacular failure if one of you thinks it's "on" and the other doesn't.

There's no standard definition of the exact conditions that set up this force, but there are three main schools of thought.

1. It's our hand. This is the most liberal interpretation, which specifies that a forcing-pass situation is "on" if we've shown at least 23 high-card points. The typical auction is one where we open and make a game invitation. It also applies if the opponents are "obviously" sacrificing.
2. It's our hand for game. For a pass to be forcing, our auction must have shown game-forcing strength — a 2♣ opener, a forcing raise, a 2-over-1 forcing-to-game response, a reverse by responder. A game invitation must be accepted to set up a forcing pass.

If your partnership follows the guidelines in Approach No. 2, it will be clear to both of you that your pass of 4♠ in the previous auction would

not be forcing. You haven't yet shown full values for game, so the only way for you to reveal extra strength is to bid or double.

If you prefer No. 1, you can make a forcing pass if the auction meets the 23-point guideline. Using the "book" ranges for your bids, your opening showed 13-plus points and partner's competitive 2-over-1 promised 10-plus points, so that may convince you that this auction qualifies.

Your focus, however, should be not on your own computation, but on partner's. No matter how certain you are that a pass would be forcing, you always need to consider the possibility that partner will analyze the auction differently.

From partner's perspective, you might have opened with 11 or 12 points and his freebid could be made with as few as 8 or 9 points and a good suit. Looking at:

♠42 ♥KJ10864 ♦J9 ♣QJ6,

he may believe the opponents have the balance of power and that your pass shows a dead minimum. He'll pass, too, and you'll be plus 150 instead of plus 500.

This type of miscue is just one of the pitfalls of forcing-pass agreements. It's impossible to discuss every situation in advance, so unless both you and partner are totally in tune with each other's thought processes, your communication won't always be perfect.

That's why many experienced players have adopted Approach No. 3:

3. The caddy would know this pass is forcing. This is the most conservative treatment, but it also requires the fewest mind-reading skills.

More about this in the next issue. □