

SYSTEMIC AGREEMENTS

Intermittently I am going to write a column with some bidding ideas/agreements that I think deserve consideration. Some will be quite common, whilst others will be thought-provoking.

RESPONDING TO 4-MAJOR OPENING BIDS

Here is a hand that suited one of my partnership's agreements perfectly. You hold:

♠ A K 10 8 2
♥ A Q J
♦ void
♣ Q J 9 4 3

Partner opens 4♥!

Our agreement is that, after partner opens with a 4-Major pre-empt, a new suit asks for control of that specific suit, for slam purposes. With a singleton or the King, you bid 6 of your suit; with a void or the Ace, you bid 7 of your suit. Naturally, with no control in the suit, you stop at the 5-level.

So, over my 4♥ opening bid, partner bid 5♣, asking for club control. Despite having opened 4♥ on a shocking hand:

♠ 7 3
♥ K 10 8 7 6 5 4 2
♦ 6 3
♣ 6

I made the 'system' response of 6♥, showing my club control. After all, partner had asked me for club control, so that had to be the focus of my bid.

Many people just 'bashed' the slam, but it's far better to be confident in your bidding. (I was impressed that East didn't double us, holding ♦A-K-Q and ♣A-K. That's respect!)

REBIDDING AFTER PARTNER'S NEW SUIT RESPONSE TO YOUR 3-MAJOR PRE-EMPT

Similarly, I have an agreement when partner introduces a new suit after your 3-level pre-empt. (It also works after weak 2 opening bids, but not when playing Multi 2s.) Typically, it applies when you open 3-minor and partner responds with 3-Major, natural and forcing.

This agreement allows us to differentiate between 0-1 card support, 2-card support, or 3-card support – with or without a singleton.

How it works is this – imagine the auction started:

3♦ Pass 3♠ Pass

Rebid	Meaning
3NT	0-1 cards in spades
4♣	3-card support + singleton or void in clubs
4♦	2-card support + shortage in some suit (so not 7-2-2-2)
4♥	3-card support + singleton or void in hearts
4♠	2-card support + no shortage

In summary, 3NT denies support, 4-own suit or 4-raise shows 2-card support, and bidding a new suit shows 3-card support and a shortage in the suit you bid.

This is all based on the notion that it can't hurt to use the 'between' bids to be more descriptive.

This structure comes up often enough to be worth playing; however, it was a regular occurrence when I played 'constructive' weak 2 bids as part of my system.

Of course, the first time it came up, it was 'with a twist'. I opened 3♠ and partner responded 4♣. Did this agreement apply with a new suit introduced at the 4-level, or not? I held:

♠ A Q 10 9 8 5 4
♥ 6 5
♦ 2
♣ 8 6 4

Would 4♦ show 3-card club support and a singleton diamond? I didn't know!

Lesson: Ensure you sort out at what level agreements apply!

I didn't want to have an accident, so simply raised to 5♣, on the principle it was better to be safe than sorry.

Fortunately, partner was happy to bid on, holding:

♠ void
♥ A K Q J 3
♦ 7
♣ A K 10 9 7 3 2

However, imagine that she had held:

♠ void
♥ A K Q J 3
♦ 7 6
♣ A K Q 10 9 3

then we would have needed the agreement above to reach the excellent 6♣ contract.

Obviously, since then, we have clarified our agreement to include 4-minor bids after 3-Major pre-empts too!

DEALING WITH OVERCALLS

Have you ever considered that, when an opponent overcalls, you have more bids available to describe your hand? You can make use of a negative double or you can make use of the cue raise (unassuming cue bid), therefore you don't really need all your other 'normal' bidding structures.

For instance, after 1♣ (1♦) a double should be used for a hand where you hold 4-4 in the Majors. You can still respond with 1♥ or 1♠, but these responses tend to indicate that you don't have 4 cards in the other Major. (*Of course, you can bid a Major with 5-4 in the suits, if you are good enough to rebid.*)

What you are doing there is making use of the 'extra bid' that has become available – the double. You are able to be more descriptive about your hand, which helps if the opponents compete.

Similarly, when playing negative doubles, $1\clubsuit$ (1♥) still leaves you able to respond with $1\spadesuit$.

However, you also have a double available. You now have the 'extra space' of a double, you can use the bids to be more descriptive in your response.

Therefore, traditionally,

$1\spadesuit$ shows 5+ spades, whereas

Double shows specifically 4 spades

This is important because your partner knows whether to compete/support with 3 spades, and can still bid with 4 spades – so you don't miss an 8-card spade fit.

Many people play Bergen raises in response to their partner's 1-Major opening bid. However, once an opponent overcalls, I see no reason to use Bergen raises. You have a cue raise available for hands with a fit and 10+ HCP. By using cue raises, you free up the jump raise to the 3-level! This can then be used like the pre-emptive jump raise to the 4-level – i.e. to show 4-card support with a weak hand (usually limited to 6 or 7 HCP).

How do I use the now freed-up jump shifts (if there is no need for Bergen raises)?

I use them as FIT-SHOWING JUMPS.

A fit-showing jump shows a decent 5-card suit in the suit bid, and 4+ card support for opener's suit.

Furthermore, these can be used whether partner has opened 1-minor or 1-Major.

One of my agreements when playing fit-showing jumps is that they are invitational or better at the 2-level, but game forcing at the 3-level. So,

$1\spadesuit$ (1♥) $2\spadesuit$ shows 5+ spades and 4+ clubs, invitational or better

but

$1\diamond$ (2♣) $3\heartsuit$ showing 5+ hearts and 4+ diamonds, is game forcing

It takes a bit of practice to adjust to this, and I have been known to forget the game forcing nature of the bid! That led to partner exploring for slam, though we stopped in $5\clubsuit$, when our counterparts at the other table were looking for the best part-score!

♠ A 4

♥ A J 2

♦ J 10

♣ A Q J 7 4 2

♠ Q 5

♥ 5

♦ K Q 9 8 5 2

♣ 10 9 6 5

$1\clubsuit$ (1♠)

$4\clubsuit$ (2)

Pass

$3\diamond$ (1)

$5\clubsuit$

$3\spadesuit$

All Pass

(1) Fit showing jump – I was a little carried away, forgetting it was game forcing at the 3-level

(2) Strong hand – slam interest

That's enough for one article. I'll discuss more about agreements and conventions some later columns.

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