



Slow Bidding

Last month (October 2017), I used Santa Barbara's Slow Play e-mail as the major portion of this column. In that e-mail, "slow play" was used as an overarching term for the combined bidding and play of the hand. This month I'd like to look at the bidding portion of a hand with some thoughts on how you might speed up that part of your game. For most readers, these tips will be a refresher of your current practices, but there may be a new item or two.

Bidding at a reasonable pace starts with looking at the vulnerability and whether you're in 1st or 2nd seat or 3rd or 4th. Now, pick up all 13 cards at once, not one at a time. Sorting the cards into suits with alternating colors can help. Putting each suit in ranking order makes counting HCP easier.

Actually, that first paragraph is not accurate. Bidding at a reasonable pace starts with knowing your bidding system. Certain bids in a system are memorized fairly quickly, others require some work. That work may be compiling a list of bids you have trouble remembering and reviewing that list (and possibly much of your convention card) before the game starts. The list should probably include some bids that come up infrequently and are, therefore, hard to remember, but nonetheless, important. A couple of candidates are responding in NT to a takeout double and to an overcall. Common bidding ranges for those two responses are:

After a Takeout Double

You hold values in the opponent's suit and no 4-card (or longer) major

1NT = 8-10 HCP

2NT = 11-12 HCP

3NT = 13+ HCP

After an Overcall

Promises 1+ stoppers in the opponent's suit, denies 3 cards in partner's suit if it's a major

1NT = 8-11 HCP

2NT = 12-15 HCP

3NT = 16+ HCP

Instead of trying to memorize all 6 ranges, three key points allow you to reconstruct all 6 ranges:

- 1) what is the range of 2NT in response to a T.O. Double (for many pairs it's the same as limit raise values or the same as jumping to 2NT in response to a minor suit opening)?
- 2) what is the range of 2NT in response to an Overcall?
- 3) what's the minimum point count to respond in NT?

Another response to memorize is responding to a takeout double in a suit.

After a Takeout Double

0-8 Bid your suit at the cheapest level

9-11 Bid your suit skipping a level (does NOT require a 5+ card suit)

12+ Bid game or make a forcing bid

A cuebid of the opponent's suit is forcing

OK, pre-game you've reviewed your agreements and on this hand you've quickly suited and sorted your cards. Probably first you note your HCP. Assume everyone before you will pass. Will you open this hand and if so, in what strain (suit or NT) and at what level. The seat you're in may affect this decision. If no one has bid yet, think about a possible overcall. Or a takeout double in the right circumstance.

While the bidding is proceeding, assess the bids and the implications for your next bid or bids. If you can think about your next bid, your likely rebid after that may be a given. From the get-go some hands call for opening a suit and jump rebidding in NT (commonly 18-19 HCP). Other hands call for opening a suit and jump rebidding that suit (typically 16-18 total points). Or maybe a jump



shift is in the cards (19+ total points). For these particular hands, your bid and likely rebid should come to mind as a package. Of course, opposition bidding can alter those plans, but it's a good start to think ahead if possible.

This assessment of the bidding applies to the opponents' bids as well as partner's. Also, if you have time, speculate on what you might lead if your right hand opponent (RHO) eventually becomes declarer in a given strain. Thinking ahead about future bids and a potential opening lead improves both the speed and quality of your game.

P.S. If you're on opening lead, you should delay writing down the contract to concentrate on the opening lead. Once you've led, be sure to keep your card face up while you write down the contract. Then, if need be, ask everyone to leave their cards face up while you review the trick.