



Bid Safe, Play Boldly

SOME years ago the great Rixi Markus, that redoubtable native Austrian British International who escaped the Nazis by brazenly fleeing through Germany, wrote a book called *Bid Boldly, Play Safe* (about which a wag quipped, ‘Rixi bid boldly to Four Spades, and played safely for down three’). As a teams (rubber/Chicago) policy, bidding boldly to game, then playing as safely as possible to make the contract, is spot on.

At pairs, things are completely different – almost the reverse applies in fact. The game bonus is far less valuable, in that if you can make one more trick than your counterparts, you have a good result with or without the game bonus. You should not push for close game contracts, but then play flat out to make the maximum number of tricks.

Let's look at a real example. You hold, vulnerable vs not, the hand below:

♠ A 10 9 4 3 2
♥ A 7 4
♦ 6
♣ A 4 3

You open 1♠, hear left-hand opponent overcall 2♥, partner bid 2♠ and right-hand opponent bid 3♥. Now it would be nice for double to be a game try, but say you don't have that piece of kit. You must decide between a competitive (i.e. non-invitational) 3♠, or a jump to 4♠. What would you do (a) playing teams (b) playing pairs, in a large, but fairly inexperienced field?

Playing teams, vulnerable, you must shrug your shoulders and bid 4♠. The 500 bonus is so material that you cannot afford to pass up the opportunity. In general, *if you make a little over one vulnerable game in three attempted, you'll show a long-term profit at teams*. Here I'd rate your chances as higher than that: (i) you have a ninth (and possibly even tenth) trump; (ii) you can deduce partner for short hearts and (iii) you have fabulous controls.

At pairs, however, there's much to be

said for settling for 3♠. If you bid 4♠ and find you can't make it, you'll score very poorly (going down when your side own the deal invariably does). Play 3♠ well (as is your wont), making the maximum number of tricks and you'll likely score quite well even if 4♠ is on.

This is the full deal; (a) How would you play 4♠ at teams? (b) How would you play 3♠ at pairs? On both occasions you receive the king of hearts lead.

N/S Game. Dealer South.			
♠ K Q J			
♥ 8			
♦ 9 7 5 4 3 2			
♣ 9 6 2			
♠ 8 6		♠ 7 5	
♥ K Q 10 6 3	W N E S	♥ J 9 5 2	
♦ K J 10		♦ A Q 8	
♣ K J 8		♣ Q 10 7 5	
♠ A 10 9 4 3 2			
♥ A 7 4			
♦ 6			
♣ A 4 3			

The bidding at teams:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
2♥	2♠	3♥	4♠
All Pass			

The bidding at pairs:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
2♥	2♠	3♥	3♠
All Pass			

(a) 4♠ at teams

Your goal is ten tricks. No more, no less. You start with eight winners – six spades

and two aces – and can make two more fairly easily by ruffing two hearts in the short trump hand. You win trick one with the ace of hearts and ruff a heart. You cross to the ace of clubs, ruff another heart, cash dummy's remaining high spade and must come to five more spades in hand. Ten tricks and game made.

(b) 3♠ at pairs

Yes, when you see dummy you wish you'd bid 4♠, but there are plenty of match-points still at stake. After winning trick one with the ace of hearts, you lead your diamond. The defence win and (say – it doesn't matter) switch to a club. You win with the ace, cross to a trump and ruff a diamond. You ruff a heart and ruff another diamond (high), noting the 3-3 split. You could play safe for ten tricks now by ruffing your remaining heart with dummy's last trump. Backing the opponents' trumps to be 2-2, you gamble and cross to a second spade. With both opponents following, you are now able to cash the three long diamonds discarding your heart and two club losers and emerge with twelve tricks.

Making 3♠ plus three scored no less than 88% of the match-points. Hardly any of the other North-Souths had bid 4♠. The common result was 3♠ plus one, declarer ruffing two hearts in dummy and not noticing the diamond potential at all.

Good pairs play is not about bidding close games. It's about bidding within yourself (in the uncontested auction, that is), but then using all your technique and flair to wheedle out the extra trick. It's only a slight over-simplification to say that if you go to the Brighton Summer Festival, you'll see the better bidders top the teams and the better card-players top the pairs. □

JUNIOR SUCCESS

The team of Basil Letts, Ankush Khandelwal, Kyle Lam and Simon Spencer put in a strong performance to finish second in the Junior Invitational Teams at the Midsummer Bridge Tournament in Finland. Report in the next issue.