



When in Doubt, Bid Game!

TO BID or not to bid (game), that is the question. Of course, each situation will have its own set of circumstances upon which any decision will depend. However, when playing teams, adopting an optimistic approach to the bidding of game contracts is likely to be a successful strategy. It is a matter of risk and reward. For example, imagine that you are North, with the hand below:

♠ Q J 8 5 2
♥ K 8 3
♦ 8 6 2
♣ 6 5

and, with everybody vulnerable, the following auction develops:

West	North	East	South
		1♣	1NT ¹
Pass	2♥ ²	Pass	3♠ ³
Pass	?		

¹ 15-17 points

² Transfer to spades

³ Showing four-card spade support and a maximum

What now?

Playing in a duplicate pairs event, it is sensible to take no further action. The point is that both 3NT and 4♠ rate to fail reasonably often and going down is likely to be just as bad as making game would be good. However, when this deal occurred in a top international teams event, the players were contemplating which game to bid, rather than whether to bid one.

The reason for this is that 4♠ making gains 10 IMPs by comparison with 3♠ plus one. On the other hand, 4♠ minus one loses 6 IMPs by comparison with 3♠ making. The reward for bidding game is a gain of 10 IMPs, the risk is a loss of 6 IMPs. Naturally, the prospect of over-bidding slightly and then being doubled adds to the risk but this is offset by yet another factor: that, occasionally, the defenders will give tricks away, especially with the opening lead.

As a consequence, experts try to bid all marginal vulnerable games, choosing to play in part-scores only when game contracts appear to be completely unrealistic propositions.

When non-vulnerable, the risk-reward ratio is closer but, even so, a mildly aggressive approach is still correct.

On this occasion, bidding game turned out to be a successful choice:

Game All. Dealer East.

	♠ Q J 8 5 2							
	♥ K 8 3							
	♦ 8 6 2							
	♣ 6 5							
♠ 9 7		♠ K 3						
♥ 9 6 5 2		♥ A J 4						
♦ A 9 7 5 3	<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"> <tr><td>N</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>♦</td><td>S</td></tr> </table>	N		E	W	♦	S	♦ J 10
N		E						
W	♦	S						
♣ J 7		♣ K 10 8 4 3 2						
	♠ A 10 6 4							
	♥ Q 10 7							
	♦ K Q 4							
	♣ A Q 9							

When West led the ♣J (partner's suit) against 4♠, a third-round club ruff provided access to the dummy and despite the ♦A being offside, the ♠K, ♥J and ♣K were all successfully finessed (dummy's trumps serving as subsequent entries) to enable the contract to be made. On other leads, the play is more complicated but declarer can prevail by exiting in diamonds (or a heart to the king) and forcing the opponents to broach the critical suits. Meanwhile, 3NT was made when West decided to lead a diamond (the ♣J lead would have defeated the contract) and the diamonds were blocked. The successful declarers were fortunate to varying extents but this is a situation where good players earn their own luck.

So be prepared to bid marginal games.

Some will make and some will fail but in the long run, the aggressive approach should turn out to be a winner, even if only 40% of such contracts succeed.

In passing, it is probably sensible to note that the strategy of optimistic bidding should not be applied to slam-bidding, for which a cautious approach is suitable.

From the Defenders' Perspective

When playing a teams match, having to play against a pair that seems to be in game on every hand is not easy. One unlucky lead, one momentary lapse in concentration, and before you know it declarer has claimed his or her contract. A constant barrage of thin games tends to apply considerable pressure and, being human, most of us yield at some point.

Therefore, the idea should be to exert (in the nicest possible way!) the same type of pressure on your opponents when the opportunity arises – stay out of hopeless games but be prepared to bid all the close ones.

In the first article of the series, I advocated the habit of playing safely for the contract. So now, the two major ingredients of successful teams play have been covered – bold bidding in the game zone, followed by careful play to secure the (potentially precarious) contract.

Final Thought

A friend of mine once told the tale of a fellow bridge player who 'gets a nose-bleed when the bidding reaches the three-level.' 'No good at teams!' he added . . .



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