



## Fourth Suit Forcing

THE NEED for the use of the fourth suit as an artificial bid has been known since the 1950s, when it was written about at length by Norman Squire. Eric Crowhurst developed the idea further in the early 1980s.

The way that most people understand the concept is that after three suits have been bid in a natural fashion, the need to make a completely natural bid in the remaining suit is remote. There are usually clear alternative bids available, such as no-trumps if a decent holding in the remaining suit is held. Thus the introduction of the fourth suit became known as an 'artificial' device to extract information from partner.

Most players appear to me to erroneously use it simply as a device to locate whether a stopper is held in the one remaining unbid suit for no-trump purposes, since it is plainly pretty daft to try no-trumps with one suit unbid and then get wiped out in that suit immediately once play develops!

My suggestion for the meaning of fourth suit forcing (FSF) is that it simply seeks to extract information from partner (it can be from opener or responder, since either player is able to introduce FSF). It can be used for any of the following reasons:

1. To allow partner to bid no-trumps with a stopper in the fourth suit (probably still the most common application).
2. To allow the responder to support one of opener's suits in a *forcing* rather than *invitational* fashion. Thus 1♥ – 1♠ – 2♣ – 3♣ is invitational (9-12 points approx.), whereas supporting clubs *via FSF* is stronger, i.e. 1♥ – 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♦ – Any – 3♣ is forcing to game (13+). This saves space enormously, rather than having to make the cumbersome jump to 4♣ to show a good raise. That clearly loses room and takes you beyond 3NT – so often the best final contract!
3. To enable responder to rebid his own suit later in a *forcing* manner.

The values required for the introduction of FSF have also changed over the years. Messrs Squire and Crowhurst essentially argued that you needed the values for the next level of no-trumps, i.e.

- 10+ at the one level,
- 11+ at the two level,
- 12+ at the three level.

My attempt to move us all on into the 21st Century is to suggest that FSF is always a *game-forcing* bid (usually based on a good 12+ points). This will allow for much smoother understanding for all aspiring partnerships.

**KEY POINT: Fourth Suit Forcing is game forcing!**

The following hand *must* use FSF:

♠ A Q J 7 5 2  
♥ 7 5  
♦ A 8 2  
♣ K 4

1♥ – 1♠  
2♣ – ?

Do *not* commit by bidding either no-trumps or spades; simply bid 2♦ then later bid spades, which

is now forcing. Simple!

So many players wrongly bid 3♣ with the above hand over 2♣, which is only invitational, showing six cards in spades with about 10-11 points.

Perhaps a more common example is:

♠ A Q 8 4 2  
♥ 6 3  
♦ 7 5 4  
♣ A K 2

1♥ – 1♠  
2♣ – ?

Bid 2♦ as FSF, showing a game-forcing hand with no clear direction.

What will happen after FSF has been introduced is that the opening bidder (or responder on occasion, if it is the opener who has used FSF) will attempt to 'describe his hand' rather than just blithely showing whether he has a stopper or not. Thus with:

♠ 3  
♥ A Q 10 7 6  
♦ K 7  
♣ K Q J 6 5

After:

1♥ – 1♠  
2♣ – 2♦  
?

While the ♦K-x represents a stopper and so many would automatically bid no-trumps now, a *much* better bid would be 3♣, accurately describing the shape of the hand. You can still bid no-trumps next time if necessary.

So if you do not bid no-trumps after FSF, *you have not necessarily denied a stopper in the fourth suit!*

### Fourth Suit Forcing at the One Level

I prefer 1♣ – 1♦ – 1♥ – 1♠ still to be used as FSF. (By choice some partnerships shade this down a bit to 10+ points.)

Some use 1♠ as a natural bid and employ 2♣ as FSF. I do *not* recommend this style. So long as you can raise 1♠ naturally with four cards, there should never be a problem, in my opinion.

### Raising the Fourth Suit

If playing FSF as game-forcing, then a raise is best played as entirely natural and shape-showing. If not played as game-forcing, this bid used to be played as 'a hand too good to limit' – a frighteningly complex use which far more often led to disaster rather than clarity for even top partnerships!

### Jumping in the Fourth Suit

E.g. 1♥ – 1♠ – 2♣ – 3♦

There are two possible mainstream ways to play this:

- a) A control-showing bid agreeing the last bid suit (agreeing clubs in the example shown).
- b) Natural, at least 5-5 in spades and diamonds forcing to game.

My personal preference is for a), but this is very much a matter for individual part-

nerships to agree on.

Playing my suggested methods, if you do actually want to describe a spade/diamond two-suiter you simply introduce the fourth suit then *rebid* it next time.

### Fourth Suit as a Passed Hand

There is a good case for using FSF as a passed hand as well, though clearly you cannot now have a game-forcing hand to describe. A maximum pass would be closer to the mark and you can still explore for no-trumps, or show a good raise etc.

### When Not to Use Fourth Suit Forcing

If you *do not* have game-forcing values, you should strive to make a limit bid wherever possible. This will often be to bid no-trumps or to return to opener's first suit (giving preference). Thus:

♠ J 6 5
♥ K 8 7 2
♦ A 8 5
♣ K 7 4

1♣ – 1♥  
1♠ – ?

Bid 3♣ *not* 2♦ FSF!  
This is only an invitational hand, so describe it for what it is.

This hand demonstrates clearly why opener should have at least five clubs and four spades for this auction, since responder must be able to give jump-preference with only three-card support (and about 10-12 points). Note that bidding this way does *not* prevent no-trumps from being reached, whereas using FSF would prevent the partnership from coming to rest in 3♣.

The old-fashioned Acol style of bidding four card suits up the line has now surely been rejected by most people. If you have two four-card suits, I recommend either opening the major (best), or opening the minor then rebidding no-trumps next. Thus the above auction always shows at least 5-4 and responder can feel quite uninhibited in bidding his hand properly.

### To Summarise

1. Fourth Suit Forcing is a 'must' for all partnerships. It allows proper communication during an auction, so that all forcing/non-forcing sequences can flow smoothly.
2. A simplistic but playable approach is to stick to FSF being aimed exclusively to finding no-trump contracts. I hope I have convinced you otherwise. Good luck! □

## IN A NUTSHELL

by Jeremy Dhondy

## CALLING THE DIRECTOR

The Director should be called if there is an irregularity (see Law 9). The wording changed from 'must' to 'should' in the 2007 laws meaning you may be fined for the failure to do so rather than you will be fined for this.

### Who can point out an irregularity?

All players except dummy. Dummy may however do so at the end of the hand. This might occur if he has spotted a defender's revoke that declarer has missed.

### Who can call the director?

Any player once an irregularity has been pointed out, so if declarer decides not to call the director and the defenders collude in this, dummy can now do so.

### Do I ever lose any rights by calling the director?

No. Law 9B1(d) explains this.

### What happens if the director is not called?

Rights to an adjustment of the score may be jeopardised by the failure to call the director. Beware those players who

say there is no need for the director because they know the law. Often they don't! There are occasions when something does not come to light until later and the director can still be called then but will want to know why there was a delay. All players are responsible for calling the director once there has been an infraction.

### Can I 'reserve my rights'?

There are occasions when there is no director available or perhaps he is playing and has not met the board yet. With some infractions such as an action after a hesitation you can say 'reserving my rights' and then call the director at the end of the hand (if however your opponents dispute the alleged hesitation, the director needs to be called there and then). However, once you have started on the next board normally your rights will have expired. When it is an infraction such as a misexplanation or insufficient bid, the director needs to deal with the problem immediately.

## UNIVERSITY BRIDGE SOCIETY LEADS THE WAY

**BRIDGE-PLAYING university students please take note:** bridge at Manchester University has been recognised as a Mind Sport, thanks to the endeavours of members of the University Bridge Society (see photo). This is how Michael Coop, Chair of the society, tells the story:

'With the Portland Bowl being the only source of competition for universities, we wanted to try and obtain for bridge the status it deserves while also competing with other universities and schools across the UK. To this end, we campaigned to the University of Manchester Students' Union (UMSU) to recognise games such as Bridge, Chess, Go, Chinese Chess and Checkers as Mind Sports and not just as 'Leisure/Entertainment'. We were classed with activities such as Beer Pong and Dubstep – which we felt didn't reflect what bridge is about! After a thirty-minute grilling by a panel of eighteen students and members of the Union Assembly, they agreed by 16 votes to 2 to recognise bridge as a Mind Sport. The Activities Officer, Amaya Dent, supported our argument during the debate. It is to be hoped that other university bridge societies will follow suit and this should help bridge to become more popular as a university sport.

'Our next step is to contact the Athletics Union for their support of bridge being classed as a Mind Sport. It is our hope that we can gain BUCS points for the Manchester Athletics Union by competing in inter-university bridge matches.'

For further information on the debate, as well as the idea put forward to UMSU, visit [www.umsu.manchester.ac.uk/content/union-assembly-idea-mind-sports](http://www.umsu.manchester.ac.uk/content/union-assembly-idea-mind-sports) or contact Michael Coop at [bridge.society@gmail.com](mailto:bridge.society@gmail.com)

