

The Value of Doubt

Sometimes in an auction we know exactly what to do. For instance our partner opens 1N and we hold a balanced 12 count with no 4 card major. We can safely raise to 3N and expect partner to make it. (no guarantees, but it seems pretty likely.) We have no doubt that the right level is game and that the right contract is no trump. However most frequently (at least in my case) I find I am not sure what to do and I would like partner's input. As such, the more that I play, the more that I look for bids that say, "I don't know partner, what do you think?"

In fact, we can use this concept in order to reframe some of our most common bidding conventions.

For instance, Stayman. When we use Stayman we are signalling to our partner that we have doubt about the strain, and sometimes doubt about the level.

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
	1N	Pass	2C
Pass	2H	Pass	3N

Rewriting the auction as a conversation gives us:

North: I have a stronger than average hand with a balanced shape

South: Hmm, I'm not sure we should be playing notrump, can you tell me more about your major suit holdings?

North: I have 4 hearts

South: That wasn't what I was looking for. I was sure about wanting to be in game, but thought that maybe we should be in spades since I have 4 of them.

Using this framework can help us remember the difference between Texas and Jacoby Transfers. We use Texas when we are certain, and we use Jacoby when we have doubt.

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
	1N	Pass	2D
Pass	2H	Pass	4N

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
	1N	Pass	4D
Pass	4H	Pass	4N

A common assumption that many players make is that both of these auctions are keycard. However, by applying the doubt framework we can tease out the difference between these 2 sequences.

In auction one, South has doubt about whether or not hearts should be trump. Therefore 4N shouldn't be keycard because south wasn't sure about trump. It must be quantitative. So South has 15-16 HCP and 5 hearts.

In auction two, South is certain that hearts should be trump. They are therefore setting trump before asking for keycards.

Most of the conventions that you learn like new minor forcing, fourth suit forcing, support doubles, are all expressing uncertainty at some level. They are all ways to say, "I don't know what we should be doing, please tell me more about your hand."

In fact we can use this framework to help us decide a common bidding scenario. Should I overcall or should I double? An overcall suggests that we are certain which suit we want to offer up as a potential trump candidate. A double suggests doubt. When put in this position, decide how certain you are that you want to make your overcall suit trump. The less certain you are the more you should double to get partner's input.

In competitive auctions, I have doubt all of the time. In general the most common way of expressing doubt in a competitive auction is doubling. Whenever I have doubt that is my go to action. Or as I like to put it "I have enough points to do something, but I don't know what to do!"

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1H	1S	2H	X

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1H	1S	2D	X

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1H	1S	3H	X

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1H	1S	1N	2S
X			

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1H	2S	X	

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1C	1H	P	2H
X			

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1C	X	P	2H
X			

All of these auctions express doubt.

Try this auction:

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
1H	2C	P	P
X	P	2D	P
2H			

West said they had "doubt" about where to play, but when offered diamonds, chose to rebid their heart suit. Since they had doubt, they should have spades to go with their hearts. A typical hand here might be: AQxx AKJxxx x xx

Selling out to 2C doesn't seem right, but committing ourselves to hearts leaves out the possibility of finding a spade fit.