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BIDDING LIKE MUSIC

Accurate and imaginative *serious bidding* requires a considerable amount of effort and for some players, I realise, this will be a deterrent. Professional players, beyond reach for the general public, look down at outsiders with some kind of embarrassment. Truly outstanding players are quite willing to discuss their bidding conventions but there are not many chances for you to do that.

Yet, every determined bridge player should consistently try to satisfy his needs. If he perceives music in the course of bidding with his partner, he will derive satisfaction and pleasure from it. He will become part of a circle of lovers of bidding beauty.

The term *serious bidding* can be misleading because amateurs may associate it with something rigid and gloomy, while it should merely indicate a serious approach to the problem of bidding accurately. Bidding is a difficult art, based on skills acquired with the help of talent.

The lack of interest in *serious bidding* may be because players do not realise how appealing it can be. It is my intention to set a fashion and, consequently, to popularise more intellectual bidding. Do not think it will be an easy ride. I shall not be cutting any corners or taking short cuts. Try to discover the beauty and logic of bidding in an intelligent way, page by page. I shall be very happy if you succeed!

Krzysztof Martens

1. MODERN BIDDING

1.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE MODERN BIDDING

Modern bidding has these four main objectives:

1. To reach game contracts in a way that gives away least information to the defenders (to make the opening lead more difficult).
2. To play a no-trump contract the right way round, with the stronger hand as declarer.
3. To provide maximum slam bidding comfort by developing economic mechanisms of suit agreement and showing side-suit shortages.
4. To stop in a part score, where appropriate.

These four basic objectives, sometimes in conflict with each other, have to be reconciled while trying to hit the happy medium. You should be aware that even in *two over one* bidding a part score is sometimes the best possible solution. Let's look at some bidding sequences that illustrate how you can use waiting mechanisms as part of an intellectual communication with your partner.

Your partner opens 1♠. How would you respond on the following hands?

1) ♠ 6 5	2) ♠ A 7 5	3) ♠ 8 7
♥ A K 7 3	♥ K Q 8 6	♥ A J 6
♦ K Q 9 8	♦ A J 10 6	♦ A Q J 9
♣ J 7 6	♣ J 4	♣ 10 9 6 3

Opposite a 1♠ opening a 2♥ response promises at least five-card suit, in almost all bidding systems. Many players reckon that for a 2♦ response it is enough to hold a good four-card suit. West European and American bridge players, in particular, will respond 2♦ on each of the above hands. This is in contradiction to a basic bidding requirement:

Do not divulge unnecessary information to the defenders, bid in such a way as to reach a proper game contract with the least exchange of information.

Let's put the first of these responding hands opposite a typical 1♠ opener.

Example 1

♠ A J 7 4 2	N W E S	♠ 10 8
♥ K 2		♥ A Q 7 3
♦ K Q 6		♦ A J 10 9
♣ 7 4 3		♣ J 10 9

Classical bidding:

1♠ — 2♦
 2♠ — 3♥
 ?

I shall give half of my kingdom to any West player who would think of the winning 3NT bid now. 4♦ is the correct bid but it leads nowhere. This is the recommended Modern bidding:

1♠ — 2♣ (waiting)
 2♠ — 2NT (waiting)
 3NT — pass

The waiting 2♣ response still allows you to find a diamond fit (if the opener rebids in diamonds). It also follows the rule of camouflage. The declarer did not divulge his distribution or location of the honours.

A decade or two ago, there was a fashion for artificial, relay systems. A one-way course of bidding was strongly advocated. After partner had opened the bidding, the responder took control of the auction. A series of relay bids asked questions about the opener's strength and distribution. The responder then made the final decision about the contract, based on the information that he had gathered.

The captain of a ship sets the course and gives the necessary orders. A crew member does not ask questions about where the ship is heading, he merely follows orders. If a bridge player at the helm does not know how to use the compass, sextant and other navigational tools, the partnership is doomed to fail pretty soon. The captain is the master of the deal and everything follows his wishes. The precision of such relay bidding is nonetheless superficial. It does not take into consideration many vital elements of card evaluation, such as the location of honours and the quality of the trump suit. That's because there is no opportunity for an intellectual conversation between the partners.

The one-way approach, favoured by relay bidding, can work well on occasional deals and should not be disregarded or rejected. Natural bidding, however, has many advantages. Both players can show their intentions with the calls they make and they can indicate whether or not they would be happy to play a no-trump contract. Since they are not tied to a table of relay responses, they have a free hand in deciding whether to give accurate information on their hand or to avoid giving away such information. And finally, the most important thing is a considerable resilience to intervention by the opponents.

In the 21st century, bidding systems look for a symbiosis between relay bidding and a two-way exchange of information. Specific consideration is given to camouflage, wherever this is possible without obstructing the quality of the final contract.

When partner has opened with a one-bid, you can bid 2♣ as responder to initiate a one-way auction. With this bid, the responder informs his partner, in a somewhat arrogant way, that he is taking control of the auction. He will say nothing about his own hand, leaving the opponents completely in the dark, and will wait for the development of the situation before deciding on the final contract. Following a fundamental assumption of modern bidding, the waiting bid should be situated economically.

After a 1♠ opening followed by a 2♦ or 2♥ response, a two-way flow of information will continue. It is a sensible path only when the responder has an important message to convey. For example, showing a fairly solid five-card suit is important. The opener will be able to take such information into consideration and bid accordingly.

What types of hand can the responder have when he chooses the 2♣ waiting response?

- 9-11 HCPs, 6+ clubs. According to the Polish system, repeating clubs on the second round is not forcing;
- 12+ HCPs, 5+ clubs;
- 12+ HCPs – all balanced hands, including a possible spade fit.

You should bid slowly with strong hands. Respect bidding space because you may need it. As you see, the waiting 2♣ response promises at least two cards in clubs.

Before we look at a large number of sample auctions, I would like briefly to present some slam zone conventions that I am going to use. I am aware that the Polish treatment of some of these bids is not standard elsewhere.

1.2 RULES OF SHOWING SHORT SUITS

In a situation when a shortage has been shown, a repeat bid in the short suit indicates a void there. It is a priority to show the void even at the price of omitting other cue bids.

Example:

1♠ — 2♣;
 2♥ — 2NT – waiting;
 3♣ — 4♣ – invitational, to play slam in clubs;
 4♦ — 4♥
 4NT — ?

Since 4♦ (repeating the shortage already bid) indicated a void diamond, the subsequent 4NT was *Exclusion Blackwood*, asking about just four key cards – three aces (excluding the diamond ace) and the club king.

To avoid any memory problems, it is important to have clear rules that define how the various slam sequences, including those showing shortage, should be interpreted.

A) 5-4 shape has been shown.

- 1♠ — 2♦
 2♣ — 2NT – waiting, I need more information;
 3♣ — 3♠ – how about a slam in spades?

The opener continues on these lines:

- 3NT – no shortage, partner, meaning the shape is 5-2-2-4, but we can talk;
 4♣ – two shortages 6-1-1-5 (7-1-1-4);
 4♦ – shortage in diamonds;
 4♥ – shortage in hearts;
 4♠ – an absolute minimum.

As you see, the situation is simple – we bid both short suits in a natural way. Repeating one of the suits shows two shortages and a notrump bid indicates a minimum hand without a shortage.

B) 5-5 shape has been shown

Classical version 5 spades – 5 diamonds;

- 1♠ — 2♣
 3♦ — 3♠ – how about slam in spades?

The opener continues:

- 3NT – singleton heart;
 4♣ – shortage in clubs;
 4♦ – two shortages;
 4♥ – void in hearts.

The first two levels, 3NT and 4♣, allow us to show shortage in a natural way; 3NT shows heart shortage which is precisely a singleton, because we use the next free call – 4♥ – to indicate a void. Repeating one of the suits (4♦) identifies two shortages.

C) 6-4 shape has been shown

- 1♥ — 1♠;
 2♣ — 2♦ – waiting;
 3♦* — 3♥ – how about slam in hearts?

The opener continues:

- 3♠ shortage in spades;
 3NT singleton diamond;
 4♣ two shortages;
 4♦ void in diamonds.

The first two levels allow us to show shortage in a natural way. 3NT identifies a singleton in diamonds and we use the next free call – 4♦ – to indicate a void in diamonds.

D) One suited hand disclosed

Transfer version 3♦ = +6 hearts

- 1♥ — 2♣;
 2♥ — 2NT – waiting;
 3♦ — 3♥ – how about slam in hearts?

The opener now bids:

- 3♠ – shortage in spades;
 3NT – no shortage;
 4♣ – shortage in clubs;
 4♦ – shortage in diamonds.

As you see, we bid all shortages in a natural way and a notrump bid means that no shortage is held. Easy to remember!

* Transfer version 3♦ = 6 hearts – 4 clubs, good hand (The whole idea of transfers is described step by step later in the book)

1.3. **BLACKWOOD USED IN “BIDDING LIKE MUSIC”**

Blackwood

In a situation when a suit is agreed, we use *Blackwood* to ask for the five key cards: four aces + trump king. This is the method we will use in all the examples later in the book. I am accustomed to the well-known *Roman Key-card Blackwood* responses:

- 4NT — 5♣ — means zero or three key cards;
- 5♦ — one or four key cards;
- 5♥ — two or five key cards without the trump queen;
- 5♠ — two or five key cards + trump queen.

I am a supporter of the following economical way of showing the number of kings as well:

- 5NT — two or five key cards + trump queen + one king;
- 6♣ — two or five key cards + trump queen + two kings.

When you play this method, the 5♠ response implies two or five key cards + the trump queen and no king. Such a convention is also useful when the club suit is agreed. In the classical version of *Roman Key-card* a 5♠ response shows 2 key cards + the trump queen, not mentioning the number of kings.

5NT — asking for kings. In a situation when a 6♦ response (one king) might drive us to a risky grand, we have to make a guess. The Economical version solves this problem.

Another advantage of these responses is this:

After 4NT — 5♠, showing two or five values + trump queen and no king, 5NT becomes available as an inquiry for queens (not counting the trump queen).

Theoreticians think, and quite rightly so, that it is in conflict with showing the void. To check such fundamental issue as void in a side suit there is bidding space, beginning with 1♣ and concluding with 4♠.

After a different response to *Blackwood* the next level asks for the trump queen. For example, after agreeing hearts in the first part of the auction:

- 4NT — 5♣;
- 5♦ — asks for the trump queen;
- 5♥ — sign-off in the agreed suit because the number of aces is inadequate;
- 5♠ — asks for the number of kings.

Note that after asking for asking for the trump queen we can use the economical version:

- 4NT — 5♣;
- 5♦ — 5♥ — no trump queen;
- 5♠ — trump queen, no king;
- 5NT — trump queen + one king and so on.

Indeed, there are methods that allow you to find out which specific king partner holds. The Polish system is happy just to show the number of kings. If for some reason you have bypassed 4NT, I strongly recommend that you adopt 5NT to take over the function of asking for key cards. I know that some great bridge champions claim they can do without this mundane convention. Nonetheless I can recall many a high-ranking pair bidding a grand slam with an ace missing. These disasters have always been originated by a different interpretation of cue bids.