

Krzysztof Martens

Professional Slam Bidding

Part II

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Krzysztof Martens

Translated by

Cathy Bałdysz

Editor

Brian Senior

Cover Design

Aleksandra Berkowska

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BIDDING SPACE

Preemptive bidding has a great advantage – it takes bidding space away from the opponents. Of course, it's true that the gains are offset by the risk of going down for a very costly penalty on misfit hands.

A conservative pair doesn't preempt very often, because their requirements for preempting are too restrictive. Undoubtedly, they don't give away -800 or -1100. On the other hand, look at how rarely the opponents make a mistake against them. A passive pair very often complains that they were unlucky.

Personally, I'm a big fan of active bidding. I like a good fight "under the knife," and a little chaos in the bidding which, after years of experience, I think I can handle better than my opponents.

In tennis the pros call it a forced error. It's when a tennis player takes a risk, goes for the line, and changes the tempo and style of the game.

There's a category of forced errors that can also be applied in bridge.

Bidding space is fundamental to successful partnership bidding. Especially in slam bidding, bidding space is as necessary as the air we breathe.

It sometimes happens that a pair loses bidding space in an uncontested auction without a good reason for doing so. When this happens it's the result of an individual error or a misunderstanding of the basic principles of natural bidding.

It can also happen if a system agreement is badly or illogically constructed.

In boxing, there's a saying that there are no boxers resistant to taking blows, only punches that missed the mark.

I'd like to show, using a few examples from world class bridge play, that there is no such thing as a pair that is invulnerable to preemption, only that some pairs aren't so effectively preempted out of the bidding.

BEIJING 2008
 OPEN TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP, THE FINAL

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

♠ K Q J 10 9 7 2
♥ 10 9
♦ J
♣ 8 4 2

Both vulnerable

W	N	E	S
Nunes	Gold	Fantoni	Townsend
			2♦
Pass	2♥	Pass	2♠
Pass	Pass	Dbl	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
5♦	Pass	...	

The very conservative opening 2♦ — Multi — bid by Townsend left the Italians with a lot of bidding room. It was only pessimistic hand evaluation on the part of Nunes that kept them from bidding a slam.

W	N	E	S
Malinowski	Lauria	Sandqvist	Versace
			3♠
Pass	Pass	Dbl	Pass
4♦	Pass	5♦	Pass ...

Versace made a better opening bid of 3♠.

The surprisingly passive bid of 4♦ by Malinowski must have been because they have an aggressive style of reopening the bidding.

However, the 5♦ bid should have woken him up to the fact that he had a beautiful hand for his partner.

At this point he should have made a grand slam try with a 5♥ cue bid.

SAO PAULO 2009
 BERMUDA BOWL, THE QUARTER-FINALS

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

NS vulnerable

W	N <small>Lauria</small>	E	S <small>Versace</small>
	1♦	1♠	2♥
4♠	Dbl	Pass	5♦
Pass	6♦	Pass	...

Despite the lack of bidding space, Lauria and Versace handled the situation perfectly.

One debatable point is whether 4NT wouldn't have been better than 5♦.

In my opinion 4NT shows 6♦ and 4♣.

W	N <small>Hamman</small>	E	S <small>Zia</small>
	1♦	1♠	2♥
4♠	5♦	Pass	

Hamman chose a worse option than did Lauria. He could have bid 5♦ with a lot of weaker hands than the one he actually held.

Zia didn't have any reason to bid the slam.

W Rodwell	N De Wijs	E Meckstroth	S Muller
	1♦	1♠	2♥
3♠	4♦	Pass	4♠
Pass	4NT	Pass	5♥
Pass	7♦	Pass	

Meckwell left the Dutch pair a lot of bidding room. You have to admit that Muller and De Wijs were quite optimistic on this deal. I greatly sympathize with their attitude.

SAO PAULO 2009
BERMUDA BOWL, THE FINAL

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

None vulnerable

W	N	E	S
Zia	Fantoni	Hamman	Nunes
			Pass
1♥	3♣	3♠	Pass
4♥	Pass	...	
3♣	—	+5♠ +5♦	

Hamman's cue bid didn't get any reaction out of Zia.

This must have been because their bidding style very rarely allowed for such a weak opening hand.

And yet, once partner shows a genuine heart fit and hand too good to simply bid 4H, the West hand is a lot better than it was when Zia opened 1H. Flexible hand evaluation is needed and now he might bid 4C because it commits to nothing, in case partner is strong. Or, is this a non-serious 3NT situation, in which case he can do that?

Brian Senior

W	N	E	S
Versace	Rodwell	Lauria	Meckstroth
			Pass
Pass	1♠	1NT	Pass
2♦	3♦	3♥	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♠	Pass
6♣	Pass	...	

Versace didn't follow the same path as Zia and didn't open the bidding.

The auction continued much more slowly and Alfredo showed excellent hand evaluation.

I should add that Lorenzo also helped out in the auction.

SAO PAULO 2009
 TRANSNATIONAL TEAMS, THE FINAL

The same hand.

	♠ Q 9 7 6 5 4										
	♥ 5										
	♦ A K Q 6 2										
	♣ 4										
♠ J 3	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100%; height: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> <td style="text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">E</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> <td style="text-align: center;">S</td> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> </tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A K
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A 10 9 8 3		♥ K Q 4									
♦ J		♦ 9 8 7 5 3									
♣ K Q 9 6 2		♣ A J 3									
	♠ 10 8 2										
	♥ J 7 6 2										
	♦ 10 4										
	♣ 10 8 7 5										

None vulnerable

W	N	E	S
Żmudzinski	Narkiewicz	Balicki	Buras
			Pass
1♥	1♠	2♠	Pass
4♥	Pass	...	
2♠	— game forcing with support		

Just like Zia, Żmudziński reacted negatively, although he had more bidding space available to him had his judgment been more positive.

Adam belongs to the group of players who make very sound opening bids, so it is not unexpected that he took a negative view with such a minimum opening hand.

W Kalita	N Helness	E Kotorowicz	S Helgemo
			Pass
1♥	1♠	2♦	Pass
2♥	3♦	3♠	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♠	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♣	Pass
5♦	Pass	5♠	Pass
6♥	Pass	...	

2♦ — support in hearts either weak 6-8PC or strong +13PC

This was a good showing by the young Polish pair.

The 2♦ bid created a lot of additional bidding space and a more comfortable psychological situation.

Opener limited his hand (with the 2♥ bid). Thanks to this, after the 3♠ cue bid he could react positively without overstating his enthusiasm for slam.

The 4♠ cue bid not only showed the lack of a diamond control, but also promised extra values.

PARIS 2001
 BERMUDA BOWL, THE QUARTER-FINALS

♠ —	N	♠ J 9 7 4
♥ Q 10 9 5 3	W E	♥ 6 2
♦ K J 10 9 4 3 2	S	♦ Q 5
♣ 9		♣ J 8 5 3 2

♠ A Q 10 3
♥ K J 7 4
♦ A 8 7
♣ A 6

Both vulnerable

W	N	E	S
Duboin	Meckstroth	Bocchi	Rodwell
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♣
4♦	Pass	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♥	Pass	5NT
Pass	7♣	Pass	7♠
Pass			

4NT — Blackwood, spade agree

5NT — grand slam invitation

Despite the lack of bidding space, Meckwell got to the excellent grand slam in spades.

The fact that the critical suits split badly, doesn't at all detract from my admiration for their bidding.

W	N	E	S
Hamman	Lauria	Soloway	Versace
4♦	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass	4♠	Pass	...

Hamman preempted the bidding in the modern way (I like it).

The Italians reopen the bidding very aggressively, so partner has to be very careful in deciding to go beyond game. In my opinion, however, Lorenzo Lauria was too careful.

PARIS 2001
BERMUDA BOWL, THE SEMI-FINALS

♠ A J 10 9 8 5 4	N W E S	♠ K
♥ A 2		♥ K 5 4 3
♦ Q 5		♦ J 10
♣ K Q		♣ A J 9 8 3 2
		♠ —
		♥ Q J 9
		♦ A 8 7 6 4 3
		♣ 7 6 5 4

EW vulnerable

W	N	E	S
Versace	Aa	Lauria	Groetheim
		1♣	2♦
2♠	4♦	Pass	Pass
Dbl	Pass	4♥	Pass
4♠	Pass	5♣	Pass
6♣	Pass	...	

This is an example of what is referred to in sports as a forced error. The activeness of the Norwegians during the bidding provoked the Italians into making a mistake.

What is going on here? If West has shown a hand too good to bid 4S on the previous round, then East has no business bidding on with such a minimal opening bid. If West has shown a hand with spades plus club tolerance, then he should pass 5C as East rates to be his actual shape so often – marked with a singleton spade at most or would have passed 4S, and hence often two diamond losers.

Brian Senior

VERONA 2006

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROSENBLUM CUP, THE SEMI-FINALS

♠ —		♠ A 10 6 5 3			
♥ A Q J 9		♥ 8			
♦ A K J 8 6 3		♦ 7 2			
♣ Q J 3		♣ A 9 7 4 2			
♠ Q J 7 4 2	<table style="margin: 0 auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	
N					
W E					
S					
♥ K 10 7 4 3 2					
♦ 5					
♣ 6					
		♠ K 9 8			
		♥ 6 5			
		♦ Q 10 9 4			
		♣ K 10 8 5			

Both vulnerable

W Kalish	N Lindkvist	E Podgur	S Fredin
			Pass
2♥	Dbl	2NT	Dbl
3♠	4♦	4♠	Pass
Pass	5♠	Pass	6♦
Pass	...		
2♥	— 5+♥/4+♠ and 5-10 HCP		
2NT	— asking		
3♠	— 5+♥/5+♠ and 6-8 HCP		

The Israelis used a bidding strategy which I am constantly trying to get “my students” out of the habit of using.

A jump to 4♠ by Podgur was called for. However, he decided to bid slowly and that gave the Swedish pair a lot of bidding room.

A club ruff set the slam, but this was a matter of luck, and not part of a well-thought out plan.

Helness took excellent advantage of the bidding space left by the Swedes.

The grand slam in diamonds was much better than the grand in clubs. A 3–2 diamond break and 3–3 spade break was an additional chance, when North’s potential club loser would go on the established clubs.

W Sontag	N Nystrom	E Bates	S Bertheau
			1♠
Pass	2♣	3♥	3♠
4♥	6♣	Pass	...
2♣	— game-forcing relay		

Bates jumped to the three level in hearts and that was all it took to keep Nystrom from finding the optimal contract.

VERONA 2006
 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP ROSENBLUM CUP, THE FINAL

♠ K Q 9 4 2	N W E S	♠ A J
♥ 7		♥ J 10
♦ A 10 8		♦ K Q J 9 7 6
♣ J 8 7 4		♣ A K 6
		♠ 7
		♥ K 6 4 3 2
		♦ 5 4 3 2
		♣ Q 5 3
		♠ 10 8 6 5 3
		♥ A Q 9 8 5
		♦ —
		♣ 10 9 2

Both vulnerable

W	N	E	S
Helgemo	Lindkvist	Helness	Fredin
Pass	4♥	1♦	3♣
3♣	— majors	Pass	...

Fredin's bid at the three level, showing a two-suiter with both majors, kept Helgemo out of the auction.

Why Fredin decided to take such an aggressive action at unfavorable vulnerability will remain his secret. This is another deal which proves that it pays to be active in the bidding.

One down, -100.

W	N	E	S
Nystrom	Sontag	Bertheau	Bates
		1♣	1♥
1NT	3♥	4♦	Pass
4♥	Pass	4♠	Pass
5♦	Pass	6♦	Pass ...
1♣	— strong		
1NT	— 5+♠, unbalanced		
4♥	— good diamond raise		

Bates made a completely sensible overcall of 1♥, but it left a lot of bidding space available to his opponents and allowed the Swedes to get to the diamond slam.

Bates led the ♥A for -1370.

ISTANBUL 2004
 WORLD TEAM OLYMPIAD, THE FINAL

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

♠ K J 10 9 7 5 2
♥ 8 6 4
♦ 5
♣ 5 3

♠ 8 6
♥ J 7
♦ J 10 9 7 6 4
♣ 9 8 2

EW vulnerable

W	N	E	S
Schollaardt	Fantoni	Drijver	Nunes
	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♣	2♠	Pass	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♥	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♦	Pass
5NT	Pass	6♣	Pass
6♠	Pass	7♥	Pass ...

Bidding like music.

3♥ — game forcing and showing four hearts plus a spade stopper (3♠ would have shown four hearts without a spade stopper).

Note that in this very unusual situation the Dutch pair had a precise agreement:

6♠ — pick a grand slam.

Creating a bid at the six level which means pick a grand slam is evidence of a highly sophisticated style of bidding.

Would it be too wild for North to overcall 3S instead of 2S at this vulnerable?

Brian Senior

W	N	E	S
Duboin	v Prooijen	Bocchi	Brink
	Pass	1NT	Dbl
Rdbl	2♠	3♣	Pass
3♠	Pass	3NT	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♦	Pass
4♥	Pass	5♦	Pass
6♣	Pass	...	

Dbl — clubs or diamonds

Rdbl — strong

3♣ — Bocchi thought the redouble showed clubs (as it would have over a 'strong' double)

When they found themselves in a similar bidding situation, the Italians were completely lost.

ESTORIL 2005
BERMUDA BOWL, THE FINAL

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

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
Versace	Hamman	Lauria	Soloway
Pass	1♣	2♣	2♠
4♣	Pass*	Pass	Dbl
Pass	4♠	Pass	...

1♣ — strong

*Pass — Hamman forgot that he was supposed to double to show interest in a spade slam and now Soloway expected him to have a minimum without good spade support.

The Italians did an excellent job of creating the right tempo for the bidding.

The Americans' mistake can be counted as a forced error.

W	N	E	S
Rodwell	Fantoni	Meckstroth	Nunes
Pass	1♥	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	3NT
Pass	4♣	Pass	4♦
Pass	4♥	Pass	4NT
Pass	6♠	Pass	...

The Americans were passive and didn't get in the way of their opponents' bidding.

With plenty of room the Italian bidding machine got to a good slam.

Blame the swing to a substantial degree on the strong club methods – few would bid as East over a 1H opening, but all would bid over 1C. And the American mistake is only partially forced – someone forgot his system. As did Bocchi in the previous example.

Brian Senior

ESTORIL 2005
BERMUDA BOWL, THE FINAL

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

♠ K Q 10 6 4 3
♥ J 9 6 5
♦ 7
♣ 10 9

NS vulnerable

W	N	E	S
Nickell	Bocchi	Freeman	Duboin
	Pass	1♣	1♠
Dbl	Pass	3NT	Pass
4♦	Pass	4♠	Pass
5♦	Pass	6♣	Pass ...

Here is another good example. Holding an interesting hand, Freeman shot himself in the foot. He took up all the available bidding space yet gave very little information about his hand other than general strength.

I agree, of course, but perhaps you should suggest what East should have bid instead of 3NT – 3D, 2S? And, as regards 3D, that would be forcing because 2D would not be a minimum opener? My personal approach would be that 2D is not a full reverse but definitely shows extras, with a minimum 4-5 rebidding the clubs.

Brian Senior

LILLE 2012
 14TH WORLD BRIDGE GAMES, THE SEMI-FINALS

	♠ J 4								
	♥ J 7 6 4								
	♦ Q 10 5								
	♣ A K 9 5								
♠ A 10 5 2	<table style="width: 100%; height: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td> <td style="text-align: center;">E</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">S</td> </tr> </table>	N		W	E		S	♠ K Q 9 7 3	
N									
W	E								
	S								
♥ A K 10 9 2		♥ 8 3							
♦ A 8 4		♦ K J 7 3							
♣ 3		♣ 7 4							
	♠ 8 6								
	♥ Q 5								
	♦ 9 6 2								
	♣ Q J 10 8 6 2								

EW vulnerable

W	N	E	S
Nystrom	Fantoni	Upmark	Nunes
		Pass	Pass
1♥	Pass	1♠	2♣
3♣	5♣	5♦	Pass
5♠	Pass	...	

I applaud N/S's active bidding. The Italians took a lot of bidding space away from their opponents.

At the other three tables the E/W bidding was undisturbed.

Perhaps I am crazy, but if I bid as South it would be more likely to be with 3C not 2C.

Brian Senior

I agree. KM

W	N	E	S
Helgemo	Cullin	Helness	Bertheau
		Pass	Pass
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
3♠	Pass	3NT	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♦	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♦	Pass
5♥	Pass	6♦	Pass
6♠	Pass	...	

The Norwegian pair places great weight on uncovering shortages. Helness showed good hand evaluation, with 3NT asking for a shortage.

4♦ — the club shortage was accepted (last train). That was enough for Helness to use the world's favorite convention – Blackwood.

W	N	E	S
Buras	Garvey	Narkiewicz	Carrol
		Pass	Pass
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♠	Pass ...

Perhaps Buras was closer to a Splinter than a 3♠ bid in the Polish system. Narkiewicz's reaction shows that he didn't expect such a good hand from his partner.

This was a lack of consistency in the partnership. If the system allowed a 3♠ bid with Buras's hand, then this would have been bad hand evaluation by Narkiewicz.

W Mcgann	N Balicki	E Hanlon	S Żmudziński
		Pass	Pass
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2NT	Pass	3♣	Dbl
3♦	Pass	4♦	Pass
4♥	Pass	4♠	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♣	Pass
5♦	Pass	6♠	Pass ...

The Irish did well on this tricky hand. Thanks to their system, they had more bidding room.

2NT — strong raise with spade support

3♦ — shortness in ♣'s