

**Krzysztof Martens
Marek Wójcicki**

**PROFESSIONAL
COMPETITIVE BIDDING
BATTLE OF THE TITANS**

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FROM THE AUTHORS

There has been a long standing trend in modern bridge for ever increasing aggressiveness and action in the bidding. These days not many auctions are left uncontested with the active participation of only one pair. Given this, bidding agreements in contested auctions and defensive bidding have become much more important. Most players have only loosely defined or general agreements. Most of us have experienced first-hand how costly it can be without specific agreements or how costly the resulting misunderstandings can be.

All of us can remember a time when a big IMP score was lost after one team bid and made a game at both tables, when a doubled partscore was made, or when someone went down for a big number because of a misunderstanding or from a bad decision when both pairs were fighting for the contract.

In this book we present selected deals from some of the most important championships as examples of modern contested auctions. We show the consequences of being active in the bidding for both pairs. Using examples, we have tried to show how to handle these situations, how not to handle them and why.

We present agreements that world class pairs use in particular bidding sequences. In some situations there is a systemic approach.

This book gives you an overview of how to treat most of these situations. This should help you and your partner to agree on a chosen style for contested auctions. Since there are numerous kinds of possible situations, it isn't as easy to categorize bidding treatments as it is in uncontested sequences. Trying to create a complete set of agreements to handle every situation is practically impossible. It is important to build an understanding within the partnership that is harmonious and that makes it possible for both partners to analyze situations and come up with a choice of bids that are along the same lines.

BEING ACTIVE AT THE TABLE

In recent years there has been a tremendous increase in being active in the bidding. In contemporary bridge “maximum aggression” is the approach that underlies the bidding of the opening side and the defending side.

There are bidding systems, for example, where agreements differ depending on the vulnerability in order to allow for maximum aggression. These systems are directed not only to improving bidding precision in the partnership that opens the bidding but also to obstruct the opponents’ bidding as much as possible. This, however, is a topic for another book – it was mentioned in the book *The Martens System*. Here, we will mainly look at problems created by aggressive bidding by the defending side, although some points will come up that deal with various other bidding positions.

There are advantages and disadvantages of being active in the bidding. On the plus side, it can make life more difficult for the opponents to exchange information, a profitable sacrifice can be found, or the best lead can be indicated. On the downside, excessive action in the bidding can be costly. The cost of going for a number can be very expensive. Active bidding can also make the opponent’s declarer play easier by revealing information about the distribution or strength of the defenders’ hands.

Despite the drawbacks, year by year there is an increase in aggressiveness in the bidding and auctions are rarely left uncontested. Presumably, the results justify this style of bidding. From what we have observed, being active in the bidding simply pays off.

Why? In modern bidding, penalty doubles are used much less frequently. Doubles and redoubles have been assigned more important meanings – conventional treatments that have absolutely nothing to do with penalizing the opponents. This has made it practically impossible to punish overly aggressive bidding.

The most obvious convention that frequently allows the defending

side to get away with stepping into a live auction is the support double and support redouble.

A redouble by opener after a double by the advancer should show the ability and desire to double the opponents. This should be the answer to opponents who crazily step into an auction, suggesting a misfit and inviting partner to cooperate in doubling for penalties.

One concept which works well is a negative double which guarantees at least two cards in the opponent's suit. This is a particularly useful option when we open 1NT and the next opponent makes a natural overcall at the two level. A negative double without shortness in the overcalled suit means that opener can more frequently pass the double out for penalties, which shouldn't be contrary to the aims of the side that opened the bidding.

We now present deals which illustrate the style of contested auctions among world class pairs from the most important championships. This paints a picture of the current trends in bidding. We will also try to present solutions of how to handle certain situations. This can be the basis for a further fine tuning of an approach and systemic agreements or at least lead to a discussion on partnership bidding style.

*Beijing 2008**Bridge Olympiad, the semi-finals*

You can see in the deal below just how far one can go with the idea of a “light” overcall. In second seat! Note how consistent the bidding style is in the partnership. The partner of the overcaller counts the points around the table and reacts adequately.

NS vulnerable Dealer North		♠ 9 ♥ A54 ♦ QJ10854 ♣ AQ4	
		♠ AK104 ♥ 1086 ♦ K76 ♣ 1086	
		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS</div> </div>	♠ 875 ♥ J32 ♦ 3 ♣ KJ9752
		♠ QJ632 ♥ KQ97 ♦ A92 ♣ 3	
W	N	E	S
Versace	Helness	Lauria	Helgemo
	1♦	2♣	2♠
pass	3♦	pass	3♥
pass	3NT	pass...	

This degree of being active at the table, East’s 2♣ overcall, is seldom seen among top pairs. This style requires an enormous ability to judge a situation and assign the points around the table based on the opponents’ bidding. Note that Versace didn’t even raise to 3♣, let alone double 3NT for a spade lead.

Deceptively clouding the location of honor cards can bring many benefits and make declarer play much more difficult.

Brian Senior: It can indeed, but is the style described on their cc (the answer is, I believe, no), or do they perhaps alert when an overcall occurs? Surely any pair who play in such a non-standard manner must work hard to give adequate disclosure.

Beijing 2008**Bridge Olympiad, the semi-finals.**

Here you can see the negative consequences of being too active in the bidding.

Love all		♠ KQJ752		
Dealer South		♥ Q4		
		♦ AK6		
		♣ 84		
♠ 4		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> N </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> W E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; width: 100%;"> S </div> </div>	♠ A8	
♥ J10652			♥ K73	
♦ 8752			♦ J43	
♣ K62			♣ AQ1093	
		♠ 10963		
		♥ A98		
		♦ Q109		
		♣ J75		

W	N	E	S
Duboin	Helness	Sementa	Helgemo
pass	1♠	dbl.	pass
3♥	4♠	pass...	2♥ ¹⁾

¹⁾Helgemo's transfer of 2♥, showing a better raise, is standard these days

We recommend the opposite agreement – a two-way transfer – with a sub-minimum raise or a game forcing raise:

1)

W	N	E	S
1♥	dbl.	?	

- 2♦ = heart fit, 5-8 or 13+ PC

- 2♥ = heart fit, (8)9-10 PC

2)

W	N	E	S
1♠	dbl.	?	

- 2♥ = spade fit, 5-8 or 13+ PC

- 2♠ = spade fit, (8)9-10 PC.

Brian Senior: One benefit of this agreement would be that a jump to 2NT could now be specifically a limit raise to 3M, rather than a constructive raise to „at least 3M”, as in basic methods.

W	N	E	S
Aa		Molberg	
2♦	2♠	3♣	pass
4♣	4♠	pass...	3♠

At the other table the Norwegian's 2♦ bid, even as a "bad Multi," takes guts. Needless to say, at both tables the opening lead was a heart. This time being active turned out to be calamitous, since it produced a bad opening lead. It's true, that Aa tried to redeem himself by bidding 4♣, but even so, can you blame partner for leading a heart?

This begs the question – what do we want to achieve? It's an important point for deciding to intervene in the auction with a marginal hand. The opening lead factor should also be taken into consideration.

Beijing 2008**Bridge Olympiad, the semi-finals.**

On this board you can see how the pair with the majority of the points is susceptible to intervention in the auction, even delayed intervention.

	♠ 932	
EW vulnerable	♥ K4	
Dealer West	♦ AJ97643	
	♣ 9	
♠ 10		♠ KQ865
♥ Q875		♥ A32
♦ 105		♦ K8
♣ AQ8753		♣ KJ6
	♠ AJ74	
	♥ J1096	
	♦ Q2	
	♣ 1042	

W	N	E	S
Duboin	Helness	Sementa	Helgemo
pass	pass	1♠	pass
1NT	3♦	dbl.	pass
4♦	pass	4♥	pass...

At this table there was delayed intervention. Apparently, Helness' hand was too good for an opening 3♦ bid at favorable vulnerability.

Brian Senior: Personally, I would prefer to open 3♦ and to hell with it, even if I am stronger than I might be.

The Italians faced a difficult problem of choosing the best game. Sementa's double showed a good hand. Each bid seems to be correct, but the game was doomed.

W	N	E	S
Ja.Hackett	Gromoller	Ju.Hackett	Kirmse
pass	3♦	dbl.	pass
4♦	pass	4♠	pass
5♣	pass...		

W	N	E	S
Aa		Molberg	
pass	3♦	3♠	pass
4♣	pass	5♣	pass...

W	N	E	S
Sandqvist			Malinowski
pass	3♦	3♠	pass...

At the other three tables there was an opening 3♦ bid. The further auctions were different. Molberg decided on 3♠. Then again, the auctions went down different paths – Aa bid clubs which led to game in that suit, and Sandqvist, somewhat masochistically, passed. Hackett doubled for take out, which led to a contract of 5♣, while also allowing for the possibility of playing game in hearts.

5♣ can be made by running the ♠10 and then taking a ruffing finesse.

Estoril 2005***Bermuda Bowl, the semi-finals.***

When using a conventional overcall that shows, for example, a two-suiter, you can't simply have an agreement that "we're playing Michaels." It's essential to know also "what next?" especially in contested auctions. How high are we forced to bid? Are there any forcing pass positions? And many other further points to agree on.

Love all		♠ A874	
Dealer South		♥ K8	
		♦ J73	
		♣ Q843	
♠ –		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS </div> </div>	♠ QJ32
♥ A109852			♥ J7
♦ 109842			♦ KQ65
♣ A7			♣ 1065
		♠ K10965	
		♥ Q43	
		♦ A	
		♣ KJ92	

W	N	E	S
Nystrom		Bertheau	
			2♠ ¹⁾
4♦ ²⁾	4♠	5♦	pass
pass	dbl.	pass...	

¹⁾10-13 PC, 5+♠

²⁾Leaping Michaels – hearts and diamonds

W	N	E	S
Duboin	Lindkvist	Bocchi	Fredin
			1♠
2NT ¹⁾	3♥ ²⁾	4♦	4♠
5♦	pass...		

¹⁾Ghestem two-suiter – hearts and diamonds

²⁾constructive spade raise

W Rodwell	N Ekeblad	E Meckstroth	S Rubin
2♥	dbl.	pass	2♣
3♦	4♠	pas...	2♠ ¹⁾

¹⁾11-15 PC, 5+♠ and 4+♣

W Hampson	N Nickell	E Greco	S Freeman
2♠ ¹⁾	3♦ ²⁾	pas	1♠
pass...			3♠

¹⁾two-suiter in the reds

²⁾constructive spade raise

Each of the four West players appreciated their distributional hand and came into the auction. After 2♠ opening, Nystrom decided to bid 4♦, showing diamonds and hearts.

It is understandable that a pair can have this style of bidding, but how to handle the situation when the hand is two tricks stronger? This increases the strength range of a convention that shows a two-suiter. It increases the frequency of being able to use it, but clouds the precision in bidding. As a result it is extremely difficult to know what is forcing, when a forcing pass situation is set up and how to make decisions in the slam zone.

Let's look at the Leaping Michaels convention used by the Swedes. It has been gaining in popularity, however, it is very narrowly defined – the first bid is made at the four level in a suit held, just below game level. Using this convention, it is absolutely critical to agree what is forcing. Does it promise honor card strength or only offensive tricks? Is it forcing or non-forcing? Is a forcing pass set up or not?

Brian Senior: Leaping Michaels has the benefit of showing both suits but is very committal. Say that we play a style where the 4♣/♦ overcall promises a decent amount of high-card strength. It is easy to agree something like, „With 5-5-2-1 hands a minimum is something like AQJxx twice, or perhaps only AQxxx twice”. But actually, unless we are wedded to the idea of showing both suits at all costs, should it not depend on which major has been opened against us?

Over a 2♠ opening, we may as well stretch to bid 4♣/♦ to show the shape,

because the alternative is 3♥, which is also pretty committal and dangerous and leaves little space for exploration, but over a 2♥ opening we have the option of a simple 2♠ overcall, over which there is a fair amount of space to explore. We can, for example, make an invitational raise, something which is unavailable facing a 3♥ overcall of 2♠.

So I would suggest that:

♠ AQxxx ♥ xx ♦ x ♣ AQxxx

is a 2♠ overcall of a 2♥ opening, but

♠ xx ♥ AQxxx ♦ x ♣ AQxxx

might as well be a 4♣ overcall of a 2♠ opening.