

Steel City Bridge

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GIVE PARTNER LEEWAY

When we all read books on bidding, somehow all the example hands and auctions always seem to fit together perfectly. Who'd have thought it? But the hands we pick up at the table aren't quite so perfect. There are 36 possible opening calls, and the number of possible bridge hands is 635,013,559,600. So we have to improvise, and that often starts with your first call.

The farther along we get in the auction, the fuzzier the boundaries become. And the fuzziness increases exponentially if the opponents get into the auction, and they do so more and more often every day.

Suppose your RHO opens 1♠ and you hold one of these hands. Which ones would you double with?

1. ♠7 ♥AQ53 ♦KJ62 ♣K1095
2. ♠7 ♥A653 ♦KJ62 ♣K1095
3. ♠7 ♥A653 ♦K862 ♣K1095
4. ♠7 ♥Q653 ♦KJ62 ♣K1095
5. ♠7 ♥A53 ♦KJ62 ♣KQ1095
6. ♠7 ♥A53 ♦KJ62 ♣KJ985
7. ♠7 ♥A53 ♦Q862 ♣KQ985
8. ♠7 ♥A53 ♦Q862 ♣KJ985

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I would double with all of them. The fact that #4 is an aceless 9-count gives me pause, but the shape is outstanding, and I will have a decent play for game opposite ♠J92 ♥KJ82 ♦A10543 ♣4. But I don't want to get to even 3♥ with any of hands 5 through 8. How is that possible?

The 4-4 fit gives us 1 more trump and the defense one less, and decreases the possibility that they will elect to double us. Plus, with hands 5-8, the extra club makes it somewhat more likely that an opponent will get a club ruff somewhere along the line. Also note that, when we have 7 trumps, one of the defenders will have 4 trumps 64% of the time, while when we have 8 trumps that number is cut to 32%.

My mentor, Steve Labins (a very strong player from Connecticut) used to preach that you should play 4-3 fits only at the 2, 4, and 6 levels. Why? Because they are risky. At the 2-level, you are low enough to make it unlikely that you will suffer a penalty. At the 4-level (in a major, you should only play minor suit 4-3 fits at the 2 or 6 level), you are willing to undergo the risk of a big penalty to get the game bonus. And likewise at the slam level you are trading risk for a slam bonus.

How do we give partner leeway after they make a takeout double? We avoid jumping to the 3-level in a 4-card suit. If you want to invite (or force to game) in hearts with a 4-card suit after partner doubles 1♠, cue-bid 2♠ to tell partner you are inviting. Then partner can bid 3♥ with 4 hearts and a minimum, or bid 3 of a minor with 5 and only 3 hearts, or “raise” to 3♠ with a 4441 maximum.

4TH SUIT FORCING

Many new players are mystified by 4th suit forcing. (And some not so new players...) But if you remember that new suits by an unpassed responder are always forcing, you won't go too far wrong.

Why do you need this gadget anyway? After, say, 1♥-1♠,-2♣, opener can have anywhere from a bare minimum up to 17 or 18 points. And responder can have anything from a bare minimum response to the rest of the deck. At some point, somebody has to start showing how good their hand is.

Responder can have, say, 5-8 points; if so, he is limited to going back to opener's first suit (this can be on a doubleton if nothing else appeals), rebidding his own suit (this should at least be a decent 5-card suit, like QJ9xx), or passing (this is the least attractive alternative and should only be done with at least two more cards in opener's 2nd suit than his first).

With 9 or 10 points, responder has the option of raising opener's 2nd suit with 4-card support. Otherwise, he is still only allowed to bid a previously bid suit. From this you can see that if opener has at least 15/16 points, he needs to bid again if he can make a descriptive bid in case responder has the 9-10 part of 5-10 for a rebid of his own suit or a preference to opener's first suit.

We have carefully avoided a whole lot of bids so far. Anything else shows about 11 points or more. But again we distinguish between 11-12 (invitational) hands and 13+ (game forcing) hands. This is where 4th suit forcing comes about. Most expert pairs play that when responder's 2nd bid is the only remaining unbid suit at a minimum level, it is an artificial game force. It's equally playable to play “4th suit limit” where the bid of the 4th suit says, “I have a game invitation somewhere.” Gail Carns is a proponent of this, and so is Richard Pavlicek. Richard is a world class player, and is passionate about this, but he is badly outvoted by the expert community. Ah, well, Galileo was once a lone voice as well, but he won out in the end.

So, going back to our sample auction, responder's non-minimum rebids have the following meanings:

2♦ is the artificial game force. It is used for (1) GF hands with no known fit and no stopper in the 4th suit, (2) hands with a known 8-card fit in one of opener's suits and about 14-15 HCP or more (can be shaded with big shape), or (3) 6+ cards in responder's suit and either a suit too weak to just jump to game or 14-15+ HCP. Note that type 1 hands can have 5 cards in responder's suit and also 4+ cards in the 4th suit if the hand is too good to risk allowing partner to pass a jump to 3NT.

2NT is game invitational with a good stopper in the 4th suit. Responder may have 5 cards in his first suit; Opener must bid 3 of responder's first suit with 3-card support if accepting.

3♣ is less than a game force but promises 4-card support. If you have been paying attention, you know that this can be as few as 9 points and its maximum is still 12. This is a known problem

auction for standard based systems; there are fixes but they are very complicated. And, in any case, it's usually only a minor suit. When opener's 2nd bid is one of a major, this problem goes away since responder can now pass with 5-7, raise to 2 with 8-10, raise to 3 with 11-12, and use the 4th suit with 13+. Note that all raises here guarantee 4-card support, although responder may pass with only 3.

3♦ is an invitational distributional hand, almost always played as showing 5-5 since with 5-4 you would make your game try by bidding 2NT.

3♥ is game invitational and promises 3 trumps. You might have 4 trumps if you have no direct limit raise available, or if you have six or more spades. But in general when you have 4 trumps and a lot of spades you just bid game.

3♠ is game invitational with a good 6-card suit. Again, QJ9xxx is probably very close to the worst suit quality you would have for this; partner could be void. (Note – if you are opener and you are void, DO NOT BID 3NT without a solid acceptance since partner's hand will play badly. Just pass.)

3NT is natural and promises a stopper in the 4th suit, although it denies 5 cards in responder's first suit if that suit is a major.

4 of a major is a game force, but does not encourage slam investigation. A sensible rule is that you can have as many as two key cards for the chosen trump suit only with very bad trumps.

Now let's describe how opener should react to partner's 4th suit bid. Again, we are discussing the auction 1♥-1♠, -2♣-2♦. Opener's bids:

2♥ means he has nothing to show except, possibly, extra values. He certainly denies 3 card support for responder's first bid suit, and if he can make a delayed raise in that suit at the 2-level most top players would say that he can't have as good support as Qx. And he denies a good stopper in diamonds unless he has a 6-card or longer suit.

2♠, as we have seen, shows support; any 3 or Qx. Responder should "mark time" by bidding something else without 6 cards in his major.

2NT is a minimum with a stopper in the 4th suit – this stopper can be 4 small, it's one of two ways to find a 4-4 fit in the 4th suit. Over this 2NT bid, responder will rebid the 4th suit with at least 4 and suit interest – *i.e.* slam interest.

3♣ shows 5-5 unequivocally. With only 4 clubs, opener will rebid something else to see if responder wants to show 4-card club support.

3♦ shows a good hand with 4 cards here, probably a minimum of 15 HCP. Opener is urging responder to show slam interest if he has more than a bare 12/13.

3♥ shows a very strong suit, capable of playing for one loser opposite a small singleton. With a lesser 6-card suit, opener will again make a simple rebid, since he knows he will get another chance to bid his suit.

3♠ shows about 15-18 with 3-card support. Opener is guaranteeing shortness in the 4th suit. This is a very slammish bid.

T-t-t-that's all for now, folks. See you next month with some more discussion of this very important topic.

IMPROVE YOUR COUNTING SKILLS

The following is a collection of advice from a bunch of USBF Junior mentors and other sources. But the advice is equally valuable for those of us who have accumulated considerably more mileage.

1. Practice. The more you play, the easier it becomes to focus. I don't mean going to a Regional and playing the morning, afternoon, evening, and midnight sessions every day. (One of my juniors did that at the Atlanta Nationals a few years ago. But he was 13, and very talented.) I would be dozing off as dummy now if I tried that, and perhaps even as declarer or a defender.
2. Playing has to be focused. Playing good bridge is hard work. Just going to your club game and "pitching cards" is even worse than not playing at all. You need to try to count everything. Distribution, High Card Points, tricks won by each side so far, and which cards have been played in each suit and by whom. The last is a daunting task. It's even hard for me now; when I was 19 it was totally effortless.
3. Keeping track of distributions around the table. 13-0-0-0, 12-1-0-0, 11-2-0-0, 11-1-1-0, 10-3-0-0, 10-2-1-0, 10-1-1-1, 9-4-0-0, 9-3-1-0, 9-2-2-0, 9-2-1-1, 8-5-0-0, 8-4-1-0, 8-3-2-0, 8-3-1-1, 8-2-2-1, 7-6-0-0, 7-5-1-0, 7-4-2-0, 7-4-1-1, 7-3-3-0, 7-3-2-1, 7-2-2-2, 6-6-1-0, 6-5-2-0, 6-5-1-1, 6-4-3-0, 6-4-2-1, 6-3-3-1, 6-3-2-2, 5-5-3-0, 5-5-2-1, 5-4-4-0, 5-4-3-1, 5-4-2-2, 5-3-3-2, 4-4-4-1, 4-4-3-2, 4-3-3-3. Not only are those the only 39 possible hand patterns, they are also the only 39 possible ways for the cards in one suit to be distributed around the table. When I look at dummy and see that dummy and I have five cards in a particular suit, I immediately think 8-0, 7-1, 6-2, 5-3, 4-4, 3-5, 2-6, 1-7, 0-8. Those are the only ways that the unseen cards can be divided between the other two hands. Usually, the bidding rules out some of these. Who passes 8-card suits any more? If you do this for all four suits, you can start getting an idea of the shapes of the unseen hands, particularly when you are defending and declarer has done a lot of bidding.
4. Keep track of the points around the table. If one of the unseen hands has passed as dealer, you can pretty much rule out that person having 13 HCP (or, for Phil or me, 10; you have to know your opponents). Again, there are only 40 HCP in the deck. If I have 9 and know that RHO rarely passes with 11, I can assume that the other two hands have at least 21 points. If I can see one of the hands, I have a reliable minimum for the other unseen hand.
5. Card carefully. This is vital to defenders. If declarer leads a suit, and you have no reason to try to win the trick, give your partner honest count. And expect partner to do the same. You'd be surprised to see how easy it is to count out a hand if you know partner has an odd number of clubs and an even number of hearts. If you lead a suit, be careful to lead the card that corresponds to your carding agreements.
6. What's going on? At various times recently, I have kibitzed Ron Franck, Randy Pearson, Bill Holt, and Bob Park while directing. They're all among the better players in this unit. But every single one of them has made a bid or a play while I was watching that indicated to me that they

had no idea what was going on in that particular deal, usually because something unexpected happened previously. When something unusual happens, stop, think, and reevaluate what you know about the hand. Your LHO leads a club against 1NT-3NT. You hold KJxx in dummy and AQx in hand. You win in hand and lead your other high club and LHO shows out. YOU PLAYED WHAT (sorry, RF)? Stop, and try to figure out why he led a singleton. For me, this means he was 4441 and had unattractive holdings in all three other suits. So now I have to work through all the other suits to figure out what “unattractive” means for each other suit.

7. Packets. Each trick of 4 cards is a “packet.” Often, everyone follows suit. So you can remember this trick as a “packet” of 4 cards. And you need to focus on which particular spot cards each defender played on that packet, as well as which cards were played that fill in the gaps in that suit between the cards that you can actually see. For instance, partner leads a ten and the trick goes J, Q, K. If I have the 98, I know now that I can play the 9 to force out the ace and establish my 8. Then I just have to make sure that I keep that nugget of information saved for the next few minutes. But I also think to myself “Hearts – 7-K-4-3” for example, for each trick.
8. Be Flexible. Suppose your LHO opens 1NT, RHO bids 2♣, and LHO 2♠. You should immediately start thinking of the patterns he can have. 4=3=3=3, 4=3=4=2, 4=3=2=4, 4=2=4=3, 4=2=3=4 (S=H=D=C in all cases) are the most likely ones. Would he open 1NT with 5=3=3=2, 5=3=2=3, or 5=2=3=3? Some would, many might, some wouldn't. But have you considered 4=2=2=5 or 4=2=5=2? Is LHO the sort who likes to open 1NT with a singleton Ace or King? Would he open 1NT with 5=2=2=4 or 5=2=4=2 (or even 5=4=2=2)? Me, I just worry about the 4333 and 4432 shapes until they become impossible or the play indicates that declarer is likely to have a 5-card suit.
9. Don't overload yourself. Hands where you need to count shapes, points, and tricks are rare. Shapes are the most important. But practice until you can build up a hand diagram in your head with your hand and dummy known, and the shapes of the other two hands – think of the Wheel of Fortune board with spaces lighted up for each of the unknown hands.
10. Develop a sense of empathy – put yourself in your opponent's seat and ask yourself how you would defend with the various hands he might hold.
11. Have a reason for every card that you play. If you can't think of a reason to play one rather than another, think some more. This will be hard at first, but as you practice, the game will “slow down” for you. Of course, in the meantime, you will be slowing down the game – try not to think too long.
12. Build your library of card play themes. You get these from books and from kibitzing world class players online. If you have enough card play themes in your library, you begin to think of hands in terms of which themes might fit. This, surprisingly, makes it much easier to count out a deal when defending because you can make a lot of inferences about declarer's hand from how he starts the play. A basic example against 3NT is “Why didn't he attack clubs when dummy has ♣KJ10xx?” There are two answers – either he has AQ or he is trying to get a count to figure out how to play the suit. If you're looking at the ♣Q, you know which it is and you need to think how you might prevent him from figuring out your shape.
13. Every card tells a story. At the conclusion of each trick, try to figure out what those four stories were. This will help you to remember all the spots.
14. This is a weird suggestion from Poland. But it comes from a world class player, and Poland has a strong Junior program. All your partnership's carding should be count.

- a. From an honor sequence, lead A, Q, or 10 if you have an even number and K, J, or 9 from an odd number. Marking your convention card for these leads will generate a lot of strange looks from people who actually look at it, and you'll have to alert partner's lead of any of those cards. Partner leads a Q – "Alert! He has an even number, but may have either or both of the K or J."
- b. If you're not trying to win the trick always give count, even in trumps. Even your discards should be count. Doesn't make sense to give count here? Tough. Do it anyway.
- c. At the end of each hand, say out loud declarer's shape.
- d. Do this until you have completely rewired your brain to the point where counting out shapes is totally automatic.
- e. For the purpose of this exercise, I strongly recommend that you switch to 3rd and low leads (3rd from even, lowest from odd). You can count out almost any suit from partner's lead this way. I mildly prefer to defend this way, but most of my current partners are 4th best types. (Warren Oberfield and I defended 100% on count (with 4th best leads) and we did just fine. I also know of several world class pairs who defend primarily or entirely on count, although they are mostly 3rd and low types.)

YOU BID WHAT???

COMMENTARY, SCORING AND ABUSE BY RICHARD FINBERG

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Match points. N-S Non-Vul., EW Vul.

W	N	E	S
	1♦	1♥	3♦
4♠	Pass	Pass	?

You hold ♠Q ♥85 ♦QJ753 ♣A9875.

You are playing MPs in a multi-table BBO game. You know nothing about your opponents. What do you bid when West's vulnerable 4♠ is passed around to you?



This seems like a straight-forward problem with a mostly binary answer: pass or bid 5♦, with a few other bids sprinkled in. But we are in The Steel City where the road home is seldom straight. Our panelists found three different routes to 5♦ (four different ways if you separately count two different meanings for 5♣). One panelist even went on strike, refusing to make any bid whatsoever.

Three panelists bid 5♦ directly:

Paul Caplan: 5♦. It looks like minus 500 as opposed to minus 620.

RF: The fundamental question is whether to defend 4♠ or to bid on, usually ending up in 5♦ doubled. The relative merits of these choices are developed below.

Connie Hoehstetter: 5♦. I bid 5 diamonds. Not sure they'll make 4 spades, but I feel partner's pass is forcing. Double might be right, however.

RF: It does feel like *something* should be done about this annoying 4♠ bid, but since we are not in a game forcing auction, North's pass is not forcing. Partner simply has nothing more to say. If you want to teach them not to mess with your auctions, how about a spiteful double with your undisclosed Ace and trump Queen? Put at least 3 red cards on the table to make your point. Since this is MPs and many EW pairs will not bid 4♠ in this situation, -790 is only slightly worse than -620, and you might get +200, which at the better bridge clubs is served on a golden platter. You risk little to win much.

Richard Katz: 5♦. I bid five diamonds knowing sacrifices are not good ideas. Just feels right. Luck is always important in this decision. Stakes seem right like in poker. I will soon find out which way the wind is blowing.

RF: Richard is among our town's toughest bridge opponents, but the devil loves a sacrifice and will sometimes pokers you with a stake to get you to sacrifice. Sacrifices are not the only bad ideas. It is also a bad idea to spit into the wind to find out which way it is blowing.

Frank Cymerman: Pass. Assuming 3♦ is weak, my hand is better than partner expects, so I am not taking a unilateral position and saving. Sometimes, Richard, bridge is like poker, and you just have to be at the table.

RF: Another poker analogy and table feeler. But unlike Richard, Frank chooses to pass. Frank's explanation that he has more defense than partner expects is good reasoning. Frank also follows the rule of Preempts 1.01: He who preempts shall not bid again.

Herb Sachs: I bid 5♣. It's a bidder's game.

Bernie Fudor: 5♣. This is a coin flip. I bid 5♣ in case opener has 5 clubs and 4 diamonds.

RF: Bernie makes the right bid (assuming sacrificing is right), but for the wrong reason. 5♣ should be lead directing here, not showing club length. Generally, we like to show our second suit in competitive auctions so partner will know if we have a double fit. But here, you have already committed us to the 5-level, so what to lead is the primary question, in case EW bid again. Showing your shape will mostly help your opponents play or defend better. If you still disagree and want to find a club fit, you can always join the Zimmermann-Holt 4NT Club – but I don't recommend that either.

Bob Zimmermann: 4NT. I'm bidding 4NT for the minors. My 3♦ bid limited my strength, so partner won't go crazy. A sane North has at 7+ spades and at most 1 diamond, and if partner had 4 spades and a card or two, he might have doubled. As it is, down 3 will beat whichever major suit game they can make.

RF: The best thing I can say about a 4NT bid is that it frees up 5♣ as a pure lead director. 4NT's disadvantages include: (1) it may lead to a phantom sacrifice; (2) it needlessly reveals your minor suit shape; and (3) it obscures any message that you prefer a club lead (in fact, by not bidding 5♣, you imply you do not want a club lead).

Bill Holt: 4NT. It doesn't sound as though partner has too much in the majors here. Let's give partner a choice of the minors. Perhaps the opponents will mistakenly venture to the 5-level. Or we might be making 5 of a minor. Sort of a combo bid. Down 3 'dubbled' is less than their vulnerable game - if making. Nothing in my hand suggests it isn't [making]. 4NT allows partner to declare either minor, guarding his ♥ K if he holds it.

RF: Bill's 4NT, of course, shares the same flaws as Bob's 4NT. Bill says he sees nothing in his hand to suggest 4♠ can be beaten, but I can't wait to cross-examine him:

"Sir, you don't see the ♣A or ♠Q plainly in your hand?"

"And you think partner lied and does not have 2 or 2½ quick tricks?"

"Even though his hand is so flat he did not himself sacrifice?"

Moving onward and upward:

Ernie Retetagos: 5♣. I'm going to guess that 4♠ will make more often than not. The missing heart cards will be onside. If I'm saving, I might as well bid 5♣ in case West bids to the 5 level.

Ron Franck: 5♣. I am bidding for a club lead. My partner's possible heart cards are ill placed, and I do not think we are setting 4♠. If they double our eventual 5♦, it looks like -300 or -500, but if they take push to 5♠, I get a club lead from partner.

Trudy Cohn: I will bid 5♣. Then, my partner will have a better idea of what to do if the opponents bid on to 5♠. At this vulnerability, we have a sure profitable save.

Stanley Ruskin (paraphrased): 5♣. No one can really tell who can make what. They probably have at least 9 spades and 7-8 hearts between them. Many hands allow us to make 5 or 6 diamonds or them to make 4 or 5 spades. On hands like these, I generally will bid rather than double or pass. Bidding 5♣ gives my partner a lead and shows him my 2-suited hand as well. [RF: ?] Stanley says he would also sacrifice at IMPs – but a losing double part score swing is no good at IMPs, and if you lose 300 (or 500) in 5♦ doubled while your teammates lose 100 in 4♠, it is an IMP disaster.

Steve Nolan: 5♣. My best guess. Now let the opponents make theirs. At least partner won't have to guess an opening lead.

RF: A qualified "Yes" for everyone who makes the lead directing 5♣ bid, since it is clearly better than a direct 5♦ bid. Aside from suggesting a club lead, it will discourage a diamond lead when partner has the ♦A but not the ♦K. But one demerit for everyone who does not defend 4♠. As Craig explains further below, partner may well have a balanced hand, in which case you will likely be set 300 to 500, while 4♠ does not even make.

And now, the passers. We have already heard from Frank, but here are what the other passers have to say:

Gail Carns: Pass. This is a hard problem since 3♦ was not explained as preemptive or limit, but since it could be either, I pass. Plus, it is better than a minus and a double would attract a diamond lead even if partner does not have AK, and a club would probably be led if they have the diamond Ace and not the King. It is not clear if 5♦ would beat the game bonus or whether EW can make 4♠.

Craig Biddle: Pass. This should be unanimous. Partner heard me sing. He didn't like my song. Why should I play it again, Sam?

The focus of this problem, for me, is that the given hand is wildly overstrength for the auction. Many commenters may not realize that partner is likely to have something like 2=4=4=3 shape with 12 HCP, in which case [only 7 cards] matter (the ♠A, ♥AK, ♦AK, and ♣KQ). Partner is unlikely to have more than 3 of them. So, we are going for at least 300, maybe 500 if they can ruff a club or draw 3 rounds of trumps. Meanwhile, if partner has the ♦A, ♥A and ♣K, we are likely beating them off the top, and even if he has the ♦AK, we are not necessarily cooked defensively.

Since we misdescribed our hand earlier, it's no longer possible to enlist partner's aid. If we go for 300, we will find that a significant portion of the field did not bid their 19 point game, so the odds against saving are horrific.

RF: I agree fully with Craig's analysis and write only to quibble whether South's 3♦ bid is "wildly overstrength" or just "overstrength." Most partnerships allow a preempt to include a side Ace of King, but a preempt in opener's suit tends to be very weak. Its message is that game is hopeless unless opener has a lot of extra values. If this fit were in a major, a raise to 4 of the major is automatic. But 5 of a minor is too far away, and you do not want to bypass 3NT (more so, if your suit were headed by the Ace or King, which makes it much more likely to run). Unless your system has a way to show a mixed raise in diamonds, or a limit raise based on tricks not HCP, there is no single bid to accurately describe this hand, so I approve of 3♦ even though it is overstrength.

Webb Hawthorne: Pass. My regular partners might be surprised by that action, since I tend to sacrifice more than I should. But there are defensive options on this hand. I am certainly not doubling, but I do have some hope to defeat this contract. There are many other bidding sequences where I would be tempted to trot out 4NT, expecting my partner to recognize that I want to sacrifice in a minor suit, but not this time.

Gus Costanzo: Double. This is a hard problem. NS have at least half of the points, but West is nevertheless willing to play a vulnerable game. West should have extreme distribution with a good suit. South's hand is ambiguous. If 3♦ is purely pre-emptive, North has no reason to believe South holds a quick defensive trick or help in the spade suit. Passing ends the auction and NS could go plus, but they might miss a making 5♦ contract.

Gus offers some possible North hands with which North could neither bid 5♦ (for fear of being set too many) nor double, despite 3 likely defensive tricks (since South does not guarantee any defense and diamond tricks may not cash). Gus doubles because he has more defense than promised and even a one trick set for +200 assures a good score. Gus also makes a point I noted above: since many EW pairs will likely stop in 3♠, you will always get a poor score if 4♠ makes, while +200 will be a top if you beat them. So, a double loses little when 'wrong,' but makes a big profit when right.

RF: I would often double here, especially late in a MP game if my score needed a boost to scratch. Of course, some unsavvy partners hate -790 and think you're a fool or are trying to punish them.

I have greatly condensed and paraphrased Gus' full argument because it is lengthy and raises some nonessential side issues that would require much ink and effort to discuss. I am sure Gus will share his full comments if you contact him.

Reanette Frobouck: [On strike]. "I would have bid 4♦ the first time, and then I wouldn't have to ask myself what to do now. Since I didn't do that, I am finished. That is my final answer.

RF: Reanette need not answer if she doesn't want to. But I am pretty sure it won't work in face-to-face games. I checked with club director, and at last report, Reanette's table was still frozen in time, waiting for the auction to end.

In my defense, bidding 4♦ is not a panacea. It bypasses 3NT, which was in still in play after RHO's 1♥ overcall. On the actual deal, West would make the same 4♠ bid over 4♦, leaving us with essentially the same bidding problem (except when North takes charge).

The Extra Points

What should South have bid on his first turn?

Standard bidding (in the United States anyway) gives you no ready bid when you hold ♠Q ♥85 ♦QJ753 ♣A9875 and your partner opens 1♦ and your RHO overcalls 1♥. Using inverted minors, if RHO passed you could make a nebulous 2♦ call, forcing one round, intending to rebid 3♦ to try to sign off. But many, if not most, partnerships play inverted minors are off in competition, and this hand is too strong to merely compete with a nonforcing 2♦ bid (which could show as little as ♠xx ♥Kxx ♦JTxx ♣Qxxx). The actual hand could easily be slam worthy whenever partner has some extra values and a singleton club, such as ♠xxx ♥AKx ♦AKxxxx ♣x.

But the hand is too strong for a preemptive 3♦ bid and somewhat light for a 3♦ limit bid (adequate playing strength, but somewhat light in defense for a typical limit raise). What we need is some form of mixed raised based primarily on distributional values, not HCP. Who plays that? Or perhaps try a fit showing jump to 3♣, if you play them and both suits meet your minimum requirements. I don't usually play mixed raises or fit showing bids, but perhaps they should added to our bidding methods.

In the actual deal, South chose to cue bid 2♥ over 1♥ to show a limit raise or better in diamonds. I thought some panelists would object to that since cue bids suggest more defense (at least to me). So, I substituted the undefined 3♦ raise for the bidding problem – possibly a limit raise, possibly a weak raise – the sort of ambiguous bids our partners always seem to find.

Why Is South Allowed to Sacrifice after Preempting?

What puzzles me is that majority of panelists readily sacrificed over 4♠, even though many, if not most, of them considered their prior 3♦ bid to be preemptive. What happened to the fallback rule that when you preempt you must not voluntarily bid again? Or does that rule not apply to expert bidders on bidding panels? A plausible exception to the rule would be to allow the preemptor to double when holding more defensive values than previously promised (such as a trump stack, or a side Ace and a trump honor). That exception would allow speculative doubles, but what sort of preemptive hand should be allowed to take a later sacrifice? The extra defensive values make a set more likely and a sacrifice less desirable.

Do Not Concede a Large Negative Score

When you decide whether to sacrifice, the absolute difference between their score for making and your score for sacrificing is only part one of a two-part question. Minus 500 is, of course, better than minus 620, but you must also ask "how many MPs (or IMPs) will I get? If no one else bid to 4♠ and it makes, you are fixed; whether you are -620 or –

500 or -790, your MP score is the same zero. When the contract is likely to be uncommon, the only path to a good MP score is to beat their contract. Merely calculating the raw difference between potential scores at your own table is not by itself adequate to make a good decision.

At IMPs, the math is simpler; you need only worry about one other table. Going minus 500 in a sacrifice gains only a few IMPs if your teammates make the vulnerable game (net +120), but loses a ton of IMPs when the game goes down. A cheap sacrifice (likely -100, *possibly* -300) gives better odds for the sacrifice.

In our problem, you need to turn the probable fix (them bidding 4♠) into a profit, and the only ways to do that are to pass or double. For what it is worth, in the actual hand, 4♠ was bid at about half of the tables and always went down. The sacrifice was a big loser.

Finally, sometimes you will be caught when preempting. That does not mean you were wrong. When your goal is to crowd the opponents into a wrong guess at the 5-level before they have exchanged much information, you can risk a set of 500 because you often do not play the hand. So, in the auction 2♠ (X) 4♠ (5♥), the 4♠ bidder can risk a sizable set because he gets a good return: the possibility that the opponents will bid too high, or too low, or chose the wrong suit. The “sacrifices” you must avoid are in “slow” auctions, where both sides have exchanged much information. In both situations, just trust that your preempts did their job, and let them make the last guess. Do not hand them a nearly certain big score. You took the risk, now collect your reward by passing and defending well.

The Scoring

I ran the problem through bridgewinners.com two different times using different auctions. In one auction, I assumed South cue bid 2♥. In the second auction, I assumed South’s first bid was the admittedly ambiguous 3♦. Changing South’s first bid made no difference as to whether they ultimately chose to defend or sacrifice. Among persons who responded to both bidding problems, their final choice was the same regardless of their first bid, with only one exception. Their choices were mostly binary: 52% sacrificed in 5♦, 38% passed, and only 10% did anything else (mostly, they bid 4NT or 5♣). The SCB panel’s bids were much more dispersed, with the most popular bid being 5♣ (usually treating it as a lead director). Here are the full results:

Bid	BW		SCB		Score	Comments
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.		
4NT	4	4%	2	12%	60%	Why show club suit? Show lead.
5♣	3	3%	7	41%	80%	Good for lead, but bad sacrifice.
5♦	53	52%	3	18%	70%	Bad sacrifice, no help with lead.
DBL	3	3%	1	6%	100%	Best to defend; wins part scores.
Pass	39	39%	4	24%	100%	To defend is to win.
On strike	0	0%	(1)	N/A		(% excludes the striker)
Total	102	100%	17	101%		Rounding error.

This was a tough problem. I strongly dislike sacrificing on this hand and would award less if the sacrifice were not so popular. The many auctions leading to 5♦ show imagination.

Many panelists will be disappointed with the scoring, and I expect most panelists will not change their opinions. But to me, passing or doubling are the best overall actions. That’s how I see it.

[CB] Richard and I are on the same page here. That's a first, I think. But that's OK, we have very different bidding styles. I am used to having both a mixed diamond raise and a preemptive diamond raise available in competition, so my comment that I was wildly overstrength for a preemptive raise was in that context.

I'm also used to opening everything that breathes, and a few hands that have quit breathing within the last 5 minutes. So I am less likely to beat 4♠ than most. But I regard saving here as the worst of the common bridge mistakes. Once you've showed your whole hand, bidding again when pass is an option is asking for trouble. And that's what I think I have done with my 3♦ raise that led to this problem.

I was playing online with Phil the other night and the opponents had the following auction. The interpretation of the auction is all mine, but it's so typical. Pass-1♠, 2♣ (Drury, I have about 10 points and spade support)-2♦, 2♠ (I still have 10 points and spade support), 3♠ (do you have anything extra?)-4♠ (I have 10 points and spade support). Down 2. Note that responder, who had 10 points, a doubleton diamond, and 3 spades to the king, sent the same message with all three of his bids. Bidding the same values over and over is bad bridge.

PITTSBURGH'S SPRING SECTIONAL IS ON!!!

MAY 20-22, MASONIC CENTER NORTH

[FULL DETAILS ARE HERE!](#)

Steel City Bridge

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 3

~ EDITED BY CRAIG BIDDLE ~

MARCH 2022

BIG GAMES:

			Arlene Port	Glenshaw	Sat
Glenda Gibb & Lynn Gibbs	79.17	Natrona Heights	Trudy Cohn Mon	Glenshaw	Sat
Patricia Anders & William Holt	73.00	Steel City	Jack Hammer Thurs Asim Ulke	Export Glenshaw	Mon Wed

STREAKS:

2 in a row:

			Judy Haffner	Glenshaw	Wed
			Peggy Shivetts	Export	Mon
Lynn Gibbs	Natrona Heights	Mon	Leroy Hackenberg II	Export	Mon
James Gump	Glenshaw	Mon	Samuel Bliman	Lebo	Fri
James Gump	Rodef	Thurs	Chris Macoy	Lebo	Fri
August Costanzo	Rodef	Thurs			

UNIT NEWS AND NOTES

LORRAINE HANNA

Tournament Schedule

Here's a link to tournaments scheduled for 2022. Hope to see you there!

<http://www.pittsburghbridge.org/Tourneysched.htm>

Congratulations to our new Ruby Life Masters, Cynthia Custer, Phyllis Geinzer and Donald Turacy, Sr.; Our Silver Life Master, Randy Pearson; Bronze Masters, Anne Allen, Ruth Ann Boyd

The Pittsburgh Bridge Association Board of Directors has dedicated Committees to encourage, build and support our local games. We have Committee heads who are not on the Board, but nonetheless serve a very valuable service. Here are a few...

Darlene Mannheimer is our Novice Liaison. She encourages and directs games tailored to novice players. This is so important in growing our game.

Fred Schenker has been our Caddymaster for over 10 years. Fred would like to transition this responsibility to someone new. He will train his replacement starting with our next tournament in May. The job of the Caddymaster is to recruit and train our caddies to efficiently work in our tournaments. If you have a grandchild, or someone you know who would be interested in this good paying job, let Fred know; if you're interested in becoming the Caddymaster, let Fred know at fschenker2@gmail.com

Please help us to retain caddies at bridge games by becoming the CaddyMaster or recruiting caddies. We need your help! I'm thinking a good source of caddies would be our Bridge in Schools students.

[CB] Late breaking news from Lorraine - John Doyal has volunteered for this task. Many thanks to Fred Schenker for his many years in this role.

Education Bridge in Schools: We had an active dedicated group of volunteers, headed by Paul Caplan who taught in our local schools. It was very successful and we were expanding our reach to the bridge players of tomorrow. We hope to get back to this program in the near future. A big thank you to all of you who were a part of this important program and hope you continue when we're able.

Pro-Am Charity Game; now known as the Jane Marshall Pro-Am Charity Game. The Board has renamed this tournament in honor of Jane's contribution to bridge for the many years she served the bridge community, not only in this event, but in varying capacities. The purpose in providing this tournament is to bring together a pair who would not normally play together. A more experienced player is chosen by someone who would like the opportunity to play with a "pro" to hopefully learn a few new tricks. I think it's safe to say this was a popular event. We don't have a date as to when the next game will take place. We will need a Chair, or Co-Chairs to organize the event since Chris Wang who chaired this in the past has moved out of state. We have plenty of helpers; we need a Chief to oversee the tournament. Contact the Board on this page: <http://www.pittsburghbridge.org/board.htm>

Be kind to your partner, kinder to your opponents.

Lorraine C. Hanna

[ADVERTISEMENT]

Expert-level Bridge Lessons for advancing and intermediate players

Richard, the "King of Deception Plays," has shared his expertise with a dose of wit in Zoom lessons to players wanting to improve their game. Want to elevate your game? Richard's lessons will bring you to the next level and beyond. – *Lorraine Hanna*.

Richard Finberg – Virtually Outstanding. Teaching bridge well requires skill and knowledge, and playing bridge well is an art. Richard does both and his play of the hand is, I think, amazing. He has since the Covid crisis shared his expertise with our Unit members by giving free virtual lessons. Students at every level can learn so much from him. – *Arlene Port*.

In addition to my free group lessons, I also give private individual lessons on Zoom at affordable rates. I focus mostly on play and defense but can teach you "anything bridge," ranging from basic suit combinations to squeeze play. I can also improve your bidding judgment without overloading you with conventions. Playing lessons are also available.

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