

WHO'S THE CAPTAIN? HOW TO BID SENSIBLY IN ONE LESSON

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What is bidding all about? We all learn in that in developing our bidding system what each bid means; i.e. how many points and what distribution we are showing. All of this is well and good, but eventually we have to make use of all this information to arrive at a sensible contract. That is, some decisions have to be made using this information. It is like the president of a large corporation who collects sales figures and other financial data. He has to know how and when to use them and to make good decisions based upon them.

Similarly in bidding, we should use the same principles. Provide good information to your partner by telling him about your hand; then know the proper point in time to use the information to make a decision or, if necessary, ask the proper questions to obtain any needed additional data and information so as to make the best decision (as to the final contract). The *CAPTAIN PRINCIPLE* is merely a formal statement for achieving this goal. This principle is:

Every sensible auction should proceed until a (the first) limit bid is made at which point the partner of the limit bidder becomes the captain for the remainder of the auction. Then the captain's job is to "steer the (partner)ship" to the final contract.

Certainly the captain has the best knowledge of the combined assets of the partnership for this hand, so that he can most effectively direct the bidding towards the final contract. Basically, there is nothing new about this principle. In effect, experienced players have always known and used this principle even if not consciously. If we can fully understand and apply this Captain principle, then at least 95% of all our bidding problems are readily solved.

However, we must make certain we understand what is meant and implied by this principle. First, the definition of a limit bid. Most players understand what is meant by a limit bid, namely a bid which pretty well defines the overall strength (and distribution) of the hand between a rather narrow range; i.e., between a lower and upper limit. Common examples are:

Opening 1NT = 15-17 HCP;

Raise of Partner's Opening 1 of Suit; i.e., 1S - 2S = 6-9 Points

A (the first) limit bid may be the first bid made, the second bid, or may not occur until two or three rounds of bidding have occurred; there is no general rule and can be made by either the opener or responder. Thus, one should not deliberately distort his distribution just to make a quick limit bid in the early rounds. The same principles are true as applied to defensive bidding; i.e., after simple overcalls or takeout doubles. So as to be sure of no misunderstanding, let us list common limit bids.

COMMON LIMIT BIDS

No Trump Bids - Opening or Responding

Raise of Partner's Suit

Rebids of the Same Suit - Jumps or Non-jumps

Preemptive Bids - Weak 2's, Opening 3's, Jump Overcalls, etc.

Preference Bids - giving partner a simple preference or a jump preference (when typically he has bid two suits)

Some Passes

Jump Response to a Takeout Double

Undoubtedly most can think of some others. Bids that are not limit bids are ambiguous as to strength and often are made so as not to incorrectly limit the hand. For example,

O R

1H - 1S None of these bids particularly limit either the opener's
2C or responder's hand; e.g., the 2C rebid can be made on a minimum hand or good hand just short of a jump shift to 3C (20 + points). Now if the responder makes a simple preference to 2H, that would limit his hand to a minimum, typically 6-9 points.

In my view, once the first limit bid is made and the partnership captain is thus selected, the "telling" is over. This is the pivotal point of the auction and should be sought out in all sensible bidding sequences. The job of the captain then is either to place the final contract or to ask questions so as to elicit more detailed information on the strength (either min or max) and/or distribution of the limit bidder's hand.

The limit bidder acts like the slave in a master-slave relationship. Of course he must respond intelligently with good judgement to any questions posed by the captain. But he doesn't have to know how good (or bad) is the captain's hand. He just responds intelligently and saves his mental energy for the next hand. Perhaps a few examples will help solidify the thinking behind this principle.

EXAMPLE 1

1NT - 2NT? A simple situation in which we are familiar, responder is *asking* opener to go to game with a maximum; he is not showing a particular number of points, although his strength can be readily deduced if desired.

EXAMPLE 2

1S - 2S Opener in this case is captain as responder's 2S bid
2NT? is the first limit bid (even though 2NT in itself could be construed as a limit bid). But 2NT should be viewed as an ask or invitation. Should we go on to game based upon whether your limit bid is a minimum or maximum and should we play in spades or NT? Without any specialized partnership agreements (2NT is not forcing); the answers are: Pass or 3S with a minimum depending upon suitability of hand for NT or suit play; similarly 3NT or 4S with a maximum.

EXAMPLE 3

1S - 2S Here is a similar situation, except now that 3C is again an ask,
3C? forcing for one round, with special emphasis on the club holding for indecisive/middle range strength; 3S is the minimum reply with 4S and any other response (such as 3NT) indicating a maximum and possibly suggesting an alternative contract.

EXAMPLE 4

1S - 4NT? This auction almost doesn't make any sense, unless the only thing the responder needs to bid a small or grand slam is the number of aces and/or kings. Nobody has limited their hand or described their distribution so that, except for very rare cases, we cannot be sure of how high to bid or whether to play in a suit or NT.

1S - 2C 4C is not Gerber, since no limit bid has been made (so
4C; no captain yet), just a strong forcing raise of clubs

1S - 4C; If 4C is, for example, a forcing splinter raise of spades, then it is the
first limit bid, so that the jump to 4C was *not* made by the captain.

Hence, this corollary is very logical since the only time you want to use Gerber (or Blackwood) is after a limit bid so that one partner has a good picture of the total partnership assets and has some idea of how high to bid.

Therefore, to bid sensibly, always ask "Who's the CAPTAIN?"

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CAPTAIN PRINCIPLE

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Typical Limit Bids

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Some Passes
Jump Response to a Takeout Double

Preference Bids

1H – 1S – 2C – 2H Simple Preference (6-9 pts.)
1H – 1S – 2C – 3H Jump Preference (10 – 12 pts.)

Opponents Not-Passing

1H – 1S – P – 2S
3C - P - 3H Simple Preference (0 – 5 pts.)

Example Hand

S XXX
H XXX
D XXXX
C KXX

1H – 1S – P – 2S
3C - P - 3H Simple Preference (0 – 5 pts.)

Examples of Non-Limit Bids

1H - 1S - 2C

1C - 1H - 1S

1S - 2C - 2H

1S - 2C - 2H - 3D

No Captain Chosen Yet

Captain's Job/Options

- Place the Final Contract
- Ask questions to elicit more detailed information on the strength (either min or max) and/or distribution of the limit bidder's hand
- Then, ultimately place the final contract

Limit Bidder, of course, must respond intelligently with good judgment to any questions posed by the captain. Also, the Limit Bidder must know which bids are forcing (F) and which bids are non-forcing (NF).

EXAMPLES

Opponents Passing

1NT - 2NT (NF)?

1S - 2S - 2NT (NF)?

1S - 2S - 3C (F)?

1NT - 2D (Transfer) - 2H - 3D (F)?

Opponents Bidding (NV vs. Vul.)

2H - P - 4H - 4S

5H??

Example Hand

1NT - 2D (Transfer) - 2H - 3D (F)?

S X

H KQ10XX

D AXXX

C JXX

Examples of Non-Sensible Bidding

Opponents Passing

1S - 4NT?

2NT - 3NT - 4NT?

1C - 1H - 1NT - 2C - 2NT?

Example Hand

S X

H KQXX

D JX

C J10XXXX

2 Corollaries

- Closeout (Shutout) Bids
- Gerber - Extended Use

#1 Closeout Bids

Only a captain can make a shutout bid

Last Bids are NOT Shutouts

1H – 4H; 1D – 1H – 4H; 1C – 4S

Last Bids ARE Shutouts

1NT – 3NT; 3D – 3NT; 3C – 4S; 1S – 2S – 4S; 1C – 1H – 1NT – 2H

#2 Gerber (Extended Use)

A 4C Bid is Gerber Under 2 Conditions:

- Jump to 4C
- Only by a Captain (after a limit bid has occurred)

Handles all sequences following opening 1NT and 2NT, Including Stayman and Jacoby Transfer Sequences

Examples (Opponents Passing)

2C – 2H – 2NT – 4C; 1NT – 2H(T) – 2S – 4C;
1S – 2S – 4C; 2H – 4C

Non - Gerber Examples

1S – 3S – 4C No Jump; 4C is a Cue Bid

1NT – 2C – 2S – 4NT 4NT is Quantitative, as 4C Gerber is available

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3C - P - 3H Simple Preference (0 – 5 pts.)

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Examples of Non-Limit Bids

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1C - 1H - 1S

1S - 2C - 2H

1S - 2C - 2H - 3D

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1S - 2S - 2NT (NF)?

1S - 2S - 3C (F)?

1NT - 2D (Transfer) - 2H - 3D (F)?

Opponents Bidding (NV vs. Vul.)

2H - P - 4H - 4S

5H??

Example Hand

1NT - 2D (Transfer) - 2H - 3D (F)?

S X

H KQ10XX

D AXXX

C JXX

Examples of Non-Sensible Bidding

Opponents Passing

1S - 4NT?

2NT - 3NT - 4NT?

1C - 1H - 1NT - 2C - 2NT?

Example Hand

S X

H KQXX

D JX

C J10XXXX

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1S – 2S – 4C; 2H – 4C

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1NT – 2C – 2S – 4NT 4NT is Quantitative, as 4C Gerber is available