

December 23, 2010.

BILManager: Thank you all for coming and wish you Happy Holidays -Thank you Howard for the Series.

hondo717: You are all quite welcome. Let's get started. This is my fifth and final lesson on the Fundamentals of Constructive Bidding. What I have tried to do in these lessons is give you an idea as to the "whys" of modern bidding. I find that many students memorize rules in order to figure out how to bid. What I hope to do is explain the theory behind the rules. That way, even if a hand does not meet a specific rule, or there are two conflicting rules that apply to a hand, you should be more comfortable in choosing the correct bid. It is more important that you understand the concepts than the rules. If you understand the concepts, the rules are not nearly as important, as you can figure out most of the rules yourself.|PG||AT|

In the first lesson, I discussed the general theory of constructive bidding -- how to determine how high to bid; e.g whether or not you should bid game. On the vast majority of hands, the main decision each partnership has to make is whether or not to bid game. In the second lesson, I talked about how to apply the theory to hands when opener starts with 1NT. In the third and fourth lessons, I talked about how to apply the theory to hands when partner opens 1 of a major. In this final lesson, I will talk about how to apply the theory to hands where partner opens 1 of a minor.|PG||AT|

Constructive auctions when partner opens one of a minor are the most difficult. That is because opener can have a wide range of hands, from a weak balanced hand to a strong distributional hand. When partner opens 1N, that obviously makes things easy for the partnership; because opener's hand is well defined as 15-17 balanced. Even when partner opens 1 of a major, things are still relatively easy, because at least opener is known to have a 5+ card major. So the partnership knows almost half the cards in opener's hand. But when opener bids 1C or 1D, less is known. However, you still know a lot more about the hand than you think. Partner is very unlikely to have a 5-card major. Responder, in fact, should assume that partner does not have a 5-card major. In a few rare cases, opener can have a distributional hand with 6/5, but that is very rare. You should assume until informed otherwise that partner does not have a 5-card major. Responder also knows that partner does not have a 1NT opener -- 15-17 balanced. Finally, and this may be a surprise to many of you. In a vast majority of the cases (over 80%), opener has at least 4 cards in the minor. So, if necessary, responder can assume a 4+ card minor (such as when the opponents preempt). The only time responder does not have a 4-card minor is with 4-4-3-2 and 4-3-3-3 distribution, where the 4-card suit(s) are majors. Most of the time opener has a 4 card minor.|PG||AT|

let me briefly digress here. I recommend that you play "better minor", that is, with 2 3-card minors you open the suit that is stronger. However, some people play that you always open 1C when 3-3 in the minors. The advantage of that is that it vastly increases the odds that a 1D opener is done on a 4-card suit because the only time 1D is opened with a 3 card suit is specifically with 4 spades, 4 hearts, 3 diamonds, and 2 clubs. At the same token, that approach slightly decreases the percentage of the time that a 1C opener has a 4 card suit. Some people even play a "short club." That is, they play 1D promises a 4 card suit. so with 4-4-3-2 they open their 2 card club suit. I do not particularly like that approach and, even if you play that, you should still pass as responder with less than six points, no matter how many clubs you have. Otherwise, you can really get yourself in big trouble by responding with a very weak hand. So, should you choose to play a short club, you still can't worry about passing when you have a weak hand and are short in clubs. But as I said, I don't like the short club. I will assume for the rest of the hand that one of a minor promises at least a 3-card suit, and is almost always a 4-card suit.|PG||AT|

Responder's responsibilities are the same as always when partner opens 1C or 1D. Responder must a) figure out if their side has game and b) figure out what suit (or NT) to play in. We have already discussed previously how to decide if your partnership has game. Just to briefly review. As opener, you have one of 3 hand ranges -- min (12-14) medium (15-17) or strong (18+). Similarly, as responder your 3 hand ranges are min (6-8) medium (9-11) or strong (12+). So, as responder, if you have a strong response (12+), your first thought must always be "I must make sure our side gets to game." You as responder must continue to make forcing bids (often new suits) until your side reaches game. Similarly, as opener, if you have a maximum hand (18+), and responder makes any bid (showing 6 or more), you as opener must make sure your side gets to game. When both partner have a medium hand (15-17 for

opener, 9-11 for responder), it is a joint responsibility to get to game. That is just a review of what I presented in the first lesson. BTW, for those who missed any of these lessons, you can download the tutorials and movies from my web site www.hondobridge.com.|PG||AT|

Okay, so most of you should understand how to determine whether or not your side should be in game. What I will focus on in this lesson is determining the best suit to play in. On almost all game hands, you should strive to play in either 4 of a major or 3NT. It is fairly rare that 5 of a minor is the best contract. I am not saying it never happens that you want to play in 5 of a minor. But, if you made a rule in your partnership to never play in 5 of a minor, you would do fine, in fact better than most partnerships. I do not recommend you have that rule, but the point I am trying to make is, you better have a very good reason to bypass 3NT and go to 5 of a minor and a singleton or void in one suit is not usually a good enough reason if you have any reason to believe partner has a stopper (for example if partner has bid the suit). Too many people avoid NT when they have shortness and this is just plain wrong.|PG||AT|

Okay, enough lecturing, lol. In terms of finding the best fit, responder's first obligation is to find a major suit fit. And the most common case is finding a 4-4 major suit fit. So, responder's first obligation, once opener bids one of a minor, is to bid a major suit of 4-cards or longer. Some people will bid 1D over 1C, even with a 4-card major. And this is okay if you choose to play it that way. However, the modern tendency is for responder to bypass bidding diamonds in favor of bidding a major suit. So, 1C-P-1H can be done even with 4+ diamonds. The main point here is that your first obligation as responder is to show your major suit(s). Responder should bid their longer major in general. So, with a 5-card major and a 4-card major, responder should bid their 5-card major. However, with 4-4 in the majors, responder must bid hearts first, even if their spades are much better. Why is this? Because it gives the partnership the most flexibility to find their major suit fit. If opener has hearts, after hearing a 1H bid, opener will obviously raise. And if opener has spades and not hearts, opener can cheaply bid 1S over 1H. If responder, with 4-4 sometimes bid 1S, it would be very easy for the partnership to lose their 4-4 heart fit. That is the reason that with 4-4 in the majors, responder bids 1H over one of a minor, never 1S. |PG||AT|

As opener, if you are fortunate enough to hear partner bid a major in which you have 4-card support, things are easy--you raise partner. With a minimum opener, you raise partner to 2 (e.g 1C-1S-2S). Responder now will only bid 4 with a max hand (12+). With a medium opener, opener raises to 3 (e.g 1C-1S-3S). In that case responder will bid game with a medium (9-11) or max (12+) hand. And, if you are lucky enough as opener to have 4+ card support and a max opener (18+), jump right to game (e.g. 1C-1S-4S). Now, there is some confusion about that auction 1C-1S-4S. Some people say 4S is a "shutout" bid, and responder should pass. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, if you as responder have a max response (12+), slam is very likely. So, the 4S bid is not a shutout; it is merely informative, telling responder how many points opener has. Responder is still free to look for slam with a good hand.|PG||AT|

One other issue with opener. Suppose responder bids 1H in response to 1C or 1D and opener does not have 4 hearts, but does have 4 spades. With a minimum or medium opener (12-17), opener bids 1S. With a maximum hand (18+) and an [^]Bunbalanced[^]N hand, opener jump shifts to 2S. Note that I said an unbalanced hand. The auction 1C-1H-2S promises that opener has 5+ clubs and 4 spades. It also establishes a game force, since opener is showing a maximum opener. If opener has a [^]Bbalanced[^]N maximum, she rebids 2N. Please, note that the auction 1C-1H-2N does not deny 4 spades. It simply shows 18-19 balanced and not 4 hearts. If responder also has 4 spades, he should still look for a 4-4 spade fit. How you find the 4-4 spade fit depends on what conventions you play over 2N.|PG||AT|

If you play New Minor Forcing, you use that. I won't get into the details here, but I have a tutorial on new minor forcing on my web site. But just to give you a flavor, if playing New Minor Forcing, the auction 1C-1H-2N-3D means the following:

The 3D bid is artificial and asks opener about her majors. Opener will show either 4 spades or 3 card heart support. That is one way how you would find a 4-4 spade fit (or a 5-3 heart fit). Some people play "checkback stayman" where a 3C bid over 2N is similar in concept to New Minor Forcing, asking opener about her major suit holdings. If you play neither of those, then 3S over 2N shows 4 spades and asks partner to choose between 3N and 4S. The main point here is that the auction 1C-1H-2N does not

deny 4 spades.|PG||AT|

Now what about if responder has a 5-card major. Responder should bid that major over the 1C/1D opener. With 5/4 in the majors, responder bids the 5-card major. With 5 spades and 4 hearts, responder does bid 1S. As I showed previously, responder is only guaranteeing a 4 card major. So, opener usually only raises responder with 4 card support. However, this is not a hard and fast rule. If opener has 3 card support with an honor, and a distributional hand (usually a singleton or void), it is ok to raise to 2 even with 3 card support. Therefore, the auction 1C-1S-2S tends to promise 4 spades by opener, but will occasionally be done with 3 card support. The reason for this is that raising partner is the most encouraging bid opener can make. If you always rebid 1N or 2 of your minor with 3 card support, responder will often pass with a 5 card major, and you could easily miss game, or your best fit. In fact, I have seen the auction go 1C-1H-2C-P, where they end up in a 5-1 club fit, instead of a 5-3 heart fit. Please remember, with appropriate distribution, it is ok to raise one of a major to 2 of a major with 3 card support.|PG||AT|

What happens if responder does not have a 4 card major? Responder most often then bids some number of NT. With a minimum response (6-10) responder bids 1N. With a medium response (11-12) responder bids 2N. And with a maximum response (13+) responder bids 3N. What I just said is the standard way of playing NT responses. I personally make one small adjustment. I play 1N shows 6-9, 2N 10-11, and 3N 12+. However, the standard way of playing is fine.|PG||AT|

There are a few cases where responder, with no 4 card major, does not make a NT bid. First of all, if opener bids 1C, and responder has 4+ diamonds, responder should bid 1D rather than some number of NT. The reason for that is that the NT bids take up extra room. So, bidding 1D preserves bidding space. That means that if the auction goes 1C-1N, responder always has at least 4 clubs--responder is denying 4 diamonds 4 hearts and 4 spades. Some people play that 1C-2N can be bid with 4+ diamonds but, I do not personally like that because it too takes up extra room. I play that 1C-1N/2N/or 3N denies 4+ diamonds (as well as a 4 card major of course). |PG||AT|

Over 1D opener, things are a bit more complicated. You do not have the luxury of bidding 1C over 1D with clubs and 2C is fairly strong, depending on how you play it. 1D-2C tends to show 5+ clubs if you play SAYC, it can be done with as little as 10 points. If you play some versions of 2 over 1, it shows a game forcing hand. However, in the version of 2 over 1 that I play, 1D-2C shows 10+ points and is not a game force. This is something you have to work out with your 2 over 1 partners. In any case, there are many more distributions where you have to bid NT over 1D than over 1C because of the fact that you can't always show your clubs over 1D.|PG||AT|

Finally, let me get to minor suit raises. Although as many of you know I favor bidding "support with support", minor suits are one area where this is not the case. As my previous discussion indicated, playing a minor suit game is not usually a good idea. You should strain to play a major suit game or NT. The only time you raise is when there is little chance of a major suit game, and your hand is somewhat unbalanced. The classic raises work as follows (most people do not play the classic raises):
with 5+ card support or good 4 card support responder raises to 2 with a min hand (6-8),
with 5+ card support or good 4 card support and a medium hand(9-11), responder makes a "limit raise",
and
with a max hand, responder must bid a new suit (or 3N); responder has no raise available.

However, these classic raises are no longer played by most people. Most people play what is known as "inverted minor suit raises." Briefly, what that means is you reverse the meaning of a raise to 2 and a raise to 3. That is not exactly true, but is the general idea. So, a raise to 3 (e.g. 1C-3C) shows 5+ card support and a weak response (6-8). It also denies a 4 card major, as we discussed before. The idea is that it is likely that the opponents have a major suit fit, and you are making a preemptive raise to make it harder for them to find their fit. A raise to 2 is stronger than a raise to 3. It shows a medium or maximum hand (9+) and at least 4 card support. It is forcing at least to 3 of the minor. If you play inverted raises, you need to understand the follow ups when responder raises opener to 2 but that discussion is beyond the scope of this lesson. I have a tutorial on my web site about inverted raises which you can download if you are interested. However, I don't recommend you play inverted raises unless you understand the follow ups when partner raises 1 of a minor to 2. Next, let's go through a few

examples.|PG||AT|

Assume your partner opens 1@C. What do you bid with @Sxxxx @HKxx @Dx @CKxxxx?|PG||AT|

You bid 1@S over 1@C. Your first obligation is to show a 4 card major. Some people might say that if you play inverted raises 3@C is better tactics, particularly with a bad spade suit. But for now, the correct bid is 1@S. Leave the tactics to the experts :). Remember, if you do not bid a major over 1 of a minor (e.g. bid NT or raise), you are denying a 4-card major.|PG||AT|

Okay, after 1@C what is the correct bid with @SKQxx @Hxxxx @Dxx @CQxx?|PG||AT|

Here the answer is 1@H. With 4 hearts and 4 spades, bid hearts first. Even if your spades are a lot better, as on this hand. By bidding hearts first, you give your side the most flexibility in finding your 4-4 major fit, either in hearts or spades.|PG||AT|

Over 1C, what do you bid with @SKxxxx @HKQxx @Dxx @Cxx?|PG||AT|

Here you should bid 1 spade, since you have 5 spades and only 4 hearts. If partner makes a minimum rebid of 1N or 2C, you have to pass. On occasion, you will miss a 4-4 heart fit (remember partner cannot bid 2H -- a reverse -- unless he has a medium or maximum opener). That is a flaw in standard bidding. You occasionally "lose" the 4-4 heart fit.|PG||AT|

Over 1@C what do you bid with @Sxxxxx @HKQxx @DKx @Cxx?|PG||AT|

Technically, 1@S is still correct. However, I would not quarrel with you if you chose to treat the weak 5-card spade suit as a 4-card suit and bid 1@H instead. The only downside is partner will never play you for 5 spades.|PG||AT|

Over 1@C what do you do with @Sxxxx @Hxx @DKQxxx @Cxx?|PG||AT|

The modern tendency is to bypass diamonds and bid 1@S. I would not quarrel with that. But, I personally would bid 1@D to show where my values were. You can always raise spades if partner bids 1@S.|PG||AT|

Over 1@C what do you bid with @SKxx @HQxx @Dxx @CKxxxx?|PG||AT|

1N is good, particularly if you play inverted raises, where you would have to jump to 3@C to raise clubs. But if playing classic raises, 2@C showing 6-8, would be a good choice as well.|PG||AT|

Over 1@C what do you bid with @SKQxx @Hx @DQxx @CK10xxx?|PG||AT|

Here 1@S is clearly best. Remember, raising clubs denies a 4 card major.|PG||AT|

Over 1@C what do you bid with @Sxxxx @Hxx @DKQx @CKQxx?|PG||AT|

Again, 1@S is correct. Some people might choose 1N (or 2N) with such weak spades. However, I think 1@S will be the winning bid more often than not.|PG||AT|

What do you bid over 1@C with @SKxx @HKxx @Dxx @CKQxxx?|PG||AT|

With honors in both majors, I would bid 2N. If you choose to raise clubs (3C if classic raises, 2C if inverted raises) that would be acceptable.|PG||AT|

Over 1@C what do you bid with @SKxx @HKxx @Dx @CKQxxxx?|PG||AT|

Here, because of your singleton and six card support, clubs is more likely to be a better contract. I would make a club raise (2C if inverted, 3C is that is the limit raise).|PG||AT|

Over 1@C what do you bid with @Sxx @HKxx @DKQxxx @CQJx?|PG||AT|

2N is possible, showing a balanced hand with 11 or so. But, I think 1@D is a much better bid. It keeps the bidding lower, allowing you to explore, and shows where your values are. I hesitate to bid 2N (or 3N) over 1 of a minor, as that takes up a lot of room.|PG||AT|

After 1@C what do you bid with @SKQxx @HKxxx @DKx @CQxx?|PG||AT|

The first thing that should occur to you as responder is that your side has game (you have a maximum response). The only question is whether to play NT or a major. Start with 1@H, which is forcing. No matter what partner does, you will know what to do next. If partner raises hearts you will bid game in hearts. If partner bids spades, you will bid 4@S. If partner makes any other bid, you will bid 3N.|PG||AT|

Over 1@C what do you bid with @SKQx @Hxx @DKxx @CKQxxx?|PG||AT|

If you play classic raises, you can't make a forcing club raise, so you are forced to bid 3NT, since you have a game forcing hand. If you play inverted raises, you can bid 2@C (forcing) and find out if you have a heart stopper.|PG||AT|

This concludes this lesson, and the lesson series. Thank you all for coming.

hallway: @D@D THANK YOU Howard for providing members with the opportunity to attend this special series on Constructive Bidding together with tutorials - very much appreciated by all.