



Andrew Kambites

The fourth suit

THIS is the last article of my series on no-trump bidding. It explains bidding the fourth suit, and ironically it doesn't feature very much no-trump bidding! This is because most readers understand very well how the fourth suit can identify the necessary stopper for no-trumps, but don't appreciate just how much more widespread its use should be. I will return to some of the principles introduced right at the beginning of this series.

If you have a choice of reasonable bids, and one of them is 3NT then bid it.

However:

If opponents are silent and we have bid three suits, I require a stopper in the fourth suit in order to bid no-trumps. If our auction has told them what to lead, then I had better be prepared for it.

Consider your dilemma as responder with Hand A after the following auction:

| Hand A | Opener | Responder |
|-------------|--------|-----------|
| ♠ A Q 6 3 2 | 1♥ | 1♠ |
| ♥ 9 4 | 2♣ | ? |
| ♦ 6 4 3 | | |
| ♣ K Q 9 | | |

Opener has shown at least five hearts and at least four clubs. He might have a minimum opening bid, or he could have up to 18 points. You have enough for a game try opposite an opening bid and hence quite a

lot of bids are available, but none of them is really appropriate. You don't have the sixth spade necessary for 3♠, four-card support that is required for a raise to 3♣, or a diamond guard for 2NT. You are too strong for simple preference to 2♥, but jump preference to 3♥ would guarantee three-card support.

The answer is to bid 2♦, the fourth suit. This doesn't show diamonds, indeed if you had 11 points and values in diamonds you would bid 2NT.

The fourth suit is artificial and forcing. It passes the message that responder is at least strong enough to make a game try (maybe 10 HCP), but has no suitable bid available. 2♦ doesn't specifically promise half a diamond stopper. You cannot afford to give such a restricted use to such an important bid. Only a tiny fraction of the hands where as responder you would be stuck for a bid contain Q-x or J-x-x in the fourth suit. Neither does 2♦ specifically ask for a diamond stopper for no-trumps, although often the fourth suit bidder will be delighted if partner has a diamond stopper and can bid no-trumps. Its use is more widespread than that. Opener is asked to use common sense to describe his hand further. Showing an extra card in one of opener's suits, or support for responder's suit might be just what responder wants to hear.

How forcing is the fourth suit?

The fourth suit is artificial and forcing, but I suggest this simple rule as to how far it is forcing:

After the fourth suit is bid, any bid at the three level is game forcing.

Thus if opener has a better than minimum opening bid, he must avoid responding to the fourth suit with a two-level bid.

We now return to our original auction. The following hands show how our original auction might develop:

| Opener (Hand B) | | Responder |
|-----------------|--|-------------|
| ♠ 7 | | ♠ A Q 6 3 2 |
| ♥ K J 10 8 6 5 | | ♥ 9 4 |
| ♦ Q 7 | | ♦ 6 4 3 |
| ♣ A J 4 3 | | ♣ K Q 9 |

| Opener | Responder |
|--------|-----------|
| 1♥ | 1♠ |
| 2♣ | 2♦ |
| 2♥ | Pass |

2♥ shows a minimum opening bid and suggests six hearts.

| Opener (Hand C) | | Responder |
|-----------------|--|-------------|
| ♠ 7 | | ♠ A Q 6 3 2 |
| ♥ A J 8 6 3 | | ♥ 9 4 |
| ♦ A Q 2 | | ♦ 6 4 3 |
| ♣ A J 4 3 | | ♣ K Q 9 |

| Opener | Responder |
|--------|-----------|
| 1♥ | 1♠ |
| 2♣ | 2♦ |
| 3NT | Pass |


Opener realises that responder could pass 2NT, so he makes sure that game is not going to be missed.

| Opener (Hand D) | | Responder |
|-----------------|--|-------------|
| ♠ K J 4 | | ♠ A Q 6 3 2 |
| ♥ A Q 8 6 3 | | ♥ 9 4 |
| ♦ 2 | | ♦ 6 4 3 |
| ♣ A J 4 3 | | ♣ K Q 9 |

| Opener | Responder |
|--------|-----------|
| 1♥ | 1♠ |
| 2♣ | 2♦ |
| 3♠ | 4♠ |

3♠ shows three-card spade support and is game forcing.

Occasionally opener might have to improvise. Consider the following example: ⇨

| | | |
|------------------------|---|------------------|
| Opener (Hand E) | | Responder |
| ♠ 5 4 | | ♠ A Q 6 3 2 |
| ♥ A K 7 6 3 |  | ♥ 9 4 |
| ♦ 7 2 | | ♦ 6 4 3 |
| ♣ A J 4 2 | | ♣ K Q 9 |

| | |
|---------------|------------------|
| Opener | Responder |
| 1♥ | 1♠ |
| 2♣ | 2♦ |
| 2♥ | Pass |

With a minimum opening and nothing to add to what he has already said, opener reluctantly rebids the five-card heart suit.

There is one sequence which allows the fourth suit to be bid at the one level:


| | | | |
|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| <i>Auction (i)</i> | | <i>Auction (ii)</i> | |
| Opener | Responder | Opener | Responder |
| 1♣ | 1♦ | 1♣ | 1♦ |
| 1♥ | 1♠ | 1♥ | 2♠ |

I recommend that 1♠ in (i) is natural, showing four spades. It might be necessary to find a 4-4 spade fit if opener has a 4-4-0-5 or 4-4-1-4 shape. Responder may be quite weak for this bid, but it should be played as forcing for one round. In (ii), 2♠ is the conventional fourth suit bid.

One last useful principle

I will end with another useful principle:

In any auction in which the fourth suit is used, the sixth bid makes the auction game forcing.

| | | |
|------------------------|---|------------------|
| Opener (Hand F) | | Responder |
| ♠ 5 4 | | ♠ A J 9 6 3 2 |
| ♥ A K 7 6 3 |  | ♥ 9 4 |
| ♦ 7 2 | | ♦ A 4 |
| ♣ A J 4 2 | | ♣ K Q 9 |

| | |
|---------------|------------------|
| Opener | Responder |
| 1♥ | 1♠ |
| 2♣ | 2♦ |
| 2♥ | 2♠ |
| 3♠ | 4♠ |

Responder is looking for doubleton spade support, but cannot jump to 3♠ over 2♣ as that is not forcing. So he uses the fourth suit and then bids on: 2♠ is the sixth bid and makes the auction game forcing. Now there is plenty of space to compare notes. □

Beyond the green baize

This column features interesting people you might meet at a local bridge club. Contributions welcome!

Robert Gasser



DR ROBERT GASSER is a regular at Summertown Bridge Club, Oxford, where his charming and cheerful manner make him a popular member. He has not been playing there all that long; although he learned to play bridge in his undergraduate years at Oxford University, he gave up the game for about forty years because of family and work commitment, and has only gone back to playing club bridge two years ago. Once a week is enough for Robert, but he keeps his bridge wits sharp by practising with the computer software his daughter gave him as a Christmas present. 'I enjoy a friendly atmosphere,' says Robert, 'and I don't think people should be fanatical about bridge, but at the same time I prefer it if the game is taken seriously – and I do like to win!'

Robert, who before retiring was the bursar of Brasenose College, Oxford, had an unusual hobby before bridge beckoned again: he specialised in Hitchcock-type appearances in several episodes of the famous *Inspector Morse* series. 'It wasn't what you might call acting,' says Robert, 'but it was great fun!'

Robert's involvement with *Morse* was the consequence of another hobby of his: acting as the liaison between filming and broadcasting companies, and what was unofficially known as the 'Oxford Filming Consortium' – a group of colleges, libraries and theatres which had agreed

to being hired as film locations.

Robert Gasser well remembers how much he enjoyed working with the late John Thaw (*with Robert in the picture above*) and the rest of the cast in the town that Colin Dexter, creator of *Morse*, (also a regular 'extra' in the series), dubbed the 'murder capital of the world.' Robert's walk-on roles in *Morse* brought him his only speaking part – as the Chancellor of Oxford University in Richard Attenborough's film *Shadowlands*, in which he delivered a speech in Latin!

Asked about his best and worst memories of his involvement with film making, Robert remembered talking to the late Sir John Gielgud on the set of a *Morse* episode as one of the highlights. The worst moment came right at the start of his film 'career': during the shooting of *Young Sherlock Holmes*, produced by Steven Spielberg in 1985, a scene required a main square in Oxford to be covered in snow. The effect was achieved by smothering the area with a special foam, while the falling flakes were simulated by five tons of bits of paper pumped out by Hoover-like devices. 'It all worked very well,' sighs Robert at the memory, 'but clearing all that paper was a bit of a nightmare, especially since I had not realised that it would be my job to make sure there would be no trace of it left at the end of the shoot!'