

Bidding judgment

Send your questions to multiple world champion Heather Dhondy c/o the editor at 23 Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LR or e-mail elena@ebu.co.uk. Please include your name and address even if writing by e-mail – though we are happy not to publish your name to protect the guilty!



ASK HEATHER

Heather Dhondy

CP ASKS: Playing Benji, what should you open with:

♠ A K Q 10 9 6 4 3
♥ 6
♦ 7 2
♣ A 5

My partner opened a game-forcing 2♦, which got us into a lot of trouble.

According to the letter of the law, you are permitted to open 2♦; however, this does not make it a sound bridge action. A 2♦ opening in Benji shows a hand where you can make game in your own hand, requiring nothing from your partner. This hand falls short by one trick, but is nonetheless a powerful hand where you would be reluctant to open at the one level, since you require very little from partner to make game a certainty. For this reason, playing Benji, I would recommend opening 2♣.

DB WRITES: The bidding was:

West	Partner	East	Me
		1♥	Pass
1NT	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	Pass	3♣
Pass	Pass	3♥	Pass
Pass	Dble	All Pass	

My 3♣ bid was based on (i) being not vulnerable and (ii) holding a six-card suit, a singleton heart and a 4-count. 3♥ doubled rolled in. As it turns out, 3♣ is at most one off. So the point is: am I debarred from protecting (at pairs) with very weak hands in case partner doubles for penalties or is partner debarred from doubling in this situation in case I've got a weak hand?

The short answer is that no-one is debarred from doing anything, but I would consider your action an unwise one, not because it might persuade the opponents to compete to 3♥, which I fear partner will double, but because I would expect to go for a sizeable penalty myself. Consider the hand on your left: West has, almost for certain, denied four spades, four hearts and four diamonds. Therefore he has a *minimum* of four clubs. In nearly all cases he will be delighted that he is out of a misfitting auction (the 2♥ bid in no way implies a fit) and has something to sink his teeth into!

I do not know your partner's hand so it is hard for me to apportion blame; however, if 3♥ only just made, I suspect he had a reasonable double at pairs.

CHRIS Burton writes: There are two schools of thought as to whether, after partner has opened a Weak Two and RHO has passed, a new suit bid by responder should be forcing or not forcing. I teach the method recommended in the EBU's course, i.e. that a new suit bid is non-forcing but encouraging, and I think that that is a sensible system. However, the alternative (known as 'RONF': a Raise is the Only Non-Force) seems to have a larger, or at least more vocal, following.

This is indeed a much-debated topic, including at the very top level of the game. I prefer to play (and teach) a change of suit as forcing, but there are plenty of experts who would disagree.

The first reason for my preference is that unless you are playing a Weak Two in diamonds, most changes of suit are going to force the bidding up a level, and often

from a major to a minor. Therefore you must be convinced that your suit contract is going to play significantly better than partner's in order to want to make this non-forcing bid. Partner's Weak Two will ideally be based on a good suit and should be playable facing a singleton, therefore the times when you are going to want to make this bid are low-frequency.

My second reason is that playing this bid as non-forcing leaves you with serious problems when you want to make a forcing change of suit. This is the most important point. Developing really good hands without a fit for partner becomes a big headache. Suppose you hold:

♠ A 3 2
♥ 3
♦ A K Q
♣ A K Q 9 6 4

and partner opens 2♥. Playing non-forcing responses, are you going to bid 3NT, 6♣, 4NT, or some other option? Facing:

♠ 6 5 4
♥ K Q J 6 5 4
♦ 5 4 3
♣ 3

you must play in 3NT, but facing:

♠ 4
♥ A 10 9 5 4 2
♦ 4 3
♣ J 10 7 2

you can play in 7♣.

If 3♣ is forcing you can comfortably respond 3♣, hear a 3♥ rebid on the first hand and settle in 3NT, whereas on the second hand partner will splinter with 4♠, and Blackwood will get you to the grand. □