

Asking questions

My last article showed how the auction could be completed when a limit bid has been made. Simple limit bids include all no trump bids and the second time any suit is bid. But it's not quite as simple as that. Sometimes a question needs to be asked before the decision on the final contract can be made.

Questions after no trump limit bids

♠ K Q 9 5 3
♥ 3 2
♦ A J 10
♣ K Q 2

Partner opens 1NT. You are in charge as partner has made a limit bid. With your 15 HCP, your side should definitely be going to game. But perhaps 4♠ would be better than 3NT, you can't tell. Bid 3♠. This asks partner to bid 3NT with only two spades but to raise to 4♠ holding three or more.

♠ K Q 3
♥ 9 3 2
♦ Q 10 7 5
♣ K Q 2

Partner opens 1NT, putting you in charge. With 12 HCP, your side may only have a combined 24 HCP, a bit thin for game. On the other hand, partner may have 14 HCP and that extra couple of points make game a much better prospect. Bid 2NT, asking partner to bid 3NT with a maximum and pass with a minimum.

♠ K 10 8 3 2
♥ 7
♦ K 9 3 2
♣ K 5 2

Partner opens 1♣, you respond 1♠ and partner rebids 2NT – a strong limit bid showing 17-18 HCP. Now you are certainly going to game with 9 HCP but maybe 4♠ would be safer. Bid 3♦, showing an unbalanced hand with 5+ spades and 4+ diamonds. If partner shows you 3-card spade support, by bidding 3♠, choose to play in 4♠ rather than 3NT. Partner could have weak hearts, such as ♥Q 3 2 for his 2NT rebid and the defence might cash lots of heart tricks.

♠ K Q 8 3 2
♥ 2
♦ K Q 10 7 5
♣ J 2

Again you respond 1♠ to partner's 1♣ opening and he rebids 1NT. You have a good hand and want to go to game but maybe 3NT is not best. A 2♦ bid would tell partner to pass if he preferred diamonds to spades, so you must rebid 3♦, showing a shapely game forcing hand. Even 5♦ might be a better contract than 3NT.

Questions after a suit limit bid

♠ K Q 9 5 3
♥ J 2
♦ K 9 7 4
♣ A K

You open 1♠ and partner bids 2♠. You have quite a good hand and might choose just to bid 4♠ directly. But you can ask partner by bidding 3♠, saying go on to 4♠ if you are at the good end of your 6-9 range, pass otherwise.

Some people prefer to ask a more specific question in this auction. A bid of 3♦ says 'Game is possible. Bid 4♠ if you can help me with my diamond losers, either because you have shortage or because you have high cards in diamonds'. This 3♦ bid is called a 'trial bid' because you are trying for game by telling partner where you need help.

♠ K 8 7 4
♥ Q J 4 3 2
♦ 9
♣ A 9 5

Partner opens 1♣. You respond 1♥ and partner raises to 2♥. This limit bid puts you in charge. Should you go for game in hearts or play in a safe part score? Partner has shown an unbalanced hand, probably with five clubs and four hearts and about 12-14/15 HCP. With more distribution or points, partner would have made the stronger limit bid of 3♥ or 4♥. You can try for game by bidding 3♥, asking for useful extra values, or by bidding 2♠, specifically asking for help in spades.

My beginners looked a bit dubious about this topic, most preferring to stop in safe part scores that would not test their card play too much. Still, they managed quite well with my practice hands.

Asking and answering questions

♠ A 8 6 4	♠ 9
♥ A K 10 7	♥ Q 9 8 3 2
♦ A 5	♦ 10 6 4 3
♣ Q J 2	♣ K 5 4

Roy opened 1♥, the correct bid on a balanced hand with both majors, which is too good for 1NT. Sally raised to 2♥, a limit bid showing 6-9 HCP and 4+ hearts. Roy tried for game with 3♥ but Sally passed quickly with only five points.

At the next table, when Peter raised Janet's 1♥ to 2♥, Janet tried for game with 2♠. Now Peter knew that, although his hand had minimum points, his singleton spade was just what partner wanted so he jumped to 4♥ and Janet made ten tricks.

Russell, too, opened 1♥ but when Sylvia replied 2♥, he went straight to 4♥. With 18 HCP he thought game would be good. He made it but he was lucky to find Sylvia with such a suitable dummy. She might have had a flatter hand, say, ♠9 5 3 ♥Q J 8 3 ♦K 6 3 ♣8 5 4 and now 4♥ is bound to lose two spades and two clubs.

♠ Q 8 6	♠ 9
♥ A K 7	♥ Q 9 8 3 2
♦ A 5 2	♦ K J 10 3
♣ Q J 10 8	♣ K 5 4

Over Alex's 1♣, Jill responded 1♥ and Alex rebid 1NT, showing 15-16 HCP. Jill wasn't sure whether to go to game with 9 HCP so she tried 2NT. Alex was a maximum but he was worried that his spade and diamond stoppers were weak, so he made the excellent bid of 3♥. It told Jill he was a maximum but it also

showed 3-card heart support. Jill bid 4♥ with her 5-card suit. It proved to be a better contract than 3NT, which lost the first five spade tricks at another table.

♠ K 6 4	♠ Q 9 8
♥ A K J 10	♥ Q 3 2
♦ A 9	♦ J 10 6 4 2
♣ Q J 10 8	♣ K 5

Having just heard about the idea of showing 3-card support for partner on the second round, Emily found an interesting bid. Having responded 1NT to Dick's 1♥ opening and been raised to 2NT, she tried 3♥ to show her 3-card support. Dick only had four hearts, so he signed off in 3NT. But had his ♠4 been the ♥4,

he would have played in the safer contract of 4♥.

♠ K 6 4	♠ A Q 9 7 3
♥ A K J 10	♥ Q 9 8
♦ A 9	♦ 10 6 4 3
♣ Q J 3 2	♣ 4

To reinforce that point, Dick and Emily bid this hand next. The auction started 1♥ 1♠ 2NT. Now Emily bid 3♥, showing her 3-card heart support. Dick only had four hearts but he also had 3-card spade support, so he bid 3♠, which Emily was pleased to raise to 4♠.

Some key points

- ❑ After a limit opening or rebid, the other hand should consider investigating alternative contracts, particularly in a major suit.
- ❑ If you haven't raised partner's major at the first opportunity, any subsequent bid in that major shows 3-card support.
- ❑ If partner raises your major, you can try for game by re-raising to the three level. But this bid won't tell partner where you need help. A trial bid, identifying the suit with losers, may be more helpful.