

Responder has a really good hand

If your partner opens the bidding and you have 16 or more points, you know for certain that your side is going to bid at least to game. Even if partner's opening bid is based on a 10 count with a 6-card suit, your side has at least 26 HCP. It is your duty to let partner have the good news straight away. Partner can't see through the back of your cards and won't know how good your hand is.

Sx K Q J 8 6	You	Partner
Hx A 4 3		1hx
Dx K Q 2		
Cx Q 3		

Suppose you have the hand on the left and partner opens 1hx. You clearly are going to bid your spades and a response of 1sx would require partner to make another bid. But if you bid 1sx and partner bids 2cx, you must now make a further bid that ensures your side reaches game. Knowing that partner has five hearts, you might bid

4hx to make sure game is reached.

Sx K Q J 8 6	Sx A 2	You	Partner
Hx A 4 3	Hx K Q J 10 2		1hx
Dx K Q 2	Dx 8 3	1sx	2cx
Cx Q 3	Cx K 7 6 2	4hx	

Partner holding the 13 point shown will be very happy to see your strong dummy and will make eleven tricks, losing just to the aces of clubs and diamonds. But partner could have had a stronger hand, say the dxA instead of dx8. Now partner

would make 12 tricks without any problems. You would both be disappointed that your side had failed to bid a slam. 'How could I tell you had such a strong hand?' partner would say. And it's quite clear partner couldn't tell that you had a hand where game was certain.

The answer is that with 16 or more points you should make a stronger response. Make a jump shift, bid 2sx over 1hx. This jump bid says, 'Never mind if you have a weak opening partner, my hand is strong enough, with 16 or more points and a good 5+ spade suit, that game will make even if you are weak'. It is Forcing to Game

Forcing to game means that neither partner can stop bidding until game is reached.

Sx K Q J 8 6	Sx A 2	You	Partner
Hx A 4 3	Hx K Q J 10 2		1hx
Dx K Q 2	Dx 8 3	2sx	3cx
Cx Q 3	Cx K 7 6 2	3hx	4hx

When you bid 2sx, partner still makes his second bid in clubs, but now he cannot pass your 3hx bid. 13 points plus 16 in your hand probably isn't enough for slam, so partner just bids 4hx.

Sx K Q J 8 6	Sx A 2	You	Partner
Hx A 4 3	Hx K Q J 10 2		1hx
Dx K Q 2	Dx A 3	2sx	3cx
Cx Q 3	Cx K 7 6 2	3hx	6hx

But make your partner's hand stronger, with dxA instead of the dx8. Now partner has 17 HCP. 16 + 17 is 33HCP and now partner will be able to bid to at least 6hx. With a combined

33HCP and a fit in hearts, partner could just jump to 6hx. Our side cannot be missing two aces if we have a combined point count of 33 or more, since there are only 40 points in the pack and two aces are eight points.

Sx K Q J 8 6	Sx A 2	You	Partner
Hx A 4 3	Hx K Q J 10 2		1hx
Dx K Q 2	Dx 3	2sx	3cx
Cx Q 3	Cx A K 10 9 2	3hx	4NT
		5dx	6hx

Of course partner might have a very strong hand and perhaps your side could make a grand slam. Now partner will want to check whether your hand has two aces. The way to do this is using the Blackwood convention.

A bid of 4NT from partner asks you how many aces you have. Your replies are:

5cx = I have 0 or 4 aces,

5dx = I have 1 ace,

5hx = I have 2 aces,

3sx = I have 3 aces.

On the hand shown your 5dx response showed just one ace, enough to know opponents wouldn't be able to cash the first two tricks. But that's not all we need to make a slam:

We must not have two trump losers

We must be able to make 12 tricks

We won't lose the first two tricks to two aces (or an AK in a side suit)

On the deal shown:

5dx reassured partner that we weren't missing two aces.

Partner's holding in hearts was so solid that two trump losers were impossible.

The initial 2sx bid showed a good suit, so spades would provide tricks for declarer and so would clubs.

Partner could be reassured on all three important criteria before a slam is bid.

Sx K Q J 8 6	Sx A 2	You	Partner
Hx A 4 3	Hx K Q J 10 2		1hx
Dx A J 2	Dx 3	2sx	3cx
Cx Q 3	Cx A K J 10 2	3hx	4NT
		5hx	7hx

Suppose your diamonds were dxAJ2 rather than dxKQ2, you would respond 5hx to Blackwood and partner could bid 7hx.

After this introduction to strong responder bidding, I gave the students plenty of hands for practice. Here are a couple I used:

Sx K Q J 8 6	Sx A 10 7 2	Janet	John
Hx A 8 4 3	Hx K Q J 10		1hx
Dx 2	Dx K Q 3	2sx	3sx
Cx A Q 3	Cx K 2	4cx	4NT
		5hx	7hx

With 18 HCP John intended to rebid no trumps if Janet couldn't respond in spades. He was surprised to hear the 2sx response, but knew there was no need to rush the bidding as 2sx was forcing to game, so 3sx couldn't be passed.

When Janet continued with 4cx Peter felt he could now risk Black wood, despite holding only one ace. 5hx confirmed that an ace was missing and John jumped to 6sx.

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Sx K Q J 6 4 2	Sx A 7 5		1hx
Hx J 4	Hx K Q 10 9 8	2sx	3sx
Dx K Q J	Dx 8 3	4NT	5dx
Cx Q J	Cx K 9 8	5sx	

I won't name the West player who jumped to 2sx because she had a good 6-card suit and was so pleased to hear partner raise spades that she went straight to 4NT. The 5dx response,

showing just one ace meant that 5sx was too high and the contract went one down. Having made a jump shift, all she had to do was to bid 4sx, saying 'I have bid all my hand and have nothing more to show' and her partner would have passed.

There is much more to learn about bidding strong hands and next time I will look further into Responding with a Jump Shift.