

## More discussion with partner February 2004

In my last article, you saw how you could start a discussion between you and your partner. It's equally important to know how to stop that discussion before the auction commits you to a contract you can't possibly make.

The secret is the limit bid. A limit bid is when you say something that limits the strength and shape of your hand within fairly tight bounds. For example the 1NT opening bid is a limit bid because it limits your hand to 12-14 HCP and certain well-defined shapes (4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, 5-3-3-2).

The moment one partner makes a limit bid, the other partner becomes the 'Captain of the Hand' that is, he takes charge of the auction. He is the one who decides the final contract and his partner must respect that decision. So if you open 1NT, it is partner who decides whether your side will go to game or stop in a part score. It is partner who decides whether you will play in a suit contract or no trumps. For example:

♠ K Q 10 9 5 3
♥ 3
♦ A 10 6
♣ K Q 2

With 14 HCP making at least a combined 26 HCP, this responding hand knows that your side should be going to game. Since the 1NT opening must contain at least two spades, your side has at least eight spades between the two hands. So a 4♠ response tells opener what the final contract is going to be.

Other limit bids that the opener can make after the auction starts, say, 1♥ - 1♠ are:

- A rebid of 1NT or 2NT or 3NT.
- A raise of 1♠ to 2♠, 3♠ or 4♠.
- A rebid of 2♥, 3♥ or 4♥.

Responder can make limit bids after partner opens, say, 1♥:

- Pass – less than 6 HCP, no great fit for hearts.
- 1NT showing 6-9 HCP and not four hearts or four spades.
- 2NT showing 10-12 HCP and not four hearts or four spades.
- 3NT showing 13-15 HCP and not four hearts or four spades.
- A raise of opener's 1♥ to 2♥, 3♥ or 4♥.

You can see that the second time a suit is bid and all no trump bids are limit bids. How did my students get on with this new idea?

### Responding with a limit bid

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

When Pippa opened 1♥, Olivia raised to 2♥, a limit bid showing 6-9 HCP and 4+ hearts and telling her partner that she is in charge. Pippa had been going to rebid 1NT, but she passed 2♥ instead and managed to scramble nine tricks.

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

Change Pippa's hand, so that she opens 1♥. Olivia would make a different limit bid by replying 1NT, which means that she does not have four hearts or four spades, but has got 6-9 HCP. Whilst Pippa has an unbalanced hand, her partner must have length in the minors, so she should pass

1NT. Losing three spades and two minor aces still means seven or eight tricks made.

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

If Olivia had held a bit more she could have made the limit bid of 2NT to the 1♥ opener, showing a balanced hand with 10-12 HCP and stoppers in the unbid suits. Pippa would have raised to 3NT knowing the combined points were about 26.

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

Dick said 1♠ and Emily thought she ought to show her hearts. But then she realised that when one major suit fit had been found, they didn't need to find another one. Also it's always better to make a limit bid if you can, so she said 2♠. With a good hand, Dick went 4♠ and made eleven

tricks.

### Responding with an unlimited bid

A one level opening shows about 12-19 HCP. If it is top of the range, as few as six points in responder's hand can be enough for game. Even if opener is a minimum, just six points in responder's hand will mean your side has about half the points. So it is your duty to respond to partner's opening with a fairly miserable hand. You make a limit bid if you can but sometimes that is not possible.

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

Janet wanted to open 1♥ as hearts were her strongest suit, but obediently opened 1♠, her longest suit, as it's what I'd told her to do! Peter responded 2♦ to show he had at least 9 HCP and 4+ diamonds. 2♦ is not a limit bid and it requires partner to continue the auction. When Janet rebid 2♥, Peter

raised to 3♥, a limit bid that Janet could pass. But with 16 HCP where she might only have had 13, she went on to 4♥ and made eleven tricks.

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

This time it was right for Janet to open 1♥. With two equal length majors 1♥ is preferred as it gives the best chance of finding a major suit fit. Peter asked if he should make the limit bid of 1NT but he quickly saw why 1♠ worked better when Janet raised him straight to 4♠. He played carefully

and came to ten tricks.

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

When Jill opened 1♠, Alex knew his side held more than half the points, but there was no need to rush the discussion. He was strong enough to respond at the two level with 2♦ and that bid required Jill to bid again, so she said 2♥. Alex raised 2♥ to 4♥. Jill did brilliantly to make eleven tricks.

### Remember

- A limit bid occurs either the second time a suit is bid or when any no trump opening, response or rebid is made. A limit bid can be passed.
- Always make a limit bid if you can. The sooner a limit bid is made, the sooner the other hand can decide whether to try for game or stop in a part score.
- When one partner makes a limit bid, the other partner becomes 'Captain of the Hand'.
- If responder does not make a limit bid, opener is obliged to find a another bid, since responder's strength is unlimited.