

When to bid more and when to pass

Most club-level partnerships do a pretty good job in the bidding when they have a clear run, but they lose their way when the other side comes in. The trouble is that you need to change your thinking when both sides are bidding. These situations are common.

Try this:

West deals, neither side vulnerable

<i>You (West)</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♠ KQ875	1♠	2♣	2♠	3♣
♥ KJ5	?			
♦ KQ4				
♣ 92				

What do you call?

The first point to make is that you would bid game in the normal way if you could count on 25 Total Points. Here you have 15 Total Points and partner shows 6-9 so you can rule game out. Still, you are very close so you might bid three spades on that basis. It is tempting to follow this logic, but it is wrong. **When both sides are bidding, you should base your decisions on degree of fit, not points.**

Bid one more if you have a void in their suit or if you have shape, like a two suited hand.

When both sides are competing for the contract the Law of Total Tricks is useful in deciding how high to bid as you strive to compete to the level of your combined trumps.

8 trumps = 8 tricks

9 trumps = 9 tricks

10 trumps = 10 tricks

A very simple formula, isn't it? Let's look at a few examples.

♠ K 9 6 4

♥ Q 9 2

♦ 8 6

♣ Q T 5 3

Partner opens 1♥. You raise to 2♥. With 8 trumps and about half the points, you expect to take 8 tricks.

If your opponents bid 3♦, you do not have enough trumps to bid 3♥. Maybe Partner will have an extra heart, and she'll "take the push" to 3♥.

♠ K 9 6 4
♥ Q 9 2
♦ 8 6
♣ Q T 5 3

This is the same hand. This time Partner opens 1♠, and you raise to 2♠. With 9 trumps and about half the points, you expect to take 9 tricks, though your hand isn't good enough to invite game.

If the opponents bid over 2♠, you should "take the push" to 3♠.

If you can't make 3♠ with 9 trumps, then they were probably making their bid and you'll come out ahead on the scoresheet by bidding 3♠.

♠ K 9 6 4
♥ Q 9 2
♦ 8 6
♣ Q T 5 3

A third look at the same hand. Your opponents open 1♥, Partner overcalls 2♣, and Responder bids 2♥.

Partner could have as few as 10 hcp, so your partnership hcp total could be only 17. Nevertheless, you should bid 3♣ based on your 9+ trumps.

If Partner has only 10 hcp, she has at least two "plus values" in the hand, making 3♣ a good contract. You cannot wait for partner to bid one more, because she doesn't know about the 9+ club fit.

Remember to base your decision on degree of fit, not points -

Suppose North opens 1♥, East overcalls 1♠, South raises to 2♥, and West bids 2♠.

The auction is now passed back to responder, who must decide whether to pass and defend against 2♠ or compete further to 3♥.

♠ 9 5 4
♥ K 8 3
♦ K J 7 5
♣ Q 9 8

Here responder has a near maximum in high-card points for the raise to 2♥, 9 high-card points, but only three-card support. Assuming opener only has a five-card suit, the partnership has eight combined trumps. There are not enough combined trumps to compete to the three level, and that takes priority over having maximum high-card points for the raise.

♠ 9 5 4
♥ K 8 3 2
♦ Q J 7 5

♣ 10 8

Here responder has only 6 high-card points, a near minimum for the raise to 2♥. However, responder has four-card support for hearts, giving the partnership a nine-card fit. The Competitive Guideline suggests competing to 3♥. This may make, or may push the opponents higher, or may be defeated less than the value of the opponent's partscore.

The goal during competitive bidding is to assess how many tricks each side can make and, if the opponents can make a higher contract than you can, outbid them provided that the penalty they earn is less than they would obtain with the contract you outbid.

If you can make eight tricks in hearts and they eight tricks in spades, and they bid 2S, then you should bid 3H. You expect to go down but also expect the -50 or -100 score to be better than the -110 that their 2S would produce. Any positive difference (even 10 points) to the majority of the field is decisive in terms of matchpoints

The challenge of course is to be accurate with assessing the number of tricks each side can make. Bidding 3H when they cannot make 2S may not be such a good idea!