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## Dangerous Auctions – When Not to Balance

Some auctions are inherently “dangerous”, either because you know that partner will not have values, or because you have no expectation of a fit. In general, you should not balance when the opponents are in one of these auctions – better to sit quietly and hope you can beat their contract.

Dangerous auctions are of two types – 2/1 auctions and preference auctions.

In Standard American, a direct 2-level bid by responder shows at least 10 points. After an auction like:

1H – P – 2C – P  
2H – P – P – ?

The opponents have a minimum of 22 points with no heart fit. Partner will not have the 8-10 points you need to make a balancing bid make sense. Furthermore, you have no reason to expect a fit, since the opponents do not. You can pass here without even looking at your hand.

If the opponents are playing 2/1 as game forcing, don't even think about balancing if they stop short of game. Partner will have nothing, and the hand is a misfit.

Do not confuse “preference” auctions with true fit auctions. Particularly when opponents play 2/1, auctions like this are very common:

1H – P – 1NT – P  
2C – P – 2H – ?.

This does not really show a fit. Responder may have only 2 hearts, and is just taking a preference to opener's first suit. A 2/1 pair would have this auction with the following hands:

Opener: S-KJxx H-Kxxxx D-x C-AQx

Responder: S-Qxx H-Qx D-Kxxxx C-xxx

If you bid 2 spades expecting partner to have spades you may be disappointed.

The situation can be even worse when opener bids 1S, because responder can be long in any other suit.

For example, the auction could well be

1S –P - 1NT – P

2C –P - 2S - ?

if responder had any of the following hands:

S-Qx H-Q10xxx D-Kxx C-xxx

S-Qx H-Kx D-Q10xxx C-xxx

Or even

S-Qx H-Kxx D-xxx C-Q10xxx

If you have a hand that is tempted to balance in on this type of auction, you probably should have made an immediate overcall. Doubling here (inviting partner to bid a red suit), could be a disaster. Remember that if the opponents have a misfit, you probably do also.