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Two Types of Auctions

One of the things that is great for me about the Coaching Sessions is that I get first hand information on what newer players find confusing and what the common misunderstandings are. The source of many confusions seems to be not knowing which type of auction you are involved in. But this is critical information, because the bidding strategies and methods are completely different. Until you recognize which type of auction you are in, you cannot use the right methods! This recognition underlies all the lessons to come, so please stay with me!

In this context there are only two kinds of auctions:

Auctions where our side has opened the bidding

Auctions where the opponents have opened the bidding.

The fundamental question you must keep in mind is which side opened the bidding (us or them) because the goals, strategies, and methods are different for these two cases.

Type I - When our side Opens the bidding

When you or your partner opens the bidding (makes the first call other than pass) we can certainly hope to bid and make a game if partner has a suitable hand. While it may not work out, when you open the bidding you probably sort of feel that the hand should “belong” to your side. Almost all the bidding methods and rules that you have learned are intended to be used when your side has opened the bidding. These rules and methods are designed to determine if your side has a fit and the necessary points to bid a game, or whether a part score is the right contract.

Type II - When the Other Side Opens the bidding

When the opponents make the first bid in the auction, the situation is very different. Now you know that the opponents possess at least ~12 points of the forty in the deck. This leaves at most 28 points for you and partner, and that only happens if opener’s partner is completely broke. Therefore, when an opponent opens the bidding, it is very unlikely that your side will have a game unless you have very powerful shape and great fits. Therefore, none of the bidding rules and methods that you would use had your side opened the bidding apply anymore.

Usually when the opponents open the bidding and you want to get involved in the auction, you will do this by bidding a suit over (hence “overcalling”) the opening bid. You will make an overcall to accomplish one or more of the following objectives:

To interfere with the opponent’s auction and prevent them from reaching the proper contract.

To attempt to buy the contract in a part score if partner has a fit for your suit.

To suggest a good lead to partner if your side defends.

In general, when you make a suit overcall you are not really expecting to find partner with enough strength to make a game.

As we go through the cycle of lessons, you will see these concepts come up repeatedly.