

Play Too Fast Series - In the Bidding

By Mike Lawrence

This article on bidding represents a small change from the normal items that fall into this series. Instead of a play problem, there is a multitude of bidding problems. Each represents a certain type of bidding error. If you get none of these right, don't worry. Every player that I know got these wrong at least once in their lifetime.

If you get all of these right, I will look forward to reading your articles in future issues of the Bulletin. In all cases, no one is vulnerable. You are West. What is your bid in each bidding situation?

1. ♠Q 10 8 7 6
♥J 9 8
♦3 2
♣K J 8

West North East South

1H Pass

?

2. ♠K J 3
♥J 8 7
♦K 8 3
♣Q 7 6 2

West North East South

1H Pass

?

3. ♠J 8 2
♥Q J 8
♦Q 8 6
♣K J 7 2

West North East South

1D Pass

?

4. ♠Q J 7
♥8 2
♦A Q J 7 2
♣K J 2

West North East South

1D Pass 1S Pass

?

5. ♠Q
♥J 7 6 5 3
♦8 2
♣A J 7 5 3

West North East South

1D Pass

1H Pass 1S Pass

?

6. ♠Q 8 7 2
♥2
♦J 10 7 4
♣10 6 5 3

West North East South

1S Dbl

?

7. ♠Q 7 5 3
♥A 8 2
♦7 6
♣10 5 3 2

West North East South

1H Dbl 2H

?

8. ♠Q J 6 4 2
♥A Q 7 6 3
♦J 9
♣8

West North East South

1C

2C Pass 2S 3C

?

9. ♠K J 7 6 2
♥Q 9 7 6
♦4 2
♣K 9

West North East South

1D 1NT (16-18)

?

10. ♠K 2
♥Q 9 6 5 4 3
♦6 5 3
♣Q 3

West North East South
 2S Pass
Pass 3D Pass 3S
?

11. ♠K J 6 3
♥8
♦7 2
♣K 10 9 7 6 3

West North East South
 1D 1H 1S
?

12. ♠K 9 8 2
♥9
♦A J 3 2
♣A Q 7 3

West North East South
 1D
?

ANSWERS

1. ♠Q 10 8 7 6
♥J 9 8
♦3 2
♣K J 8

West North East South
 1H Pass
?

One would be hard pressed to imagine that your first bid as responder could be a difficult one, yet when I give this hand to my students, a majority of them offer the wrong answer. The correct bid with this hand is two hearts. It is not one spade. True, if your partner has spade support, bidding one spade will be OK and may even be best. If your partner does not have spade support, then he will have to rebid something else and you will be in an awkward position. Say that you bid one spade and East rebids two diamonds. You will certainly go back to two hearts but East will not know you really do like hearts. He will fear that you have something like a small doubleton heart instead of the J98. When you have the values to show

your partner major suit support, you should do so and not get involved in other stories. Look at it this way. If you opened this hand one heart, wouldn't you love to hear partner raise?

2. ♠2
♥K Q 7 6 5
♦A K Q 7 4
♣Q 4

With this hand, you would either bid four hearts or make a game try. If your partner responded one spade and went back to two hearts over your two diamond bid, would you not worry about his having two little hearts? If he does, your hand won't be all that good. Knowing about real support makes all the difference in the world.

3. ♠K J 3
♥J 8 7
♦K 8 3
♣Q 7 6 2

West North East South

1H Pass

?

Raise to two hearts. Do not bid three hearts and do not use a forcing notrump response if you have that available. A jump raise promises four card support so jumping is violating a major rule. In addition, this hand has such poor quality points that a belated raise to three hearts is no better. This hand has maximum high cards for a two heart raise but it has terrible shape and it has only three trumps. I rate this hand at about eight and a half support points. Here is a possible layout.

♠K J 3
♥J 8 7
♦K 8 3
♣Q 7 6 2

♠Q 8
♥A 10 6 5 3
♦A J 4
♣K 8 4

South has fourteen decent high card points. If North jumped to three hearts, South would go on to game.

How will game play? South has a spade loser, one or two heart losers for sure and maybe three, and a big headache in clubs. I can imagine South actually going down in two hearts, let alone three or four hearts.

This hand emphasises three important points.

A fourth trump is worth a lot. If North had one more heart, the chances are good that there will be just one trump loser.

Random queens and jacks are not good cards. Queens and jacks come into their own when they have some supporting honors go go with them.

Balanced hands are trouble. 4-3-3-3 hands do not play well in a trump contract. Even when the four card suit is trump, the lack of a ruffing value hurts the hand.

4. ♠J 8 2
♥Q J 8
♦Q 8 6
♣K J 7 2

West North East South

1D Pass

?

This is another judgment trap hand. Yes, you have ten high card points but they are lousy points. One notrump is fine. For you to make game with this hand, your partner will need a fifteen or sixteen count. With that good a hand, he might have opened one notrump.

In addition to the worry that comes with getting too high, there is the problem of how to go about doing it. If one notrump is not the right bid, then what is? Two notrump? Spare me. Two clubs? The rest of the bidding will be exciting. Better to respond one notrump and if given another chance, catch up on that extra half a point later.

5. ♠Q J 7
♥8 2
♦A Q J 7 2
♣K J 2

West North East South

1D Pass 1S Pass

?

Anyone who has followed my writings over the years will recognize this type of hand. The correct bid is two spades. Do not rebid one notrump and do not rebid two diamonds. If you bid notrump, the opening lead (you can count on this) will be a heart through whatever your partner has in hearts and you won't like it. If you bid two spades, you can still get to notrump if it is right and you can get to notrump from partner's side of the table if that is best. The other rebid, two diamonds, is seriously flawed too. Two diamonds should show a six card suit and inferentially it should show a hand that could not rebid one notrump. Most of the time, when you rebid your minor, you don't have any support for partner's major. If he has five spades to the nine and a stiff diamond and a minimum hand, he will pass two diamonds. Care to play there? Raising spades may get you to a marginal two spade contract, but if there is further bidding, your final contract will be excellent and well-reasoned. I feel quite strongly about this question and its answer.

6. ♠Q
♥J 7 6 5 3
♦8 2
♣A J 7 5 3

West North East South

1D Pass

1H Pass 1S Pass

?

Bid one ugly notrump. Do not bid two hearts on such a terrible suit and do not bid two clubs. The main point of this hand is that a two club bid, tempting as it is, would show at least ten high card points. When you bid two clubs, your partner will not know you are bidding on cheese in hopes of finding a safe home. He will think you are bidding constructively. If he has a fifteen point or better hand, he will continue until you get to game. Your hand will be a sad sight for him if he sees it and if he doesn't see it, he will wonder why you are losing so many tricks. At the conclusion of the hand, he will definitely be wondering what you had. You can alibi it away for a round or two, but eventually, he will see those cursed hand records and the truth will be out.

7. ♠Q 8 7 2
♥2
♦J 10 7 4
♣10 6 5 3

West North East South

1S Dbl

?

There is a fallacy in bridge that has tenaciously stuck around in spite of fifty years of publicity to the contrary. I expect that most readers of this article will be in agreement with the bid I am suggesting but my readers will admit that they know many who have not yet accepted this rule.

RULE - When your RHO makes a takeout double, a jump raise by you has a totally different meaning than when your RHO passes. You should bid three spades with this hand. If your RHO passed, a three spade bid by you would show either a limit raise if that is your system, or a game forcing raise if that is your system. When there is a takeout double, the jump raise no longer shows a good hand. It shows a weak hand with good shape and FOUR or more card support for your partner. This hand, weak as it is, is a fine example of a jump raise over a takeout double.

As noted, there is a good chance that you are already using the bid this way, in which case you fairly may ignore these comments and proceed to the next hand. If, however, you still use a jump raise as a limit raise or as a game forcing raise, you are losing out on a wonderful opportunity to mess with your opponents' bidding. I promise that using the jump raise as weak is the best treatment for this bid. If you have a good hand, you can redouble or can bid two notrump, a special bid that has become a standard way to show support with points. I can't discuss the details of that bid here, but since it is so popular nowadays, you should be able to get some information on it.

8. ♠Q 7 5 3
♥A 8 2
♦7 6
♣10 5 3 2

West North East South

1H Dbl 2H

?

Did you bid two spades? There is an area of bidding where the fear in us comes to the fore. "Bid two spades with only six high card points and a bad four card suit? Oh, my."

There are reasons why you should bid two spades and I can tell you the reasons that many do not bid two spades. First, the reasons why you should bid two spades.

You have six good-looking high card points and you have some shape. In support of spades, you have seven decent points. Your suit is poor, but your partner promises support so you will be safe in two spades. By bidding, you put your side into contention to make something AND you do something else which is valuable. Even if the hand does not belong to your side, you may push their side to the three level which may be higher than they are safe. All of this is in addition to the modest chance that your side can make a game.

If your partner opened one spade or overcalled one spade, would you not raise to two spades? Yes, you would. When partner doubles one heart, he is doing something similar to bidding one spade. He is showing spades, along with other suits as well. Since your partner often has four spades, is it not a wise idea to bid two spades, which is more or less the same thing as raising spades?

Why do many players fail to bid two spades? One reason is that they view a two spade bid as 'bidding' spades as opposed to 'raising' spades. Partner's double is a question which asks you if you have spades. When you do, you should try to say yes.

Another major reason why players do not bid spades with hands like this one is that in the recent past, they did bid spades with this kind of hand only to find that partner did not have support. Partner, it turns out, has doubled for takeout with only two spades. Fresh with the memory of playing in a four-two fit, players resolve that it will never happen again. This is what happens when you make a poorly judged takeout double and your partner is left high and dry in a stinky contract. Partners remember this kind of treatment.

Be sure that when you make a takeout double, you have what you are supposed to have and in time your partner will learn that bidding two spades with this hand is a good thing to do.

9. ♠Q J 6 4 2
♥A Q 7 6 3
♦J 9
♣8

West North East South

1C

2C Pass 2S 3C

?

Did you pass? Well done. Did you think of bidding three spades? A bad tendency. Did you actually bid three spades? Quite gross! You bid two clubs, showing five-five in the majors, and dragged a preference out of East. At this stage in the auction, if someone asked you what

East has, you would guess that East has from zero to eleven points and two or more spades. Not much of an insight. If someone asked East what you have, he would say that you have five-five in the majors with eight or more points.

Interesting, isn't it, how accurately East pegs your hand?

The question for the moment is simple. Who knows better how many spades your side can make, you or your partner? Given that you have a near minimum hand, it must be right to defer to your partner's judgment. If your partner has some bits and pieces, he will bid again. Give East this hand:

♠10 8 7 3
♥K 9
♦A 8 7
♣9 7 6 3

He will know that his fourth spade is gold and his high cards are fitting and he will continue to three spades.

Give East this hand instead:

♠9 5 3
♥10 5
♦K 8 6 5
♣Q J 5 2

East will know he has nothing for you and will pass three clubs in a flash. The key to this competitive bidding decision is the common one that says when you have a minimum for your prior bidding, you should let partner make the last decision. West, having shown his shape, should make no more voluntary bids.

10. ♠K J 7 6 2
♥Q 9 7 6
♦4 2
♣K 9

West	North	East	South
	1D	1NT (16-18)	
?			

There is one and only one bid for this hand. Double. If you fail to double with this hand, you will end up defeating one notrump a couple of tricks and will receive a boring one hundred points for your efforts.

That one notrump overcall announces a big hand, to be sure, but it is not such a big hand that South can be sure of making one notrump. When he bid it, he was hoping that his partner would produce a few points.

How many points do you have? You have nine high card points.

How many points does your partner have? You don't know for sure, but it is fair to guess that he has at least twelve and can have more.

This means your side has twenty-one high card points minimum and can easily have more.

Here is the hand that South has.

♠Q 9 3
♥A K 10
♦A Q 8 5
♣Q J 8

South has a good hand, as announced by his one notrump bid. How many tricks will it take in notrump? Well, if his partner has the king of spades and the king of clubs, South will make a notrump or two. If his partner produces no high cards or perhaps a jack, South's hand will make four red suit tricks and perhaps one more trick along the way.

West knows with his nine high card points that South is going to find a terrible dummy. South is not going to get to dummy to take any finesses. Because of this he will spend the entire hand leading away from his tennaces instead of up to them.

This is a lovely opportunity for West and he should take advantage by doubling and leading his fourth best spade. True, South will make one notrump on occasion when everything is sour for East-West, but that will be rare. My guess is that South will go down about eighty percent of the time, which adds up to a fine score for you.

I suggest that whenever your opponent overcalls one notrump you double it with nine or more high card points and with any eight point hand that offers a decent lead.

11. ♠K 2
♥Q 9 6 5 4 3
♦6 5 3
♣Q 3

West	North	East	South
	2S	Pass	
Pass	3D	Pass	3S
	?		

Hard to believe, but there is a good bid you can make with this piece of cheese. Double. The meaning of double is that you wish partner to lead a spade. You promise a high spade honor for this bid. The ace, king, or queen all meet this requirement.

The one thing that double does not mean is that you remember the bidding and want partner to know it. Doubling with two little spades or even three little spades is misguided. The opponents won't play it in three spades doubled and your double will give the opponents more room to sort out what they want to do. The only thing your double will do is convince partner that you want a spade lead. If he leads a spade and you can only produce a little card, your partner will feel deceived. Say you have a hand like this one.

♠7 6 3
♥K J 9 7 6
♦8 7
♣K 9 3

If you double three spades, your partner, if on lead, will lead a spade and that may not be good. If you pass three spades, your partner will think to himself that you did not ask for a spade lead. If, with this information, your partner still leads a spade, it is because his spades are good enough to do so. If you pass three spades and partner's spades aren't all that good, he will know to look elsewhere. Perhaps you will get lucky enough to see him lead a heart.

That can happen, but not if you make a spontaneous double without good reason.

12. ♠K J 6 3
♥8
♦7 2
♣K 10 9 7 6 3

West North East South

1D 1H 1S

?

Bid two clubs. A new suit in response to an overcall is not forcing. It says you have some points and feel safe in bidding. If your partner wishes to pass, he can and if he can bid on, knowing you have a few points, that is OK too. If East does rebid, say two hearts, you don't have to fret that you have promised him a good hand. You can and should pass two hearts knowing that East bid it without encouragement from you.

Think how you would feel if you passed one spade and heard opener rebid two diamonds. If this was passed to you, might you not feel like bidding three clubs now? Better by far to bid two clubs at your first opportunity. That way, you won't have to decide to bid three clubs later.

It surprises me how many partnerships play that a new suit is forcing. Some play, so help me, that a new suit promises a fit for partner's suit. It may give the partnership some comfort to play this way, but it means that you will be doing a lot of passing while you wait for the right hand. That is not my style and it should not be yours either. Bid two clubs on hands like this one and get involved in the auction.

NOTE that if you bid two clubs and they buy the hand, you prefer a club lead from partner. Obviously, if he has great hearts, he will lead them, but if he has a broken heart holding, he will be pleased to follow your hint.

13. ♠K 9 8 2
♥9
♦A J 3 2
♣A Q 7 3

West North East South

1D

?

The right bid is pass. I regret that this is not unanimous. There is a measurable number of players who insist on doubling with this hand and it saddens me that they do not go for five hundred points each and every time. Bridge is a forgiving game and you can make bids like this now and then and get away with them, but not if I am watching.

The right bid with this hand, good as it is, is to pass. If you double, your partner will bid hearts.

If he bids one heart, you will have to leave him in one heart which he will hate or you will have to bid something to escape. Doubling and bidding a new suit or bidding notrump shows a much bigger hand.

Things could be worse. Your partner might bid two hearts or even three hearts. You will hate both of these bids too.

A thoughtful player might bid one spade which is pretty close to being a good bid. With better spades, it would be a good bid. But you have poor spades, so that bid is out.

Best is to pass and see if the bidding won't go better for you later. If your LHO bids hearts and your RHO raises, you can double for takeout. That will be a fair description of your hand and with luck, your side will win out in the bidding.

RULE - When you have an opening bid and your RHO opens first, it is not necessary to bid. You will try to bid and often there will be a good bid available, but when there is not, it is best to pass instead of making up a bid for the occasion.