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This Week in Bridge

(141) Transfers in Competition

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Level: 4

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General

Transfer bids by the Responder are valuable tools in constructive bidding. These bids allow Responder to show suit length on the first call, usually five-cards, and use the next call to show the strength of the hand.

One of the most important features of these bidding tools is the siding effect -- who will be the declarer. For example, when partner opens 1NT, you want Opener to be the declarer, so using a Jacoby Transfer bid allows for this. This siding feature of a transfer bid is important in constructive bidding, but can also be put to use in competitive bidding. When one opponent shows a good hand, we usually want to put that player on opening lead. We can use transfers in certain competitive bidding sequences to accomplish this and force this opponent to lead away from their honors.

Transfer Bids in Competition

The reasons for playing transfers in competition are many:

- Allow for proper siding – to put the opponent with most of the points on lead.
- Force the opponents to lead into the opening bidder – lead into our HCP.
- Allow more ways for Responder to raise partner -- weak vs. constructive raises.
- Allow Responder to show two suits and stay at a low level – transfer then bid a new suit.
- Allow the partnership to show support or partial support at low level.
- Cause difficulty for the opponents in properly describing their hands.

Let's look at a specific situation to try to better understand these reasons.

When the Opponent Makes a Takeout Double of Our Opening Bid

When we open the bidding and the opponent makes a takeout double, we can play transfers by Responder in this situation to accomplish many of these goals.

Example
Consider these two hands as Opener and Responder.
♠ Q2
♥ K543
♦ AKT6
♣ 987

♠ K98
♥ JT7
♦ Q54
♣ K632

1♦ X 1NT
In this case, if Responder is the declarer then the likely spade lead will come through the opener's ♠Qx– which the Ace is likely behind. That will mean that our side has only one ♠ stopper.

Instead, imagine that you could transfer into 1NT to be played by the opening bidder. In that case, the takeout doubler would be on lead and would be forced to lead away from the ♠A. This would allow our side to have two ♠ stoppers – both the ♠Q and ♠K.

Advanced Note: If you play transfers in competition, then Responder bids 1♠ over the opponent's takeout double to show a balanced-type hand – instead of a direct 1NT bid.
1♦ X 1♠* -- Transfer to 1NT.

Conclusion
The point of this discussion is not to go into all of the technical details of how to play transfers in competition or the meaning of each bid, but instead to try to understand the reasons that partnerships choose to use transfers in many competitive auctions – and have us try to accomplish many of these same goals while playing standard methods.

If you run into opponents that are playing these kinds of conventions against you, understand why they are playing them and try to avoid giving up an extra trick compared to the partnerships who are playing more standard methods.