



# Adventures in Bridge

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## *This Week in Bridge*

### **(182) Play the Hand During the Auction**

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Level: 1

Robert S. Todd

[robert@advinbridge.com](mailto:robert@advinbridge.com)

#### **General**

When we are defending, visualizing the opponents' hands during the auction is helpful in predicting what is likely to happen during the play. Doing this visualization allows us to approximate the number of winners (or losers) that are likely to show up after the dummy comes down and play begins. (Of course, this visualization is also useful when we are the declaring side.) By visualizing both the shapes of hands and location of honors, we are able to predict or estimate how the play is likely to go. Let's see how to do this by looking at some examples.

#### **Visualizing the Play During Your Auction**

Here is an example hand and auction to help us learn to think about how to play is going to go during the auction. I hope this annotated auction, with thought processes, helps you learn to visualize tricks and think about the play of the hand while you are bidding.

We hold a monster hand.

♠ AKJT52

♥ A8

♦ AKJ

♣ AQ

We start by opening the bidding with 2♣ and hear partner bid 2♦. Let's assume that this is a "positive response", putting us in a game forcing auction and promising at least one Ace, one King, or two Queens. Now we bid our long strong ♠ suit and hear partner bid 3♠. This 3♠ bid does not promise a lot of extra values, but it shows either an Ace or a King, and a jump to 4♠ would show a positive response without a control, meaning two Queens.

2♣    2♦

2♠    3♠

Now we cuebid our ♣A by bidding 4♣, to see what partner can cuebid, but we hear partner bid 4♠. In this situation partner would cuebid any Ace or King they could below game (weak hands cuebid Aces or Kings, or shortness, in these kind of auctions).

4♣ 4♠

The inference is that partner has an Ace or King, but not in either ♦ or ♥. Looking at our hand, we know honor card must be the ♣K.

At this point let's stop and count our losers, just like we will be doing when we play the hand. We have at most 4 losers - 1♠, 1♥, 1♦, and 1♣. But partner has the ♣K and that should cover our ♣ loser and hopefully allow us to discard our ♥ loser, so we are interested in slam.

We bid 4NT Keycard in ♠ and partner bids the expected 5♦, showing zero Keycards. We want to find out if partner has the ♠Q, because if they do then we will have no ♠ losers, no ♣ losers, no ♥ losers (we plan to discard our ♥ on partner's ♣K), and at most one ♦ loser. So we bid 5♥ to ask partner about the trump Queen. Without the ♠Q, partner would rebid 5♠, trying to end the auction. But partner bids 6♣, showing the ♠Q and their expected outside King, the ♣K.

4NT 5♦  
5♥ 6♣

At this point we know we have no ♠ losers, no ♥ losers (our little ♥ will get discarded on the ♣K as long as partner has at least ♣Kxx, which seems very likely), no ♣ losers, and at most 1♦ loser. If partner has the ♦Q, a doubleton ♦, or maybe even something like ♣KJxx, then we will have no ♦ losers either. And if partner has nothing else, we will be able to try to finesse our ♦J to make the grand slam. A grand slam that is at worst on a finesse is a good contract to be in, so we give it a try and bid 7♠.

Here are both hands and the entire auction:

♠ Q973  
♥ 764  
♦ 42  
♣ KT85

♠ AKJT52  
♥ A8  
♦ AKJ  
♣ AQ

2♣ 2♦  
2♠ 3♠  
4♦ 4♠  
4NT 5♦  
5♥ 6♣  
7♠

As we can see, our ♦ loser can disappear by ruffing it in the dummy and 7♠ is a great contract!

### Visualizing the Play During the Opponents' Auction

When we are defending a hand, listening to the auction and predicting how the play is going to go is how we become a “great” defender. Let’s look at an example.

Here is the opponents’ auction, playing 2/1 Game Forcing.

1♠ 2♣  
2♥ 3♣  
3♦ 3NT

The Opener showed at least a 5-card ♠ suit and a 4-card ♥ suit and Responder showed game forcing values and at least a 6-card ♣ suit on the first two rounds of the bidding. Opener then bid the 4<sup>th</sup> suit, which is usually an effort to get to Notrump and asks Responder to bid NT with a stopper in that suit, which Responder did.

Now, here is our hand.

♠ 84  
♥ KT52  
♦ KQ73  
♣ A62

We have a good hand with most of the assets for our side. We know that Responder has a long ♣ suit, but has at most 6 HCP in that suit, since we have the ♣A. The Opener will likely have most of their points in the Major suits, since they asked for a ♦ stopper and there are not a lot of points likely in the ♣ suit in Opener’s hand. That means that Responder probably has a good ♣ suit, the ♦A, and some Major suit honor.

The normal lead against 3NT would be a 4<sup>th</sup> best ♦. But if we stop and think about the play, we suspect that the opponents will try to set up Responder’s long ♣ suit, in which we hold the Ace. We can hope to stop the opponents from getting all their ♣ tricks if we can knock out declarer’s entry at trick 1 and hold up on our ♣A to cut

communication between the two opponents' hands. We should lead the ♦K to knock out the suspected entry of the ♦A at trick 1.

Here are the opponents' hands:

♠ AQJ74  
♥ A852  
♦ JT  
♣ 76

♠ 5  
♥ Q76  
♦ A42  
♣ KQJ853

If we had led a low ♦, then the ♦J or ♦T would win trick 1 in the dummy and the declarer could set up their ♣ suit for 2♦, 5♣, and a couple of Aces to easily make 3NT. But without an entry to those ♣, declarer is left with fewer tricks - 2♣, 1♦, 1♥, and 2-3♠ tricks. That is a huge difference.

## Conclusion

One of the key skills to being a good bidder is to be able to “guess” how the play is going to go while you are bidding the hand. In Notrump, this means knowing where your winners are likely to come from and in a suit contract, this means knowing how you are going to get rid of your losers.

This visualization skill is valuable as a defender as well -- both in terms of making a good opening lead and in defending in the middle of the hand. Visualize both hands in terms of shape and strength (and even location of honors) to predict how these hands fit together and how the opponents will try to take tricks. Think before you play and develop these skills to help you take more tricks and improve your level of play as a defender.