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This Week in Bridge

(192) Dealing with Inference after a 2♣ Opening

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Level: 4

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General

When the opponents interfere after our 2♣ opening bid (SAF), we need good agreements about how to communicate with partner. We want to penalize the opponents when it is right (often when we do not have a game) and we want to bid on to the right game when this will give us the best score. Let's look at the modern approach of how to deal with the opponents' interference.

Modern Approach - Pass Positive (+), Double Bust (-) vs. Interference

When responding to a 2♣ opening bid, many players play 2♦ as positive and game forcing (showing at least an Ace, King, or two Queens) and 2♥* as a "Bust" - artificial and weak, not strong enough to bid 2♦. This agreement allows Responder to immediately communicate to partner if game is a good contract or if stopping in a partscore is reasonable.

This approach, of communicating Responder's strength, is valuable when the opponents compete over our 2♣ opening bid as well. When partner opens the bidding 2♣ and RHO makes an overcall, the modern agreement is to play:

- Pass* = Positive (+) Game forcing, promising at least an Ace, King, or 2 Queens
- Double* = Bust (-) Weak action, less than a positive action.

This is a good approach to bidding because it allows Opener with a bad 22-24 HCP to convert Responder's double to penalty. This is useful because when Responder does not have enough values to make game likely, then doubling the opponents (trying to score +300 or +500) can be the best result possible for our side.

Example

♠ KQ85

♥ A4

♦ AK73

♣ AK5

2♣ 2♦ X* P

__?

Pass and try to do better than +120/+150, what you may get declaring, by trying for +300/+500.

Other bids by Opener are the same as if the auction had started 2♣ - 2♥*, showing a bust. The auction is forced to at least one level below game (2NT, 3-Major, 4-minor).

Example

2♣ 2♠ X* P

2NT P __?

Here Responder bids with "Systems On" using 3♣ Stayman, 3♦/3♥ transfers, etc...

After a pass from Responder (showing positive values) the Opener often rebids 2NT (showing a balanced hand) and then Responder uses "Systems On", just as if the auction had gone 2♣ - 2♦ - 2NT.

Reopening Double by Opener After a Positive Pass

With shortness in the opponent's suit, after Responder's pass showing game forcing values, Opener can double. This is a takeout double, trying to look for a fit, usually with 4-cards in the other Major. This is an important conversation to have with partner: the meaning of double in this auction. If partner makes what they think is a takeout double and you think it is a penalty double, this can be a disaster for our side!

Vs. Higher Level Interference

Pass as a positive bid and double as a "bust" is a good agreement vs. 2-level and 3-level interference. Some partnerships continue to play this agreement at the 4-level while others return to double as penalty and pass as showing no values. This is because at the 4-level we are no longer in a forcing auction - remember that opening 2♣ forced us to 3-Major or 4-minor, so if the opponent jumps to 4♥ or 4♠, we can pass that out without doubling. How you deal with 4-level interference is something to discuss with partner, but a simple approach is to just continue your 2-level/3-level agreements of P=+, X=-. It is up to you and partner!

New Suits by Responder in Competition

After a 2♣ opening bid and an overcall by RHO then the modern approach is to play that bidding a new suit is natural, game forcing, and usually shows a very distributional hand – a hand that feels pressure to get its suits into the auction before the opponents bid (preempt the auction) even higher.

Example

♠ 5

♥ 5

♦ QJT873

♣ KQ852

2♣ 2♠ __?

Bid 3♦ with this distributional hand that has values. It is important to show your suits because you have 2 long suits to communicate to partner and you may need to bid ♦ now so you can bid ♣ later – even at the 5-level if there is further competition from the opponents. Instead, if you pass to show values, the opponents may preempt you out of the auction and you and partner may have to guess what to do at a high level without much knowledge about each other's distribution.

Conclusion

When you open the bidding with 2♣, inexperienced players are afraid to bid and compete in our auction. But as you play against more experienced players you will find they are more likely to interfere over your side's 2♣ opening bid. It is a good and important to have agreements with partner about how you deal with this interference. Give this modern approach (P = +, X = -) a try.