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This Week in Bridge

(289) 5-Major Bids

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Level: 3

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General

In the Major suits, we try to bid to game at 4-Major or slam at 6-Major. We try not to play in 5-Major, but it does happen, like when the opponents compete and push us beyond game, or when we go looking for slam and determine that we need to stop because we are missing two Aces. So, we can use a 5-Major bid for something other than to end the auction. 5-Major can be bid concisely for a variety of reasons -- to take away bidding space from the opponents or to ask partner a specific question (which we call the "obvious question"). Let's look at our options for how to make use of this 5-Major bid.

Preempting to 5-Major

The first reason we may choose to bid 5-Major is to preempt the bidding. When it is clear that our side is the weak side (we have preempted), then the opponents are the strong side, and a jump to 5-Major is a furthering of the preempt (or an advanced sacrifice against the opponents' game) and takes away the maximum amount of bidding space from the opponents at our first call.

Example 1

2♥ P 5♥

As Responder we may extend the preempt to 5♥ immediately because we think that the opponents will likely bid and make 4♠ and we want to force them to guess what to do at the 5-level immediately.

Example 2

2♠ X 5♠

This 5♠ bid is also an extension of partner's preempt. Instead of bidding 4♠ and waiting for the opponents to bid 5♥, then bidding 5♠, we bid 5♠ immediately, again applying maximum pressure to the opponents on the first round of the bidding.

Example 3

1♣ 3♥ X 5♥

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We can also make use of this 5M preempt as Advancer. When partner preempts with 3♥, we may expect that the opponents can make either 4♠ or 5-minor. Instead of waiting for the opponents to find *their* fit and then bidding 5♥, we bid 5♥ immediately, and force the opponents to guess what to do now. There are some situations where we should be careful to not assume that a 5-Major bid is preemptive, because if partner thinks that we are in a constructive bidding auction (not a destructive one) they will believe that a 5-Major bid has another meaning (asks another question). This is why it is important for us to be on the same page as partner in these types of auctions.

5-Major Obvious Question - Trump Suit Quality

In constructive bidding auctions (where our side has shown strength), we use a 5-Major bid (in a suit that we have been bidding) to ask partner for a specific piece of information that would otherwise be different to obtain. When no other suits have been bid (or at least very few) then we use a bid of 5-Major as a *Trump Suit Quality Ask*. This asks partner to bid slam with 2 of the top 3 honors in the trump suit and otherwise pass.

Example 4

5♠

Some partnerships play that an opening bid of 5♥ is preemptive, but few play this with an opening bid of 5♠. Most play that this asks Responder to bid slam with a good ♠ holding.

Example 5

1♠ P 5♠

This 5♠ bid by Responder asks Opener to bid slam with 2 of the top 3 honors in the ♠ suit.

The reason that we may choose to use this trump suit quality asking tool, instead of 4NT Keycard, is that we may have an outside void. In this case, Keycard may not help us determine if slam is a good contract.

Here are some example hands where we may want to use a trump suit quality asking bid:

Example 6

♠ KJT9xxxx
 ♥ --
 ♦ Ax
 ♣ AKQ

Here we just open 5♠ and ask partner to bid slam with 2 of the top 3 honors.

Example 7

♠ JT9xxx
 ♥ --
 ♦ AKQJx
 ♣ AK

With this hand we open 1♠, hear partner raise to 2♠, and then we bid 5♠, to ask partner to bid slam with 2 of the top 3 honors in the ♠ suit.

Note: This is our default meaning for 5-Major, when no other special meaning can be determined.

5-Major Obvious Question - Control in the Opponent's Suit

When we are in a constructive bidding sequence (we have values and are clearly not preempting the bidding) but the opponents are also bidding and we are exploring the possibility of slam, one of the common problems that we face is determining if our side has a control in the opponents' suit (are we off two quick losers in both hands?) When we have a control in the opponents' suit, we can often use a control-showing cuebid (CSC) to communicate this to partner; but if we have an excellent hand and want to bid slam but are lacking a control in the opponents' suit, we can use 5-Major to ask partner if they have a control.

Example 8

1♠ 3♣ 4♠ P
 5♠
 ♠ AKxxxx
 ♥ A
 ♦ AKJx
 ♣ xx

This is a hand that is interested in slam as long as partner has a control (Ace, King, Singleton, or Void) in the opponents' suit - ♣. A bid of 5♠ asks partner to bid slam with a control here.

Example 9

1♥ 3♦ 5♥

They are the preempting side and we are the strong side, so we do not "preempt a preempt". This asks Opener for a ♦ control.

5-Major Obvious Question - Control in the Unbid Suit

When we are trying for slam (in a uncontested auction) and we have started to use CSC to determine that we have controls in all the unbid suits (except one), then we can use a bid of 5-Major to ask partner for a control in the one remaining uncontrolled suit.

Example 10

1♠ 3♠
 4♣ 4♦

5♠

This is the type of bid we make with an excellent hand, but two quick losers in the ♥ suit. By bidding 5♠ we let partner know we want to bid a slam, but we are worried about the uncontrolled suit, ♥.

Example 11

1♠ 3♠
 4♣ 4♥
 4♠ 5♠

Responder can also use this tool to ask about the uncontrolled suit. Here Responder's 5♠ asks Opener to bid a slam with a ♦ control.

Responding to a 5-Major Control Ask

When partner asks for a control by using 5-Major we can simply bid slam with a control and pass without one (that is the simple approach). But we can also use a more sophisticated approach to describing our typing of control.

- Pass No Control
- 5NT King
- 6-Major Singleton (bidding our suit)
- 6-Suit Ace/Void (Cuebidding the suit partner is asking about).

This is a useful approach because partner may have a large number of tricks and be able to bid a grand slam when we have a first-round control, or partner may choose to play 6NT to protect our King if we are able to let partner know that is a second-round control we hold.

Conclusion

Though 5-Major is not a bid that we use frequently, it is one that can use to help solve some difficult bidding problems when we have the type of hand that needs specific information from partner. Spend some time discussing these situations with your regular partner. It is important to not have a mix up about when 5-Major is preemptive and when it asks one of the "Obvious Questions". Slam bidding is difficult and the more bidding tools you have in your arsenal, the easier it will become to bid good slams and stay out of bad ones.