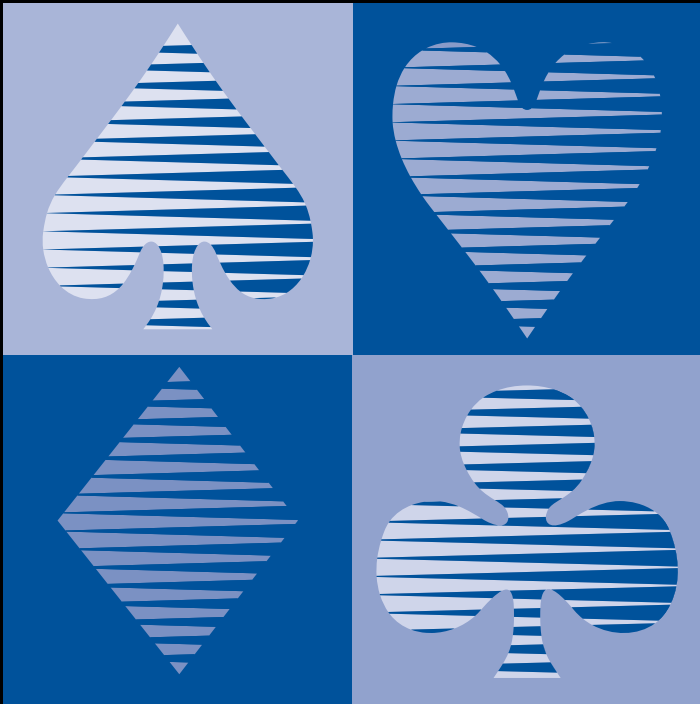

F O C U S O N

Bidding



D A N N Y R O T H

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M A S T E R P O I N T P R E S S

Foreword

This is not a book about systems, nor is it a book about conventions (although I confess I shall attempt to persuade you to adopt one or two in the course of it). This is a book about bidding, and about the places in the auction that we (and I use the word advisedly) go wrong. Let's take the opening chapter, as an example. I don't care whether you prefer to play a weak or a strong notrump, or eight-card majors, or the Purple Spotted Forcing Club. But I do care about how you decide when to bypass a major to bid one notrump, or what constitutes a decent opening bid and why, and what sequences you regard as forcing. You see what I mean about 'bidding' as opposed to 'system'? For the purpose of discussion, the example auctions are based on a fairly natural system with a strong notrump and five-card majors, but pretty well everything I talk about will apply, whatever you play.

Some words of warning

1) This book is not intended to be comprehensive; if you want an exhaustive treatment of something like negative doubles, balancing, or slam bidding, look elsewhere.

2) I'm going to point out some of the shortcomings of 'standard' methods in many areas, and suggest alternative treatments or conventions. This may disturb your peace of mind.

3) In some places I'm going to disagree strongly with accepted expert opinion. You probably won't go along with me at first, and perhaps never, but please keep an open mind and at least listen to my logic before you reject it.

4) Throughout, I'm going to ask you to think. A picture is worth a thousand words, and a bridge hand is worth any number of theoretical paragraphs. Stop each time you come to an example hand and try to decide on your own answer before continuing to read the discussion. Many of the examples are from hands I have myself (mis)bid and played, or are taken from expert-level competition. I hope I have learned something from them. I hope you will too.

Finally: *enjoy the book!*

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Some opening remarks

If I may start with an apparent irrelevance: it is generally agreed among the tennis-playing fraternity that a tennis player is only as good as his *second* serve.

A parallel might be drawn with bridge: I am firmly convinced that a bridge player is only as good as his bidding! I have lost count of the number of players who are admired as 'top-class' — being quite capable of producing endplays and squeezes as well as brilliant opening leads and deceptive cards with almost boring regularity — yet, give them a simple hand to bid with you and you would be far safer on the *Hindenburg* or the *Titanic*. Attend any major tournament or read the daily bulletins, and rest assured, there will be plenty of examples.

It is said that 75% of all the points unnecessarily lost at the bridge table are thrown away during the bidding and most of the remainder while defending. This is probably a reasonable assumption; if anything, it's an understatement. In the bidding, you are looking at only thirteen cards, while during the play, you can see twice as many (and an increasing number as play progresses) and you have information from the auction to boot. A far higher standard of accuracy can now be expected and usually materializes.

Bidding has developed very considerably over the years. One only has to read match reports from the pre-war period, popularly known as the Culbertson era, to see how very modest the standard

of play (in all three branches of the game) was in those days. Let it hastily be added that this is in no way a criticism of the players of that period. Just as, at that time, there was no color TV, space travel or computers, the game of bridge was still in its infancy, and by that stage had progressed that far and no further.

We now live in an era of very sophisticated constructive bidding systems, but as a counter, one in which preemptive bidding, particularly in the top-class game, has come very much to the fore. Fear of the accuracy of modern systems has led to a dramatic change of priorities. Nowadays, it would appear that the prime necessity is to make life difficult for your opponents, even at the expense of bidding your own hand properly. The prevailing rationale is that it is worth accepting the occasional massive loss for the more frequent benefits of the damage done to the opponents' auction. If you choose to adopt these methods, which include 10-12 notrump openings, weak two-bids, preempts and jump overcalls on pathetic five-card suits (S. J. Simon, who wrote the classic *Why You Lose at Bridge*, would be turning in his grave!), various types of raises that distinguish between preemptive and constructive and so on, that is fair enough. If you find yourself consistently successful with these methods, I shall not argue, although it has to be said that recent extensive research into bidding on sub-minimum values has revealed that it is unlikely to be a winning formula in the long run.

Here, therefore, it will be assumed that you prefer to bid constructively with less frequent preempts. There are enough opportunities to get into trouble, believe me. The purpose of this book, like its companion volumes, *Focus on Declarer Play* and *Focus on Defence*, is to try to point out some of the areas where players go wrong in the bidding. Some of these are the result of holes in the 'standard' bidding methods, and I'll make some suggestions about simple agreements that will help you and your partner bridge some of these gaps. For the most part, however, we shall be discussing everyday situations in which the rules you have learned are, at best, rough guidelines. You'll discover the right approach to thinking about the bidding so that when you do select a bid, you do it for the right reasons, and understand why your bid is the correct one.

Even the writers of fifty years ago agreed that it is better to play a bad system well than a good system badly. Make sure that, whatever you play, you and your partner are on the same wavelength. We're going to assume, for the purposes of this book, that you play a straightforward, 'standard' system, with relatively few gadgets or

conventions. If you are familiar with the Standard American Yellow Card, you will be quite comfortable. This is a summary of our base system, to which we shall suggest modifications as the book progresses:

Opening bids

1NT 15-17 with Stayman and major-suit transfers

2NT 20-21 with Stayman and major-suit transfers

3NT 25-27

1 major five-card suit, jump raises are limit, usually with four-card support; splinters; 2NT (Jacoby) shows a game raise or better, and usually four-card support

1 minor may be a three-card suit; 1♦ will normally be four cards except 4432; balanced responding hands bid 1NT (8-10), 2NT (10-12, no four-card major), 3NT (13-15)

2♣ 22 points or more or 9+ obvious playing tricks; game forcing except that 2♣ - 2♦ - 2NT (22-24) may be passed. A 2♦ response (negative) in principle denies an ace and a king or eight scattered points. Responder may use 2♦ as a waiting bid, intending to catch up later.

2♦/♥/♠ weak — a reasonable six-card suit with about 5-9 points.

Overcalls (vulnerability obviously is relevant throughout)

One-level: 8-16 points with a reasonable five-card suit

Two-level: at least a good five-card suit and opening values

Jump overcalls are preemptive, normally with a reasonable six-card suit

1NT overcall: 15-18 (12-14 balancing), Stayman and transfers still apply

Doubles

Negative up to 2♠

Responsive (after opener's suit has been supported) up to 4♦

Cuebids Michaels (at least 5-5)

Slam bidding Blackwood. Gerber directly over 1NT openings

Other Unusual notrump; fourth suit forcing to game

By calling it a 'standard' system, of course, we distinguish it from one in which a two-level response to an opening bid (1♠-2♦, for example) is essentially game-forcing. However, it's worth a short digression to examine which of our bidding sequences we regard as 'forcing' (i.e. partner may not pass them) and which we don't.

First, there are several possible approaches when responder