

The Advancing Player

Visualization

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An important part of bidding is compiling data about hands around the table. The world's best bidders are constantly **building up an image of their partner's hand**—and how well it meshes (or does not!) with their own. This gives them a better chance of finding “magic fits” where they can bid game or slam with fewer than the normal number of high card points. It also keeps them sensible and signing off when a misfit is recognized.

Bidding out your complete “pattern” of distribution will often prove helpful to partner. Responder may use artificial bids—such as New Minor Forcing or Fourth Suit Forcing—in order to gain extra information. Consider some examples.

With opponents passing, 1♠/1♥/2♣/2♦ (Fourth Suit Forcing) could be artificial. If Opener now bids 2♥, s/he is expected to be 3-1-4-5 (“prepared rebid” hand) OR 3-1-5-4 OR 3-0-5-5. **The key issue for Responder, if s/he has 5 spades, is that Opener is now KNOWN to have a singleton or void in the heart suit.** So, if Responder has NO wasted values in hearts (such as xxx), **the 40 point deck just became a 30 point deck for them, and slam is quite possible.**

The opening bid is 1♣ and Responder bids 1♥ (opponents passing throughout). Opener rebids 2♣ (usually a 6-card suit) and Responder bids 2♠ (New Minor Forcing or the equivalent). If Opener now bids 2♥ (showing 3-card support), s/he is also DENYING a 4-card heart suit (1st priority in response to NMF). Therefore Opener's distribution is (most likely) either 3-2-2-6 OR 3-1-3-6 OR 3-3-1-6. If Responder was doing a “fake” NMF—just to get more information—and has a hand that is something like ♥AKxxx ♦Ax ♠Ax ♣xxx, s/he can “see” that a spade slam is quite likely—perhaps even a Grand Slam even though they cannot have more than 30 HCP combined and could have only 27 HCP. [Maximum number of HCP that Opener can have is 15 because s/he did NOT jump in her suit on the rebid.]

Another example: 1♥ on your left. Pass by partner. 1NT Forcing on your right. Pass by you. 2♦ by LHO. Pass by partner. 2♥ by RHO. You are looking at a singleton spade; 2 baby ♦; ♥AQxxx and ♣KJxxx. It looks like a LOVELY hand for bidding 2NT, asking partner to pick a minor. **STOP AND THINK!** What does **partner** have? RHO does NOT have 3 spades or s/he would have raised spades directly. That means RHO took the “false preference” (after the forcing NT) with 2-card spade support. Therefore, your partner has **5 spades!** If RHO had held 4 hearts, s/he would have passed 2♦, rather than taking the false preference. Therefore, RHO has 3 or fewer hearts. Thus, **your partner has at least 4 hearts! Your partner has NO MORE than 4 cards in the minors** (2-2 or 3-1 or 1-3) and could have even fewer. This is a misfit hand. Do NOT bid anything! Since partner is marked with 5 of

their trump, and you are sitting behind Dummy—where most of the minor cards are likely to be, they are extremely likely to go down. **Do NOT turn a probable plus into a minus score.**

Another aspect of visualization is to think about what partner has shown you, e.g., in response to Roman Key Card Blackwood. and compare it to what HCP you can expect from partner's hand, based on the bidding. For example, if partner answers 5♦ (two Key Cards without the Queen) when you query with RKCB, and you have the other three Key Cards, plus the Queen, you can tell that partner is showing only 7 HCP (Ace and King) or 8 HCP (two Aces). If partner opened the bidding and rebid NT, she has at least 5-7 or 4-6 more HCP in her hand. You can decide whether to ask for Kings. In some cases, you can even judge the likelihood of partner holding a couple of Queens. All this further aids your visualization of partner's hand, and how well it will combine with your hand.

VISUALIZING OPPONENTS' CARDS & THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO YOURS

Picturing the opponents' hands is equally important. The honors in your hand get upgraded or downgraded as the auction progresses. Your partner opens 1♠ and RHO bids 1♦. Your ♦Kx is upgraded as “highly likely to take a trick.” You open 1♥ and LHO overcalls 2♦. Your ♦Kx is downgraded as “probably useless now.”

One of Eddie Kantar's suggestions is, when responding to partner's takeout double, subtract HCP for any Queens and Jacks in the opponent's suit. Your partner is expected to have two or fewer cards in that suit, so your “quacks” are useless points. They would be far more helpful filling in one of your partner's 4 card or longer suits. Secondary cards in opponent's suits are only useful for defense, or if you end up playing in no trump.

Suppose your partner opens a Weak Two in hearts. Your hand is ♠AQ ♦Kxx ♥KJxx ♣Kxxx. Your RHO now makes a takeout double. **I hope you love your hand!** You are sitting pretty, expecting just about any finesse you want to take to work. You would bid 4♦ with full confidence, expecting partner to have no real problem taking 10 tricks: 5 or 6 hearts; 2 spades; both minor suit Kings; and either a spade ruff in Dummy or possibly another trick from the ♥J.

Keep the same hand, and LHO opens 1♠ and partner bid 2♦—weak jump overcall. How well do you like your hand now? Both your minor Kings have gone into the toilet, and the spade finesse is probably losing. If partner has nothing other than ♦AQxxxx, 4♦ is highly unlikely to succeed. 3NT, even with a favorable spade lead will have problems (although some might risk it to protect those Kings from the opening lead, hoping to read the end position after running the heart suit). After all, LHO will have problems discarding as well. Your confidence level is much lower in this circumstance.

VISUALIZING THE OPPONENTS' DISTRIBUTION AS IT AFFECTS PLAY (& BIDDING)

A simple example. LHO opens 4♦ and partner and RHO pass. You trot out 4♥ with your 4 loser hand:

♠AKQ10xxx ♦x ♥Ax ♣Qxx

The lead is the ♦A and partner provides this Dummy: ♠xx ♦Kxx ♥Kxxx ♣xxxx for your delectation. LHO continues with the ♦Q. **Don't you DARE click on that ♦K!** If LHO has the 8-card suit usual for a 4-level preempt, you'll allow RHO to ruff the King away. Play low and ruff the heart. The King will be perfectly good AFTER you pull trumps.

Another classic example occurs when you know from the auction that RHO is out of her partner's suit, and you have only low trump in Dummy with which to ruff. Rather than ruffing, and receiving a KNOWN overruff, you should try discarding a sure loser in another suit from Dummy. The loser-on-loser play may save you a trick. Typical example below.

Suppose you hold: ♠AKQ98 ♥Jxx ♠Ax ♠Axx opposite ♠5432 ♥108 ♠Kxxx ♠Kxx. LHO leads the ♥A after opening a Weak Two bid in the suit. RHO signals the possession of a doubleton, and LHO continues with the ♥K and then ♥Q. Ruffing with a low spade is hopeless. Discard a losing club from Dummy and insure your contract (unless spades are 4-0). After you pull trumps, you can ruff your losing club in Dummy. This loser-on-loser play should be your choice even when the spades on Dummy are more robust, e.g, 10542. Why ruff with the 10 and risk losing to the Jack when you can almost guarantee the contract by discarding that losing club? Do the right thing!

VISUALIZE WHAT YOUR PARTNER WOULD HAVE TO HAVE FOR YOU TO MAKE A PARTICULAR CONTRACT YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT BIDDING

♠J103	
♥J762	
♦QJ4	
♣Q82	
♠984	♠A65
♥Q98	♥1043
♦10852	♦AK76
♣K73	♣J64
♠KQ72	
♥AK5	
♦93	
♣A1095	Dir: W

Here is an example from BBO. West and North pass, and East opens 1 ♠. South makes a takeout double, and West bids 3 ♠. It would not be my choice with only 4 diamonds and a totally flat hand—especially at red vulnerability—but that is what happened at the table. North passes, remembering the Kent Hartman mantra: **“Balanced hands defend.”**

South has 6 losers, so she MAY elect to double again (or she might pass), If she doubles, North looks at the quacky hand (good for defense; poor for offense); the likely diamond trick; and totally flat distribution, and passes—electing to defend.

The lead will be the ♥A, probably followed by a spade shift. It matters little what East does. N/S will get 2 spade tricks; 2 heart tricks; 2 club tricks; and 1 diamond trick. If E/W are undoubled, they are -300. If they are doubled, they are -800.

The North hand should not bid over 3 ♠. I would not even bid over 2 ♠. If you imagine what you need from partner to make even 8 tricks in hearts, it is a LOT more than your basic 12-14 HCP takeout double. The ♠QJx are wasted in a heart contract opposite partner's singleton or doubleton. It is a 10 loser hand—definitely time to remain silent. Making 2♥ would require ♥AKQ AND ♠AK; OR ♠AKxx with a finesse for the Queen working, and ♥AKQ; OR ♠AQxx with a working finesse;

✦ AQ10x and a working finesse If partner has only 3 hearts (possible with a takeout double), the contract becomes even more dicey with a minimum takeout double. **“BALANCED HANDS DEFEND.”** Quacky hands also defend.