

Rick's Tricks

Q Questions

By Rick Roeder

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Q (aka cue) bids and filing an extension with the IRS have one common element: Both defer potential issues that will eventually come home to roost.

Let's look at some auctions and try to clear some fog. First, let's look at some Q bids at a low level.

RHO	You	LHO	Pard
1♦	Dbl	P	1♠
P	2♦	P	?

Defining the 2♦ bid more clearly will help our analysis. First, the obvious: extra values since Pard could have a Yarbrough. Next, almost 100% to deny 4♠, as the doubler could just raise to an appropriate level of spades. Remember that a 2♠ raise by the doubler would have shown extra values (*Pard does not need confirmation that you have 4♠ at this point*). Pard has generally denied a big balanced hand – no 1NT or 2NT rebid. Pard has also denied a good 5 card suit. So, the 2♦ Q bid actually gives a lot of information.

Here are 3 sample hands that the doubler could have for this auction:

♠AKx ♥AQxx ♦xx ♣AKxx

♠AQ ♥AKxx ♦xxx ♣AQxx

♠Axx ♥AKQx ♦A ♣Qxxxx

Let's examine the minimum follow ups by Pard.

2♥: Pard is patterning out. Does not show values. Thus, passable. An excellent question is whether Pard guaranteed 5 spades in this auction. I think not. Pard might have wished to bid this way to give the partnership a better chance to pull the ripcord at a low level.

2♠: 110% passable. An interesting question is how much would you need to have to jump to 3♠. If you held ♠Axxxx, that would be enough for the jump IMO. If you held, ♠Kxxxx, I would want to hold another useful honor to justify a jump.

2 NT: Pard shows encouraging signs of life. Nobody would ever suggest No Trump with a Yarbrough. We have all played 2NT opposite nothing where declaring became a nightmare reminiscent of Clint Eastwood's ill-fated fling in "*Play Misty For Me.*" I would place Pard with 5, 6 or a poorish 7 HCP and a diamond stopper.

3♣: Passable but certainly denying 5 spades and a Yarbrough. It is possible Pard bid 1 spade out of fright and did not want to volunteer a 5 card suit at the 2 level initially with a horrible hand. This is especially true in the modern game where a double would be made on hands like ♠AKxx ♥AKxx ♦xxx ♣xx

Let's look at some auctions where your LHO opens a weak 2♦ in first seat.

LHO	Pard	RHO	You
2♦	P	P	3♦

This auction can be confusing to a partnership absent discussion. Since most people play Michaels, this appears like a Michaels auction. If you have this agreement after a weak 2, great. Personally, I think this Q is more valuable as a stopper ask, especially in matchpoints. What would you do if you held a hand like ♠Ax ♥Kx ♦x ♣AKQxxxxx? If you do not have a 3♦ ask available, good luck!

A second reason that I do not think 3♦ is best employed as Michaels is that a 4♦ bid by you is unambiguously majors. So, the use of Michaels here caters to stopping in 3 of a major. That will certainly be right on some hands but that use caters to a pretty small window.

Which leads us to (*previously featured in a different context in an earlier column*):

♠98xx ♥KJxx ♦Qx ♣KJx

RHO	You	LHO	Pard
2♦	P	P	Dbl
P	?		

This tough problem becomes an exercise in masochism if you do not have good agreements. Some will favor bidding hearts straight away, noting the quality difference between the majors. For those with extensive Bridge World collections, I highly recommend that you read Felix Vondracek's 1956 Bridge World article. In a seeming paradox, The Vondracek Phenomenon points out that playing in the weaker of two 4-4 fits can be beneficial. You have 10 HCP but since Pard is allowed to borrow a "King or so" for the balance, it is not clear how much optimism is warranted.

Assuming you take the high road, a 3♦ Q describes your hand well. Since Pard does not guarantee both 4 card majors for their double, you want to find out. On the surface, you should worry that you are overstating your values with the 3♦ Q. But you should be able to pass Pard's 3 of a major response in comfort. Why? Because, with a stronger hand, you had a 4♦ Q available. I would not want to do this to Pard without some previous discussion but, hopefully, your Pard will read this article.

Let's look at a first cousin of the previous auction. Holding the same hand, the auction instead goes:

LHO	Pard	RHO	You
1♦	Dbl	P	?

You could choose to bid 2 of a major. This bid would be right on values but misses the point that Pard does not guarantee 4 cards in each major. If you choose a 2♦ cue bid and have the agreement that a game force is NOT created, you can comfortably pass Pard's response of 2♥ or 2♠. If Pard has a non-minimum, he must show it immediately.

If you have a rock crusher opposite Pard's takeout double, you can Q a second time to unambiguously create a game force.

Let's wrap up with an anti-Q. You hold: ♠xx ♥AJxxx ♦void ♣AKxxxx.

Exciting and it gets even more so after you hear this auction:

LHO Pard RHO You

1♠ 2♥ P ?

Bid 5♥. The bid says that you have everything but the kitchen sink except for a spade control. Pard should pass without a spade control, bid 5♠ with first round spade control, bid 5NT with the ♠K and bid 6♥ with a stiff spade. *Saturday Night Live's* Debbie Downer would point out that Pard could have 3 small clubs, but otherwise the bases are well covered.

In a solid partnership, Q should not stand for questions. Your Q's should be well defined so you can stay ahead of the pack. 