

## The Advancing Player

# Is That Bid Forcing?

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It surprises me how often I see partners passing bids that are forcing; or making bids that they THINK are forcing, only to be passed. Mastering basic principles will help keep everyone on track.

### **BIDS WHICH ARE TOTALLY NON FORCING**

When Opener's second suit is LOWER than the original suit opened, it can be passed. An example: 1♠-P-1NT-P-2♥ or 1♦-P-1♠-P-2♣. With minimum hands, Responder usually passes or corrects to original suit (or rebids own very long suit or bids minimum NT).

Any time either side has limited hand by a NT opening or NT rebid, nothing is forcing (except, questions, commands, etc\*\*\*).

### **BIDS WHICH ARE HIGHLY INVITATIONAL, BUT NOT FORCING**

#### **Jumps Rebids by Opener**

If Opener jumps in the same suit, s/he is showing 16–18 HCP and a good 6 card suit. Responder is allowed to pass with dreck, e.g., 5–7 HCP and tolerance, but no real fit, and no likelihood of improving the contract. For example: 1♠-P-1NT-P-3♠ is NOT FORCING.

#### **Jump Rebids by Responder**

A jump rebid by Responder shows a good 6 card suit and 9 to 11 HCP and is NOT FORCING. Partner can pass if s/he believes game is off the table. An example: 1♦-P-1♥-P-2♣-P-3♥. If Opener has a minimum had with 1 or 2 hearts, and no likelihood of improving the contract, PASS.

#### **Jump Shift into NT by Opener**

A jump rebid of 2NT shows exactly 18–19 HCP and a balanced hand. If Responder “stretched” to eke out a bid and has 5 to a bad 7 HCP, s/he can pass. Opener's hand is limited.

### **THE 100% FORCING BIDS**

#### **Opening Two Clubs**

An opening of 2♣ (unless you are playing a Big Club or a system that is not Standard American or 2 over 1) is 100% forcing. What about the follow-ups? If Opener rebids any number of no trumps, s/he has limited her hand, and CAN be passed! If Opener rebids a suit, Responder MUST bid one more time—even with zero HCP. That is why most systems have a “second negative” after 2♦ waiting by Responder. (If you play that 2♥ over 2♣ is a “bust” hand, you are allowed to pass the second round with absolutely nothing.) Usually the cheapest 3–level bid is a “second negative” after 2♦ waiting response, warning partner that you will (probably) pass his/her next bid.

#### **All Bids Which Ask a Question are Forcing\*\*\***

Partner MUST respond when you query about number of Aces, or Kings (Blackwood, Minorwood, Gerber, etc.) Partner must respond to a Stayman inquiry (2♣ in response to a no trump opening bid). Over a Weak Two opening, most partnerships play that 2NT asks something—

for some people, a feature (outside Ace or King); for some people, shortness; for others, the Ogust convention. Conventions such as New Minor Forcing also ask questions, and Opener MUST bid.

### **All Bids Which Give a Command are Forcing\*\*\***

Jacoby Transfers cannot be passed. Other relay bids (e.g., if you play that 2♠ after a 1NT opening is a relay to 3♣) must be followed. [IF the opponents enter the auction, e.g., 1NT–P–2♦ (transfer to hearts)–2♠, Opener is NO LONGER obligated to accept the transfer. In this case, Opener promises three or more cards in the suit if s/he goes ahead and bids it.] Lebensohl auctions involve relay bids. XYZ (Two Way New Minor Forcing) involves a relay bid (after 1x–P–1y–P–1NT–P–2♣ is a relay forcing 2♦ by Opener). Some elaborate systems have a variety of relay bids.

### **All Cue Bids, Artificial 2–Suited Bids, Splinter Bids, and Control Showing Bids are Forcing**

Since you are bidding the opponent's suit with a cue bid, partner must respond. The cue bidder has no desire to play in an opponent's long suit. Similarly, a splinter show a singleton or a void. If you pass, partner will be playing with a total of 3 to 5 cards for trumps (usually), and will NOT be pleased. (Yes, it has happened to me. I have also been passed in a cue bid by a partner. When the opponents and I gave my partner a quizzical look, she said: “But Maritha, a cue bid is the only forcing bid.” Whereupon, I said: “But [name removed to protect the guilty], that WAS a cue bid.” The opponents had a good laugh.)

When you have agreed to a trump suit, and are bidding 1st and 2nd round controls (Aces or Kings or singletons or voids), looking for slam, those bids are 100% forcing. Shortness bids do not make good trump suits. Michaels and Unusual 2NT (showing 2 suits) bids are forcing.

### **Jump Shifts by Opener**

A jump shift by Opener shows 19+ (with distribution). Since Responder has already indicated 6 HCP—by virtue of responding—the bid is forcing to at least 3NT or 4 of a major. It is NOT forcing to game in a minor which requires 28–29 combined HCPs.

### **Reverses by Opener**

Reverses can only occur at the 2 level or higher. When Opener bids a second suit that is HIGHER than the suit s/he opened, Responder is forced to go to the 3 level to take a preference to the first suit. Responder might have only 6 HCP, so a reverse by Opener promises 17 or more HCP and is one round forcing. It also shows at least 5–4 in distribution with the original suit longer than the second suit bid. NO REVERSES AT THE ONE LEVEL. Bidding at the one level is just bidding up the line. 1♣–P–1♥–P–1♠ is bidding up the line. NO reverse. 1♣–P–1♥–P–2♦ is a reverse: Opener has 5 or more clubs; 4 or more diamonds, and 17 or more HCPs.

### **Any New Suit by Responder**

With ONE exception, new suits by Responder are 100% forcing. The exception, if you play the New Minor Forcing convention, is the auction of 1 of a minor–P–1♠–P–1NT–P–2♥ by Responder. That is strictly Pass Or Correct (to 2♠). Responder has a WEAK hand with 5 spades and 4 hearts. If Responder had invitational values, s/he would go through a New Minor auction.

Please note that this guideline applies even when the Opener begins with a Weak Two bid or a preempt. A new suit by Responder is one round forcing. If you play it as NON–forcing, it is red on the convention card, and must be alerted!

### **Fourth Suit Forcing**

Sometimes bidding the 4th suit (the only suit that has not yet been bid) is the only way you can force partner to keep on giving you more information in the auction. A Fourth Suit Forcing bid is

(surprise!) forcing. Most people play Game Forcing (to at least 3NT or 4 of a major). Some people play FSF only one round forcing.

### **The ASBAF Rule**

The ASBAF rule is simple: “ALL Strange Bids Are Forcing.” If your partner makes a bid you do not understand, it is usually better to bid than to pass.

### **GAME FORCING VERSUS ONE ROUND FORCING BIDS**

Two Clubs is forcing to game (3NT or 4 of a major) UNLESS Opener rebids NT (limiting hand) OR Responder shows a bust hand or gives a second negative, and Opener stops at 3 level.

Fourth Suit Forcing is generally forcing to game, but some people play only one round (Partnership Agreement)

Reverses by either partner are one round forcing—NOT game forcing.

Jump Shifts by Opener into a suit are Game Forcing

New Suit at 3 Level by Responder is Game Forcing

Cue Bid by Responder Opposite a Take Out Double creates a game force. (Partnership Agreement: some players use cue bid when BOTH majors are available to show 4–4 in majors and ask Doubler to choose.)

### **NOT ALL JUMPS TO GAME ARE CLOSE OUT BIDS**

Jumps to game show differing values, depending on who is doing the jumping. If Opener bids 1♠ and Responder bids 4S, that is the Weak Freak Raise. It shows 5 trumps (usually), a singleton or void somewhere (occasionally 2 doubletons instead), and fewer than 10 HCP. It is a “I hope we make this contract with my distribution.” bid. Unless Opener has a highly distributional (perhaps 2 suited) hand with great controls, the auction is done.

By contrast, 1♣–P–1♠–P–4♠ by Opener shows the equivalent of 20 HCP (with distribution). It does, however, deny the ability to splinter, so Opener does not have a singleton or a void. Opener is showing a BIG hand—willing to be in game opposite the 6 HCP which is all that Responder has promised. If Responder has extra values (e.g., an opening hand), it is Responder's DUTY to take control and explore for slam.

### **PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS**

There are some bids where people have varied approaches. You and your partners must reach personal agreements for those cases. Here are the two major ones.

### **GERBER VS MINORWOOD VS BAILING OUT**

1♣–P–1♥–P–2NT–P–4♣. Do you feel that the 4♣ bid shows clubs and an invitational hand for 5 clubs with distribution unsuited for NT? Do you feel that 4♣ is Minorwood, agreeing to clubs and asking for Key Cards with Clubs as trumps? Do you feel that 4♣ is Gerber and asks for number of Aces held by Opener? Partnership Agreement!

### **NEW MINOR FORCING ISSUES**

If you play New Minor Forcing, then 1♣–P–1♠–P–1NT–P–2♥ is NON FORCING because you would use the new minor (2♦) to inquire about Opener's major suit holdings and HCP (minimum or maximum). However, what about 1♣–P–1♠–P–2♣–P–2♥? Is that forcing—most people say yes, absolutely because it is a new suit by Responder. Other people say, positively not because this is also a New Minor Forcing situation and Responder could bid 2♦ as a forcing bid to inquire about major holdings. Partnership Agreement!

Keeping these principles clear on both side of the table will allow for more accurate bidding. The most important principle of all is ASBAF.

**May The Force be with you!!**