

YES, NO or MAYBE
A LOGICAL APPROACH TO BRIDGE



MORE BIDDING
BASICS

DAVID GLANDORF

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The *Yes, No or Maybe* series is dedicated to my father
Oscar Glandorf
an elementary school teacher
from whom I must have inherited my love of teaching.

Other books in the *Yes, No or Maybe* series

Introduction and Card Play Basics

Introduction and Card Play Basics Workbook

Bidding Basics

Bidding Basics Workbook

More Bidding Basics Workbook

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

Yes, No or Maybe is designed to teach beginning players the fundamental concepts of contract bridge. While it can be used as a self-study resource by a student with some understanding of the game of bridge, the intent is that it be used in a classroom format with an experienced teacher.

CONTENT

Yes, No or Maybe is a series of three textbooks, each with an associated workbook. Each textbook has 13 chapters plus an Index of Terms. Each chapter is designed for one three-hour lesson. *Yes, No or Maybe* therefore provides a resource for approximately a one-year series of classes meeting weekly with some time off for holidays, short breaks or personal (teacher) scheduling factors.

Each workbook also has 13 chapters with several exercises for the associated textbook chapter and most chapters include practice deals. The exercises can be done in the classroom, assigned as homework or divided between these two activities.

Each textbook/workbook can be used for a single 13-week course or divided approximately equally between two courses.

Introduction and Card Play Basics covers the mechanics of the game, a little bridge history, scoring, hand valuation and preferred contracts, along with the basics of declarer play and defense. No bidding is included here but MiniBridge or a variant is used for sample and practice deals. The Yes, No, Maybe bidding concepts are introduced for the determination of preferred contracts even though no real bidding is involved. The associated workbook includes a set of supplemental scoring exercises for both duplicate and rubber bridge.

Bidding Basics introduces the student to bidding including opening bids at the one level with responses and rebids, overcalls and takeout doubles with advances and rebids, the use of cuebids by responder and advancer and the practical application of the Law of Total Tricks. This textbook also includes an appendix containing some of the basic bridge information provided in *Introduction and Card Play Basics*.

In *More Bidding Basics* the student learns about balancing, several conventions (Stayman, Jacoby transfers, negative doubles, fourth suit forcing, new minor forcing), strong opening bids, preemptive opening bids and overcalls, game tries, slam bidding (direct, Blackwood, Gerber, control bidding) and opening the bidding in third or fourth chair.

The basic material presented in these volumes is not new; in fact, books on fundamental card play and bidding in contract bridge have been around for about

a century. What is new is the organization and methodology. To the best of my knowledge the *Yes, No or Maybe* approach to bidding decisions presented herein is unique in the world of teaching bridge. Finally, while MiniBridge has been around for some time, I don't know that it has previously been worked into a complete framework for teaching beginners of all ages.

Be forewarned that there is a tremendous amount of information in the two bidding books. While some of the content may be considered to be more intermediate-level material, every bridge player needs to have at least a rudimentary understanding of all the basic elements of bridge. In the classroom it is possible to play in a controlled environment using deals that are set up to illustrate the topic of the day. When playing in the real world you will frequently encounter situations that were not considered in practice deals. The details included herein should provide a handy reference for many, but by no means all, of these puzzling scenarios.

Several different bidding systems, each with several variations plus optional partnership agreements, exist in today's bridge world. One of the most common systems in current use is Standard American – 5-card majors, which is used in the *Yes, No or Maybe* series. The method of presenting this system differs significantly from that used in other textbooks because of its emphasis on logic rather than memorization. Nonetheless, you will be compatible with anyone who plays this system even if your partner is unfamiliar with this way of thinking.

BACKGROUND

After several years of teaching beginner and intermediate bridge using the ACBL Bridge Series, I realized that students with limited past experience struggled significantly with the task of simultaneously learning the intricacies of bidding, playing the cards as declarer, and reasonably defending a deal. In particular, I observed that the demands of learning the fundamentals of bidding often adversely impacted their ability to study and comprehend the fundamentals of declarer play and defense.

I concluded that part of the problem was that the students were trying to learn how to bid using a memorization process rather than a logical sequential thought process. This realization came from the multitude of questions in the form “How many points do I need to make that bid?” or “How many points does that bid show?”

Many years ago as I worked with new players in a social environment, the idea of teaching the card play aspects of bridge before addressing bidding germinated in the back of my mind. Then a few years ago I was introduced to the concept of MiniBridge and found out that I was not the only person who was aware of the challenges of learning bidding and card play simultaneously and that someone else had actually done something about it.

About the same time, I began to present the basic bidding topics from the ACBL series in a somewhat different manner from the traditional approach. My

method consists of (1) formulating a few basic questions, the answers to which are always “Yes”, “No” or “Maybe” and (2) using the answers, along with some other guidelines and rules, to make bidding decisions. This required my students to make mental adjustments/conversions as they studied their student textbooks. I received much positive feedback from my students, perhaps best summarized by a comment from one of my students who had been with me for about two years: “*Yes, No or Maybe* will take you a long way.” At the same time, I found myself apologizing to them for having to convert from the textbook approach to my approach. Eventually many of them suggested that I just write my own book.

I initially just rolled my eyes at their suggestion but in 2009 I decided to take their advice. The result was the first draft of my *Yes, No or Maybe* bidding books. This bidding book maintained the overall approach of starting new students with bidding concepts but referred them to the ACBL series bidding book for introductory play and defense topics. In the fall of 2011 I wrote the first draft of *Introduction and Card Play Basics* and in January of 2012 began using it for my introductory course for new students. Eventually the bidding book expanded and split into *Bidding Basics* and *More Bidding Basics*.

NOTATIONAL ISSUES

I realize that the modern style of writing is one of gender neutrality. While I understand the social implications of this style, I personally feel it makes for very awkward reading at times. I have found a way around this for much of this series. Opener and intervener (overcaller or takeout doubler) are assigned the masculine gender while responder and advancer (partner of the intervener) are assigned the feminine gender. When reference is made to a player outside of any of these roles the traditional masculine style is used.

Here are a few notational issues:

- I sometimes use M to represent either major suit, e.g., 4M for a contract of either 4♥ or 4♠.
- I sometimes use m to represent either minor suit, e.g., 3m for a contract of either 3♣ or 3♦.
- I sometimes use N and sometimes use NT to denote a notrump contract, e.g., 3N and 3NT both denote a contract of three notrump.
- The result of a contract that is made is written as LSD+N where L is the level of the contract, S is the strain of the contract, D is the declarer compass position and N is the number of tricks above book that were taken, e.g., 3SS+4 is written for a contract of 3♠ by South for which 10 tricks were taken.
- The result of a contract that is defeated is written as LSD-N where L, S and D are the same as above and N is the number of tricks the contract was defeated, e.g., 2NW-1 is written for a contract of 2NT by West that was defeated by 1 trick.

- Bold italics are used to identify the first introduction of a bridge term and that term is included in the Index of Terms.
- Bold is used for major emphasis.
- A player's position relative to another is often denoted by LHO (left-hand opponent) or RHO (right-hand opponent).
- Distribution of the four suits in a hand without regard to specific suits is written in the form "i-j-k-l" where each letter represents a number 0-13 with $i \geq j \geq k \geq l$, e.g., 5-3-3-2 represents a hand with 5 cards in one suit, 3 cards in each of two suits, and 2 cards in one suit with specific suits unspecified. Equals signs (=) replace the dashes when the distribution of the cards with regard to specific suits is desired, with the corresponding suits identified in decreasing rank from left to right, e.g., 3=5=1=4 designates a hand with 3 spades, 5 hearts, 1 diamond and 4 clubs.
- Sections and topics: A major division of a chapter is referred to as a section while a major division of a section is referred to as a topic. Sections are identified by large, bold, all caps, centered titles. Topics are identified by medium, bold, left-justified titles with first letters of significant words capitalized.

The following short-hand notation was introduced in the previous two books of the *Yes, No or Maybe* series:

- ***G?*** – Game? = Do we want to be in a game contract?
- ***GF?*** – Golden Fit?¹ = Do we have a Golden Fit in any suit?
- ***GFms?*** – Golden Fit minor suit? = Do we have a Golden Fit in a minor suit?
- ***GFMS?*** – Golden Fit Major Suit? = Do we have a Golden Fit in a Major Suit?
- ***GS?*** – Grand Slam? = Do we want to be in a grand slam contract?
- ***M*** – Maybe
- ***M^I*** – Intermediate Maybe²
- ***M^S*** – Strong Maybe²
- ***M^W*** – Weak Maybe²
- ***N*** – No
- ***S?*** – Slam? = Do we want to be in a slam contract?
- ***SS?*** – Small Slam? = Do we want to be in a small slam contract?
- ***Y*** – Yes

¹ A Golden Fit is an 8⁺-card fit in a suit.

² A plus or minus sign may be appended to the superscripts I, S or W to further subdivide the Maybe divisions.

I truly hope that you will find these books helpful in your journey into the wonderful world of bridge.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My greatest debt of gratitude must go to my students. I could not have written this book without their encouragement and cooperation in putting up with the experimentation of my approach to teaching them this game we all love.

Second, many thanks go to Audrey Grant and Betty Starzec who wrote and updated the ACBL Bridge Series which made it easy to start teaching bridge and provided the background for much of the content of this Series. In addition I owe so much to the other great players and authors whose works were such valuable resources for this endeavor. They are listed in the next section.

Third, I must thank two of my students who are also editors, Diane Cuttler and Leah Marchand, for the numerous hours they put into proofreading and editing the text along with their many suggestions for improving its readability. In this regard thanks are also due to Ray Lee of Master Point Press for his helpful suggestions regarding layout and formatting. Thanks also go to Sally Sparrow of Master Point Press for getting my copy ready for press and Ebook distribution.

Finally, special thanks go to my wife, Becky, who is not a bridge player but knows enough about the game to listen to my bridge stories and is willing to provide help with my class preparation and writing when I need it.

RESOURCES AND PERMISSIONS

Several books were invaluable resources for writing the *Yes, No or Maybe* series, and this author is deeply indebted to those authors for their contributions to bridge education. Of particular importance were the following five books in the ACBL Bridge Series originally written by Audrey Grant and later revised by Betty Starzec:

1. *Bidding in the 21st Century*, Baron Barclay, Louisville, KY, © 1990, Updated 2006
2. *Play of the Hand in the 21st Century*, Baron Barclay, Louisville, KY, © 1988, 2002, Revised April 2007
3. *Defense in the 21st Century*, 2nd Edition, Baron Barclay, Louisville, KY, © 1988, 2002, Revised October 2007
4. *Commonly Used Conventions in the 21st Century*, Baron Barclay, Louisville, KY, © 2001, Revised 2008
5. *More Commonly Used Conventions in the 21st Century*, Baron Barclay, Louisville, KY, © 2001, Revised January 2008

I used these books for several years when I first started teaching and was heavily influenced by them while writing the *Yes, No or Maybe* series. Most of the chapters in the *Yes, No or Maybe* workbooks include many sample deals for

practice in the classroom or at home. All of these deals have been extracted from the above five books and are used with the permission of the American Contract Bridge League (www.acbl.org). Special “EZ-Deal” decks of cards for these deals are available from Baron Barclay Bridge Supply (www.baronbarclay.com).

Commentary in *Bidding Basics*, Chapter 9 – “Overcalls and Advances - Part 1” relating to the Law of Total Tricks was drawn from Larry Cohen’s book:

6. *To Bid or Not to Bid – The Law of Total Tricks*, Natco Press, Boca Raton, FL © 1992

The following book by Max Hardy was influential in my presentation of the opening bid of 2♣ and responses thereto in *More Bidding Basics*, Chapter 6 – “Strong Opening Bids:”

7. *Two Over One Game Force*, Devyn Press Inc., Louisville, KY, © 1989

My treatment of weak two-bids and other preemptive bids, as well as their use in third and fourth seat in *More Bidding Basics*, Chapter 7 – “Preemptive Opening Bids and Overcalls,” Chapter 12 – “Opening the Bidding in Third or Fourth Chair - Part 1” and Chapter 13 – “Opening the Bidding in Third or Fourth Chair - Part 2” was drawn primarily from the following book by Ron Anderson and Sabine Zenkel:

8. *Preempts from A to Z*, Magnus Books, Stamford, CN, © 1996

While the ACBL Series includes a chapter on negative doubles, that material was supplemented by information gleaned from the following book by Marty Bergen devoted to this single topic for *More Bidding Basics*, Chapter 11 – “Negative Doubles.”

9. Points Schmoints Series, *Negative Doubles*, Magnus Books, Stamford, CN, © 2000

Most of the content on balancing in Chapter 1 – “Balancing,” Chapter 2 – “Advances after a Balancing Double or Bid” and “Chapter 3 – “Rebids after a Balancing Double or Bid” of *More Bidding Basics* was based on the following book by Mike Lawrence:

10. *The Complete Book on Balancing in Contract Bridge – Revised Edition*, Baron Barclay Bridge Supply, Louisville, KY, © 2012

Many of the sample hands were extracted from this book and used with the permission of Mike Lawrence and Baron Barclay Bridge Supply.

The above five books are highly recommended for further reading once you become comfortable with the material presented in *Yes, No or Maybe*.

The bridge history presented in *Introduction and Card Play Basics*, Chapter 1 – “Getting Started” and the Bridge Essentials portion of the Appendix of *Bidding Basics* was derived almost entirely from the following book written by Charles Goren and the editors of Sports Illustrated:

11. *The Sports Illustrated Book of Bridge*, Chancellor Hall Ltd., NY, NY, © 1961

Additional information used in the bridge history material came from private communication with Julian Laderman who so graciously read that portion of a draft of the book and provided a few corrections and enhancements.



CHAPTER 1

– Balancing

Prologue

Introduction

Balancing after an Opening Suit Bid has
been Passed

Balancing after an Opening 1NT Bid has
been Passed

Balancing after Both Opponents Have Bid

Summary



PROLOGUE

Most of the material in this chapter and the next two is based on Resource 10 by Mike Lawrence. Various references to “Lawrence” in these chapters refer to that book. Mike has been so kind to allow me to use several of his examples.

Mike is well known in the bridge world as an expert player, teacher and writer. He is a three-time world champion and an original member of the Dallas Aces with over twenty books to his credit. He has also corroborated on the development of bridge software products. You might wish to visit his home page at Michaelslawrence.com.

INTRODUCTION

Put yourself in South’s chair after each of the following auctions:

| | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| (a) | WEST 1♦ | NORTH Pass | EAST Pass | SOUTH ? |
| (b) | WEST 1NT | NORTH Pass | EAST Pass | SOUTH ? |
| (c) | WEST 2♣ | NORTH Pass | EAST 1♣ Pass | SOUTH Pass ? |
| (d) | WEST 1♣ 2♥ | NORTH Pass Pass | EAST 1♥ Pass | SOUTH Pass ? |
| (e) | WEST 1♦ 2♥ | NORTH Pass Pass | EAST 1♣ 1♥ Pass | SOUTH Pass Pass ? |
| (f) | WEST 1NT | NORTH Pass | EAST 1♦ Pass | SOUTH Pass ? |
| (g) | WEST 1♦ 1NT | NORTH Pass Pass | EAST 1♥ Pass | SOUTH Pass ? |

| | | | | |
|-----|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| (h) | WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
| | | | 1♦ | Pass |
| | 1♥ | Pass | 1NT | Pass |
| | 2♦ | Pass | Pass | ? |
| (i) | WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
| | 1♦ | Pass | 1♥ | Pass |
| | 2♦ | Pass | Pass | ? |

You are in what is called the *pass-out seat* – if you pass the auction will be over. You have 3 choices: pass, double or bid something. What should you do? Most inexperienced players would pass, and they would be wrong much more often than not. In all of these auctions the opponents have a limited combined strength of about 12 - 24 HCP at the extremes and they will usually hold approximately 18 - 22 HCP. Therefore, regardless of the strength of South's hand the partnership will usually hold the **balance** of 18 - 22 HCP. Each side may hold more total points depending on long suit points and dummy points, although East-West are unlikely to hold more than 23 total points since they have stopped bidding well below the game level. Consequently, the deal could belong to either side, and if you pass you may miss out on a great opportunity for a good partscore or even game contract. At the very least you might push the opponents up to a higher level where you will have a better chance of setting them.

This is the basic idea of *balancing* – bidding or doubling when in the pass-out seat. If you have rather meager strength your partner must have the balance of the missing HCP. You might wonder why she did not bid. Here you must remember the requirements for overcalls and takeout doubles, the actions other than pass that partner might have taken. It is quite possible, in fact almost guaranteed, that she has a hand that was not suited for either of those actions and had to pass even though she had an opening hand. This point was emphasized in *Bidding Basics*, Chapter 9 – “Overcalls and Advances - Part 1” and Chapter 11 – “Takeout Doubles and Advances.” Your partner could pass in comfort knowing that you would balance if the opportunity arose.

The action you should take depends on your strength and shape as well as the specific suits you hold relative to those bid by the opponents. But most often you should either bid or double with pass being the last option.

Vulnerability and the form of scoring also play important factors in your decision whether to pass or balance. You certainly want to be more cautious when vulnerable than when nonvulnerable. You can also be more aggressive in a duplicate matchpoint game than in an IMPs game or if playing rubber bridge where a large penalty can be disastrous. For simplicity in our examples, we assume matchpoint scoring with neither side vulnerable unless stated otherwise.

BALANCING AFTER AN OPENING SUIT BID HAS BEEN PASSED

In this section we consider those auctions similar to auction (a) in the Introduction. For our examples we will usually assume that was the auction but will make comments regarding different opening bids where necessary.

In addition to double there are many types of bids that could be made by the balancer. We consider only the following actions here:

- Double
- 1 of a new suit
- 2 of a lower-ranking suit
- 1NT

As you gain more experience you might refer to Lawrence for the use of jump bids and cuebids.

It is generally agreed that the strength requirements to compete with a double or a bid in the balancing position are lower than those in the direct position. While established partnerships have specific agreements for these actions, it is probably easiest for a beginning bridge player to have a simple guideline. The basic recommendation here is to “borrow” a king from partner’s hand, you can reduce your requirements for the given actions by 3 points from what they are in the direct position.

The Balancing Double

The balancing double is almost the same as a takeout double. The primary difference is that the minimum strength requirement is lower. How much lower is subject to partnership agreement. Certainly 10 points including dummy points are sufficient. Some players are willing to double with somewhat fewer points, but I suggest you not push this guideline without prior discussion with your favorite partners. When making a light (10 - 12 points) balancing double you want to have great distribution and prime values or good intermediate cards. Ignore singleton or double honors in the suit that was opened. Aces and kings or lower honors in combination with these are great. Isolated quacks are deterrents to your action.

Here are a few examples after an opening 1♦ bid.

♠ K Q 8 4 You would have doubled with this hand if you were in your partner’s chair. No reason not to double in the balancing position.

♥ K J 6 4

♦ 3 2

♣ K J 4

♠ J 10 8 5 This is about as light as you want to be for your balancing double.

♥ Q J 9 8 You have ideal shape and good interior values to go with your meager HCP.

♦ 2

♣ K 10 9 4

♠ K 8 5 2 If you are counting 9 HCP plus 1 point for your doubleton diamond
 ♥ 7 6 4 3 you are extremely over-valuing your hand. This hand is worth only
 ♦ QJ about 7 points, 6 HCP in the black suits plus 1 point for the double-
 ♣ QJ 7 4 ton. Best to pass and defend as well as you can.

Balancing with 1 of a Suit

The requirements for balancing with a bid of 1 of a suit are significantly different from those for overcalling with 1 of a suit:

- Just about any 5-card suit is acceptable for suit quality
- A reasonable 4-card suit is acceptable if you feel you need to compete and no other option is appropriate
- You might choose a strong 4-card suit over a significantly weaker 5-card suit
- About 7 or 8 points are adequate if you have a good suit

Other factors to consider are:

- What is your holding in opener's suit – wasted values, shortness, length?
- Do you have more than one suit you would like to bid?
- Do you have shortness in an unbid major, especially spades?
- Are you playing in a duplicate match point game or rubber bridge? A duplicate team game at IMP scoring is equivalent to rubber bridge as far as bidding philosophy goes.

Let's look at a few examples, again after an opening bid of 1♦.

♠ 9 7 5 3 2 You have a really ratty spade suit but with 10 HCP you have a great
 ♥ 9 6 2 desire to compete. While you could double, your poor heart support
 ♦ A 2 tends to make you shy away from that option. After all, if partner
 ♣ A Q 4 has her expected 10 HCP or so and a decent 5-card heart suit she
 would have overcalled at her first opportunity. You bid 1♠.

♠ K Q 10 9 You can't double with only 2 hearts, you can't bid notrump without
 ♥ 9 2 a diamond stopper (you are also a little light for that call as you will
 ♦ 6 5 2 see later in this section) and you hate to sell out to a 1♦ contract. It
 ♣ A J 8 4 looks like 1♠ is your best call.

♠ J 10 9 7 This is about as bad as it gets for 4-card suit quality but the overall
 ♥ 5 strength of the hand demands some action. Bid 1♠.
 ♦ A J 10 6
 ♣ K Q 8 4

♠ KJ9527 If you are not vulnerable take a deep breath (discreetly) and bid
 ♥ 52 1♠ in a matchpoint game but pass if you are playing rubber
 ♦ 864 bridge.
 ♣ Q84

♠ KQ9852 Recall that there is an upper limit of 16 HCP and 17 total points
 ♥ AK for an overcall. With a stronger hand and a good suit you double
 ♦ 75 first and then bid your suit to show your strength and narrow
 ♣ A97 strain interest (the rifle double). In order to keep things simple for
 the beginning bridge player, it is recommended that you use the
 same guideline for balancing. So with this hand, you would start
 by doubling and then bid your spades at your next turn.

Balancing with 2 of a Lower-Ranking Suit

From *Bidding Basics*, Chapter 9 – “Overcalls and Advances - Part 1” you know that the requirements for overcalling at the 2 level are more stringent than those for overcalling at the 1 level. You need more overall strength and a better suit. A similar philosophy applies to balancing at the 2 level vs. the 1 level. While you might balance with a 4-card suit at the 1 level, you always need a respectable 5⁺-card suit and should have a decent 10 HCP when balancing at the 2 level.

There is another subtle inference when you balance by bidding a suit at the 2 level; you tend to deny any real interest in any suits that are higher ranking than opener’s suit. Since you are bidding at the 2 level you clearly have the strength to have bid at the 1 level. Furthermore, you could have bid a higher-ranking 4-card Major Suit of rather mediocre quality at the 1 level if you had it. Since you neglected to make such a bid, you strongly suggest you have no interest in those suits. These suits actually pose some danger to your objective. If opener happens to have a strong hand with 4 cards in one of those suits, he will be able to introduce it at the 2 level and your opponents may end up outbidding you in a better contract than if you had passed.

Another danger factor associated with a balancing bid at the 2 level is that your RHO may have length in that suit and be just lacking the strength required for a response. This might prove to cost you dearly by being set several tricks. This danger is not quite so great when you are balancing at the 1 level because responder might well have stretched just a bit to mention that suit at the 1 level.

Any suits that rank between your suit and opener’s suit are also dangerous if you have shortness there. One of those suits may well be opener’s second suit and he will be able to mention it at the 2 level even without a lot of extra strength. So, your bid might push them out of a poor contract into a safe contract where your side is not able to outbid them.

We consider here an auction that begins with:

| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| 1♥ | Pass | Pass | ? |

♠ A 5 4 This should be a reasonably safe hand for a 2♣ bid. If your Major
 ♥ 5 Suits were reversed you would have some concern that opener
 ♦ 8 6 4 might have a good hand with something like a 4=5=3=1 pattern
 ♣ K Q J 9 8 4 and be able to rebid 2♠ to find a 4-4 (or better) fit with responder.
 If your red suits were reversed you would have some concern that
 opener might have a distributional hand in the red suits and be able to rebid 2♦
 thereby finding a diamond fit with responder.

♠ 6 2 You have some concern about the opponents finding a spade fit
 ♥ 8 7 3 but the overall strength of your hand and your good suit beg you
 ♦ A K to bid 2♣.
 ♣ A Q J 9 8 4

♠ 10 8 2 This deal probably belongs to the opponents but why sell out for
 ♥ 7 3 1♥? Bid 2♣ to bump them up another level. At least you will get
 ♦ K 8 3 partner off to a good lead if you do end up defending.
 ♣ A Q J 9 4

Balancing with 1NT

Probably most players treat a balancing bid of 1NT as showing 12 - 14 HCP and of course a balanced hand. This is the recommendation here. As you gain more experience you may want to adjust this somewhat but for starters this agreement should prove adequate. With a stronger hand you can double first and then bid notrump – the rifle double approach.

One change in the requirements for the balancing position as opposed to the direct position is that a stopper in the suit bid by opener is not required if you are on the high end of your HCP range. If you were in the direct position you could hope partner might be able to take some action, but in the balancing position this is the last chance for your partnership to enter the auction.

♠ K 8 2 This is a typical hand for a balancing bid of 1NT after any open-
 ♥ A 5 3 ing bid at the 1 level.
 ♦ K 8 3
 ♣ Q 9 7 4

♠ A 2 Your high-card strength certainly suggests that you compete in
 ♥ A K 3 this auction after a 1♦ opening bid. You really don't want to
 ♦ 8 5 3 double with only 2 spades and your club suit is rather shabby for a
 ♣ K 8 7 4 2 2-level bid. You don't like to bid notrump without a diamond
 stopper but that looks like the lesser of evils.

BALANCING AFTER AN OPENING 1NT BID HAS BEEN PASSED

In this section we consider auction (b) of the Introduction. For this sequence you know that opener has 15 - 17 HCP and responder has 0 - 8 HCP, so the opponents have 15 - 25 HCP between them; therefore your side also has 15 - 25 HCP.

Seldom will opener and responder both be on the high ends of their ranges, so your side rates to have a little more than the minimum of 15 HCP. In fact if you give each of the opponents their average values of 16 and 4, you find that each side will have 20 HCP. So if you have a long suit, your side could well be able to make a partscore contract at the 2 level, especially if partner has a fit for your suit with a short suit on the side for additional distributional values. Very rarely will your side have enough strength to make a game contract or to defeat the 1NT contract, so you should ignore those possible objectives and just hope to be able to compete for a partscore contract. This approach should satisfy your competitive nature for a long time until you gain enough experience to feel that you want to expand your options.

There are more sophisticated (conventional) methods to show a 2-suited hand but those are beyond the scope of this book, so we will limit our discussion to those hands where you want to compete by bidding 2 of a suit. At this point in your bridge life, partner should simply pass your action regardless of her holding. While this may occasionally give you a poor result, in the long run you will get many more good results than bad.

One thing you really will not need to worry about to any significant degree is that opener will compete further. With a limited balanced hand and a passed partner he will rarely be able to take another bid. Nor will he usually be able to make a penalty double since his partner may not have any defensive help whatsoever. It is true that responder may be able to bid or double but that is also usually a low risk.

Just about any long (6⁺ cards) suit qualifies for a balancing bid at the 2 level. A decent 5-card suit is adequate if you have an unbalanced hand – something like 5-4-3-1. With two 5-card suits it is reasonable to bid 2 of the lower-ranking suit. If you happen to get doubled you can always run to the other suit at the 2 level.

Here are a few examples:

♠ 6 2 This is clearly worth a 2♥ bid.

♥ A K 8 7 4 3

♦ 8 5 3

♣ 4 2

♠ Q J 9 8 7 3 2 You are unlikely to be severely punished if you bid 2♠.

♥ 5 4

♦ 5 4 3

♣ 2

♠ 7 3 2 Try 2♦ with this holding.

♥ K Q 10 9

♦ A J 10 8 7

♣ 2

♠ A K Yes, you have a really nice hand. Just remember that opener and
 ♥ K Q 10 9 6 you account for at least 33 HCP. You might miss a game contract
 ♦ A Q 10 8 7 if he has his values concentrated in the black suits, but in the long
 ♣ 2 run you will be better off to settle for a bid of 2♦. If you get dou-
 bled you might try 2♥. Remember that the object is just to get a
 positive score out of this deal, not to maximize your result.

BALANCING AFTER BOTH OPPONENTS HAVE BID

There are many auctions where both opponents have bid but the auction has stopped at a low level and you must decide whether to pass and defend or compete with a double or a bid. All of these auctions can be divided into two significant categories:

- Those where the opponents have found a fit
- Those where the opponents have not found a fit

When the Opponents Have Found a Fit

Auctions (c), (d) and (e) presented in the Introduction of this chapter are typical of auctions in this category. In all of these auctions both opponents have significantly limited the strengths of their hands with their bids and/or subsequent passes.

Since the opponents have found a fit, it is well known that there is a strong probability that your side also has a fit. We can demonstrate this with a few examples, or perhaps more appropriately, counterexamples. The only time your side will not have a Golden Fit is if the opponents have a combined holding of 6 cards in every suit other than their trump suit. Below are a few possible combined hand patterns where this would be true, with the numbers in each position denoting the number of cards in a specific suit. The first suit is the trump suit where they have exactly an 8-card fit.

| Opponent 1 | Opponent 2 |
|------------|------------|
| 4-3-3-3 | 4-3-3-3 |
| 4-4-3-2 | 4-2-3-4 |
| 5-3-3-2 | 3-3-3-4 |
| 6-3-2-2 | 2-3-4-4 |

From these examples you can infer that for any hand pattern for “Opponent 1” there is only one hand pattern for “Opponent 2” for which there is exactly an 8-card fit in the trump suit and exactly a combined holding of 6 cards in each of the side suits. For all other hand patterns held by “Opponent 2” there will be at least one side suit for which the opponents have a combined holding of fewer than 6 cards and therefore your side will have a combined holding of at least 8 cards. Furthermore, if the opponents have a combined holding in their trump suit of 9 or

more cards there will always be at least one side suit in which they have a combined holding of fewer than 6 cards.

Since there are many possible hand patterns for “Opponent 2” other than the one for which they have exactly 6 cards in each of the side suits it is common practice in the bridge community to ignore those specific patterns and adopt the following general principle.

If the opponents have a fit, so do we.

We also recall that the Law of Total Tricks suggests that we take some action. The opponents have bid to the level of their number of trumps (or perhaps even lower) so from a defensive viewpoint we should strive to not let them play there. Furthermore, if we do compete we may well find a Golden Fit at the 2 level and the Law suggests we should be playing there.

Before proceeding with our discussion of this topic it is appropriate to digress and look at another auction that at first glance may appear to be similar to those being discussed but is significantly different.

| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| | | 1♠ | Pass |
| 2♣ | Pass | 2♦ | Pass |
| 2♠ | Pass | Pass | ? |

The three critical differences in this auction are:

- West has shown extra values with her initial 2/1 response.
- West may not have a fit for opener but might be just showing a preference to spades over diamonds.
- You will have to go to the 3 level to compete in the unbid suit – hearts.

Consequently discretion may be the better part of valor in an auction of this type. If East’s suit had been hearts instead of spades, the 2 level in spades would still be available, but some discretion would still be suggested.

In an auction such as (c) where only one suit has been bid you should almost always balance with a double or a bid. You might be a little more cautious if their suit is hearts and you cannot bid spades or double, or if their suit is spades. In these cases you will have to compete at the 3 level. Here you will especially want to pay attention to the vulnerability and the form of scoring.

Lawrence has introduced the concepts of *dangerous suits* and *safe suits* in competitive auctions. If responder raises opener or bids 1NT then all suits higher ranking than opener’s suit are safe and all lower-ranking suits are dangerous. The point here is that neither opener nor responder is likely to have length in a higher-ranking suit but responder may have length in a lower-ranking suit without the values to bid it.

Here are a few example hands for South and his action after auction (c):