

Using Good Judgment

There are many times when you must make a decision where the conditions and the bidding leaves you in a true quandry. Almost every rule for bidding comes with the caveat: "bids are only suggestions, you must use your experience to make judgments. The following examples should help in sharpening you judgment skills. A part of this judgement hinges on what we call secondary honors or intermediate cards. The primary honors are, of course, the A and the K! Intermediate values are the JT9. Note the Q is missing from these categories, it's a cusp card. A protected Q or J is considered a secondary honor.

Prefer the 4-4 Fit

Often enough to make it worth mentioning you will be faced with the choice between two suits, one with a 4-4 fit and the other a 5-3 fit. Obviously if one is a Major and the other a Minor the choice is easy, we prefer Majors over Minors. But when there are both Majors or both Minors we want to choose the 4-4 fit. Why? The 5-3 fit offers potential long suit tricks, after the trump is drawn. An generally it makes little difference which suit is stronger if their honor strengths are close. Let's see how that works

♠KQ43	♠A962	Bidding: 1♥ – P – 1♠ – P; 2♠ – P – ?	The Responder knows
♥QJ982	♥AK4		a double fit, and SHOULD CHOOSE THE 4-4 fit with 13 hcp bid 4♠.
♦54	♦987		We can see that both Major suits have 9+ HCP total, and 8-cards each.
♣A7	♣Q32		With 5 outstanding you should expect both to break 3-2 which means

there is

there are no losers in either suit. You have 3 potential losers in ♦ and a loser in ♣ one of the ♦ losers can be trumped making the contract safe. However, with Spades as trump you can still hold ♦'s to 2 losers and if ♥'s break 3-2 your two long suit winners cover the 2♣ losers the contract making 5, and with the ♥J making 5 is assured even if ♥'s break 4-1. The only way this ♠ contract fails to make 5 is when ♥'s break as Jxxx – x, a 20% chance. Make the ♠Q the ♠8 and 4♠ is guaranteed and 4♥ can't make. Another example.

♠K3	♠AT8642	Bidding: 1NT – ?	Responder could easily bid 4♠, but nothing is lost by
♥KT43	♥A864		first bidding Stayman. Responder does have at least 4 in each MAJOR
♦A7653	♦86		and
♣AQ	♣2		8 HCP. Opener's rebid shows 4 ♥'s there is a double Major suit fit.

Choose

the 4-4 fit! Again there is an expected 3-2 split and even though there might be a trump loser and a possible ♠ loser, once those losers are cleared there are 3 ♠ tricks to eliminate 3 of the 4 ♦ losers, one a loser on loser. The results are 1♠, 1♥, and 1♦ loser.

Minor suit Game Contracts

As we know, our bidding system is geared toward finding Major suit contracts first, then to detour to a NoTrump contract. The emphasis is often so strong that many completely avoid the Minors. You shouldn't! Let's see what characteristics a hand should have that helps us decide that we should attempt a Minor Suit game contract.

- A 9-Card fit – just like the 8-card fit offers the extra trick that says you should choose a Major suit Contract over a No-Trump Contract, the 9-card Minor suit probably adds a trick for that 5-level contract.
- A Singleton or Void in a side suit. This is one time that shortness in the long trump hand might make a difference.
- Lack of secondary honors in the side suits. Secondary honors have the ability to stop an opponent from gaining too many notrump tricks. Note that a protected J still allows the

opponents to get 3 tricks in the suit. Here's an example that fits the bill.

♠AQ843	♠8
♥5	♥AQ74
♦AQT4	♦KJ975
♣K7	♣843

Note that despite the 25 HCP total, in NT, you have at least 3♠, 2♥ and 2♣ losers. Contrastly you have only 7 winners and need two precarious additional tricks to make the contract. Let's see how the bidding should go. 1♠ – P – 2♦ – P; 3♦ – P – ?

The Opener with a 4LTC hand that meets most of our requirements smartly supports partners likely 4♦ holding. Responder has all the requirements a singleton, no intermediate values in clubs and a likely 9-card fit, should bid 5♦. The bid might not succeed, but has a better chance than 3NT. There's a notion we should embrace, it is: "If you are thinking of bidding 4 of a minor as a potential contract, you might as well bid 5 and enjoy the game bonus if you are successful.

Looking at this situation from a defensive point of view, what is a good opening lead? The answer: a trump lead, And repeated trump leads whenever defense gets on lead. Why? Note the requirements for bidding 5 of a minor! Singletons stand out as a weakness to be covered by repeated trumping. Removing Trump from both offensive hands removes the possibility for declarer to do that.

Over/Under Bidding!

Despite all the conventions and bidding tools we have we sometimes find ourselves trying to decide to bid game or Pass. Here are some considerations that should help in making the judgment in cases like these.

- High cards in Partners suit are assets.
- High card points in the opponents suit (except the A) and should be subtracted!
- High cards in unbid suits may be useless, and should be discounted!
- Intermediate cards in trump suit or in a long suit in a notrump contract are assets, no HCP but still an asset.
- Extreme shapes (especially 5-5 and 6-5 hands) especially when there is a singleton or void in an opponents suit is an asset. LTC takes this type of asset in consideration. It suggests an overbid.
- Flat hands are a detriment, and should suggest a Pass or underbid.

Let's look at an a few examples:

fit. at	♠KT3	♠AQ7	The bidding: 1♥ – P – 2♦ – P; 2N – P – 3♥ – P; ? The bidding suggests that responder has 10+ HCP and a heart
	♥AT973	♥842	
	♦K6	♦AJ975	But Opener has a minimum hand (12HCP, 13PP) If responder is
	♣Q82	♣843	10/11 HCP there's not enough! Here Opener has a fitting honor

in responders suit, the asset first on our list. Despite the possible HCP situation 4♥'s is an excellent gamble. Note also that the likely opening lead (a ♠) will be into his K, a sure trick, even if Partner has a lesser holding than shown.

fit.	♠KT3	♠AQ7	The bidding: 1♥ – P – 2♦ – P; 2N – P – 3♥ – P; ? The bidding suggests that responder has 10+ HCP and a heart
	♥A9753	♥842	
	♦J8	♦AQ975	HERE Opener still has a minimum hand (12HCP, 13PP) but the
	♣A82	♣843	honor in patrner's suit is suspect, and the texture of the trump suit

is not as good. Both good reasons to Pass.

In both cases the hands were semi-flat which is "STEE..rike 3" in the 2nd case.

The Real Estate Factor

We are all familiar with the Realtor's mantra: Location, Location, LOCATION! The the next to last example we already saw one case, an unprotected K in a suit led by our LHO. That makes that K worth a full 4 HCP, just like an A, a sure trick. Likewise for the declarer hold AQ(x), Qxx, Kx(x) yield more trick taking value to the hand than the HCP count implies, especially in a notrump contract. This situation arises quite often when our Partner opens with a Minor and we do not have a 4-card Major. It's called positional value!

♠AT32 ♠Q74 When Partner opens 1♣, we might be tempted to bid our ♦'s. It's
apparent
♥A975 ♥K4 that there will be no fit in a Major so we should be heading toward a
♦Q8 ♦AJ9754 NoTrump contract. Our holding in the Majors indicate that we can likely
♣A82 ♣84 expect an extra trick (or two) from it and that we should be the Declarer.
The likely lead will be a card from a Major suit – Just what we want especially a ♥(what if Partner didn't
have the ♥A?). Note that in the absence of the long suit, the natural response, with 10-12 HCP
would be 2NT.

♠AKT32 ♠43 When Partner opens 1♠, the natural response is 2♦. Opener doesn't have
a
♥Q5 ♥A43 good rebid. The ♥Q5 doesn't promise a trick, but it has better positional
♦Q82 ♦A974 value if opener is declarer. If it doesn't yield a trick in Notrump it likely
won't
♣K82 ♣A84 in a suit contract, and it is more vulnerable if it is in the dummy. With
partner showing 10+ HCP your minimum hand being at the top has enough HCP to meet the rule of
23. But even if you were at 12, the rule may not be adhered to, but the positional value of the Qx
drives the decision.

Choosing NoTrump with Major Suit Fit

Yes there are cases where it's right to choose NT over a Major. None of the cases include "Cause I like to play No Trump!" It is often in IMPs or Matchpoint contests, like most team games are. These are the things to look for.

- No Singleton and Void, remember that short suits are anathema to No Trump!
- No obvious way to gain a trick through ruffing! That means a flat hand 3334, → no shortness!
- Stoppers in unbid suits, can include some secondary values!

Let's look at an example:

♠T32 ♠KQ4 When Opener mentions 1♥ you inspect your hand and see that you have
double
♥AQT32 ♥J43 stoppers in two of the other 3 suits and good intermediates in the 3rd. You
have a
♦A82 ♦KQ4 flat hand so can't, as dummy, gain a trick through trumping! It's time to think
♣A2 ♣KT87 NoTrump. Let's look at the example hand. There are 6 top tricks and an
additional trick in ♠'s after the A is forced out. The ♥ suit (partner's suit) has the 2 needed tricks for a
3NT contract, and offers a 3rd even a 4th additional trick so the potential scores in NT are 430 and 460
versus 420 for the suit contract. Note that if the ♥K is finesse-able it is going to be in that position
regardless of the contract. It makes no difference the NoTrump score will always be higher than the
Suit contract score.

Seven Card Fits

As we have said in the olde days it was not uncommon to find yourself playing in a game contract with a 7-card fit. Even "yesterday" (at the height of Bridge popularity – the Goren days) 7-card fits in a Major suit contract were common occurrences. Holding seven cards means that the opponents have 6 and the most probable split is 4-2 meaning that an opponent has the same number of trump as the declarer. NOT GOOD! This was the reason for the introduction of Standard American's 5-card Major. But there are times when there is no 8-card fit and Notrump is not desirable. What to do??

Here's the guidelines: If you have 2-card support that includes an honor it's not all bad – consider supporting partners 5-card Major suit. An example is in order:

♠AQT32 ♠K3 With the guideline in place let's look at the bidding: 1♠ – P – 2♣ – P;
♥Q5 ♥A4 2♦ – P – ? Responder is sure the points for game are present but there
is
♦K843 ♦Q84 hardly the possibility of a fit and NoTrump, based on 2 doubletons, is
♣K4 ♣A974 unattractive. With a doubleton honor in partner's suit responder chooses
to show delayed support, Opener at the top of its bid continues to game, 4♠. The power of the two
hands, like in the olde days, brings the contract home! Here are your homework problems. How do
you play the hand if the opening lead is a ♥? How do you play the hand if the opening lead is a ♣?