

Bidding one More: Competitive Partscore auctions

General Principles

Note that the purpose of bidding is to make the greatest possible score for your side. This might mean a negative number. Consider the opponents can make 3 Hearts. Your side is not vulnerable and can make 2S. If the opponents bid 3H, the best your side can do is bid on to 3S. Even if the opponents double, down one gives you a -100 score, better than allowing opponents to make +140, hence you would be -140.

However, change the situation to your side being vulnerable. If the opponents double you in 3S, down one means your side is -200, which is worse than -140. Hence the best decision would be to let the opps play in 3H, giving you -140. If you are quite sure the opponents are not strong enough to double, you can go ahead and bid 3S, expecting down one undoubled to be -100.

Try this one. Both sides Non-vulnerable; you can make 2H, the opps have bid and can make 3C. Should you bid 3H ? _____

In general, the 2-level should be battled for, the 3-level is a scarier level. Consider

1C P 1D P

2D P P ? Holding as little as S Qxxx H Kxxx D xx C Kxx, you should double. You have support for both unbid suits and the opponents have both shown limited hands. Expect partner to have about 11 pts. Note that the 2-level requires about 20 HCPs when you have an 8+card fit.

How do you make such decisions? The first tool is HCPs per side. Your partner opens, you have 10 HCPs and the opponents have, "with trepidation", competed to 4C. Give partner 12 HCPs, hence your side has at least $12+10=22$, leaving the opponents with 18 HCP. Given a 4-level trump contract normally takes about 25 playing points, their side is 7 HCPs short, and likely not to succeed. While they may have distributional (shortness) values that narrow that gap, odds are they will go down, and you should double. This assumes your side cannot make a game. Now, how best to defend, specifically the opening lead? Given their side has a lack of high card points, they must need lots of trump tricks. The best lead hence, is often a trump, to reduce the number of ruffs they can score (in the dummy/shorter trump side).

Law of Total tricks (LOTT)

The "LAW" states that on most bridge deals, for a pair, the total number of trumps is approximately equal to the total number of tricks. Another way: In a competitive auction, strive to compete to the level of the number of trumps held by the partnership. So, if your side has 8 spades, bid to the 8 or 2S level. If your side has 9 Spades, bid to the 9 or 3S level.

When to prefer offense

Beyond the LOTT, factors that suggest better to bid one more and play, rather than defend

- Lots of high cards in your long (trump and other) suits. If your side has 11 spades and your spade holding is S KQJTxx, you may not even get one trick on defense. Consider the following hand, your side has a 9-card spade fit, would a double of 4H make sense with S AQJxx H xx D KQJxx C x ? Here the guideline is bid on with shape and robust suits (here 5-5 with all honours in long suits)
- Shortness in a side suit also adds offensive trick taking ability. Best when the shortness is in the opponent's suit. Best when the shortness is in the dummy (shorter trump side), as this clearly adds tricks. Shortness in your partner's suit is less of an asset

- Consider holding S Kxxx H Qxxx D x C JTxx
- 1C 1D You-1H 2D
2H 3D With a known 8-card fit, a fit for partner's suit, and a singleton in opp's suit, compete with 3H. Note this is despite the LOTT guideline saying not to bid 3H.
- Working honours in partners suit. You hold S KJxx H xx D KT9x C xxx
 - 1D 1H X 2H
2S 3H ? -----→ with double fit, hence all cards working, bid 3S

Better to defend when

- Honours are scattered, ie, S Axxxx H Kxx D QJx C Kxx.
- Trumps are splitting badly for declarer.
 - RHO has bid 3H (both sides NV) after the following auction
 - 1S P 1N 3H
 - And you hold S AJT9x H QTxx D KQJ C A
 - Why is a double right here?
 - Partner has at most 2 spades, so your spade suit is good on defense (they have 6 or 7 spades to worry about/lose tricks in).
 - You have 2 (almost sure) heart tricks (behind declarer), and declarer must deal with a badly splitting trump suit
 - You have a good opening lead
 - Partner has at least 6 HCPs, so your side has at least 22 HCPs, opps at most 18. Remember that pts required per level assumes reasonable trump splits. Three level requires 23 playing pts (they have 18 HCPs at most and getting a bad split)
 - You have cards in all suits that will win tricks or be good helpers
- How your high cards are positioned?
 - Take the same trump stack as above and put it **in front** of the 3H bidder, does this change your defensive prospects? Yes, substantially. Consider this example

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      x
      x
x      QTxx
      A
      K
      J
      9
      x
      x
  
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Declarer can, assuming 2 entries to the dummy, pick up the entire heart suit for no losers, especially if you double (and tell him you have heart stack)

- Listen to all the bidding.
 - You (dealer) hold S Axx H AKTxxx D AJ C xx and here this auction
 - 1H 1S 2H 3S
 - Opponents are likely showing 5+4=9 spades, hence partner has only one spade and you can ruff your spade losers in dummy; Any honours partner has should be helpful; bid 4H.

What a game!!