

BID WHERE YOU LIVE by Maritha Pottenger

When we first learn to bid at bridge, we are given lots of “rules.” As time goes by, we learn to be more flexible. I strongly recommend that you make a habit of “bidding where you live.” By this, I mean to strive to make calls that show where your values are in the hand that you have. This is why a **Jacoby 2NT call denies a good 5-card suit that is a potential source of tricks**. If partner opens 1S, a Jacoby 2NT raise is usually 4-4-3-2 or 4-3-3-3 or some balanced hand. If you have a 5-card suit, it is pitiful, e.g., AKxx 10xxxx Ax Kx. When you have a good, long suit, it is imperative to show it. The hand with Axxx AKxxx Ax xx **MUST** bid 2 Hearts. You have a source-of-tricks suit, so slam is a real possibility. Let partner in on the secret. (Give partner KQxxx Qxx xxx Ax and you are gin for 6S assuming spades are no worse than 4-1 and hearts are 3-2.)

Sometimes the “book” bid is not the best bid. Partner opens 1D and RHO overcalls 1S. You have: KQ10x 9xxx Jx Kxx. The “book” bid is a negative double. But where you live is a 1NT call. Most of your HCP are in spades. If you neg double, partner with x KQxx KQxxx Axx will get way too excited about hearts.

Similarly, when you are opening in 3rd or 4th seat, game is unlikely if you have minimal values. Your priority is getting a plus score. So, **bid where you live!** Tailor your opening bid to reasonable part scores and getting partner off to the best lead, if you end up defending. Thus, Kxx xxxx AKQ xxx should open 1D **not** 1C. (Get partner off to best lead if you end up defending.) AKQx KJx xx 8xxx should open 1S **not** 1C. If partner raises you on three cards, it will not be the end of the world.

When you have control of the auction, it is OK to make a non-standard bid. Thus, if partner opens 1S and I hold KQx x AKQx Qxxxx, I will bid 2D rather than 2C. I intend to support spades at my next opportunity. Partner is sure to be very worried about diamonds (unless s/he is short), so I want to let partner know that I have values there.

Another non-standard bid could occur when you are deciding between no trump and a minor game or slam. Suppose partner opens 1C and you hold: Kx AKxx Ax Kxxxx. You bid 1H and partner responds 1NT. You are probably headed for 3NT, but it doesn't hurt to probe a bit in case a club slam is an option. So, bid 2D, **ostensibly New Minor Forcing**. If partner bids 2H, you can bid 3C—a mild slam try in clubs. The payoff is when partner bid 2NT. Partner does not have 3 hearts and does not have 4 spades, so should be 3-2 in the majors. With 5 cards in the majors, partner should have 8 cards in the minors. With 4-4, partner would have opened 1D, therefore, partner has 5 clubs. You now bid 4C (**Gerber** since last bid was 2NT). Partner shows you two Aces. You bid 5C, asking for Kings. Partner shows you one King (which must be King of diamonds. You now bid 7C!! Partner can ruff two hearts in his/her hand, and you can ruff one spade and one diamond in your hand. No trump would make only 11 tricks. Partner's hand is: Axx xx Kxx AJxxx (or clubs could be AQxxx, or partner could have a queen elsewhere and/or wasted jack/s in any other suits). With those basic cards, you take 13 tricks with clubs as trumps.

A corollary is to warn partner as soon as possible when you do not live where your bidding would suggest. Today my partner held Axxx AKxx x Jxxx. Her LHO opened 1D; I passed; her RHO bid 1H. She doubled. LHO bid 2H and I bid 2S. RHO bid 3H and she bid 3S (very debatable bid as I am marked for a singleton or void in hearts and probably bidding partly on that distribution). LHO passed and I passed and RHO bid 4H. Partner did not double. We were not vulnerable at Swiss teams, so I took the push to 4S which was down one. If she doubles 4H to warn me off, they go down one. If her heart values had been in clubs, as I expected from the auction, we would have made 4S.