

Fifth Chair



Bidding after passing originally

One of the most wonderful advantages to passing marginal hands in the first place is the ability to bid aggressively later on without fear that partner will misinterpret drastically the strength of your hand. Many times a slam can be reached when one passes originally and yet not reached after opening, then feeling a little guilty and taking conservative action later. The opposite can be true of course, especially when partner takes control once you open.

One of the keys that I use when deciding whether to open or not on marginal hands is this: "is the hand and suit good enough to overcall later at the two level". If it is good enough, or if I have reason to believe that I will have the opportunity to make a good two suited bid (ie michaels or unusual nt) I will pass and then bid later. If it is not good enough to overcall, yet pretty good, I will open and get it off my chest early. A good example is Jxxxx AK xxx K10x.

This is not a good hand, but we may have game opposite a fairly weak hand with a fit. If i pass and the bidding goes p 1d p 1nt, I would be an utter fool at any vulnerability to bid 2s. Of course it could work out, but we could also go for 800 at either vul, vs no game. I open this hand 1s and have no more to say, partner can do anything he wants.

Yes we might get to a close game when partner has 12 hcp that doesn't make. But more things good happen than bad when one takes action early. The opposite is a hand such as Axx xxx KQJxxx x.

Some feel the necessity to open any six card suit a weak two. But here we have good support for either major and we might play 2d when cold for game in major opposite the right 8 count. Opening 1d seems a stretch even by my standards. This is a very good hand to pass and overcall diamonds later. If it goes p 1h p 1nt, I will eagerly bid 2d. I have shown my hand and limited it both.

So in some sense, it takes more to overcall at the two level than it does to open, especially vul.

Once one has passed and limited ones values one is free to make more aggressive bids. But this does not mean one can go crazy.

Remember partner may have to make some high level decisions based on your values. Also partner may make some bids, believing that as a passed hand you are very limited in what you can do. For example, if you pass and partner (with or without opps bidding) bids 4s, it would only be in the most extra-ordinary situation that you should bid on.

And certainly no matter what distribution you have, there is no possibility of playing in another suit other than spades. You see partner is making a judgement that this is the best place to play opposite a passed partner. He is playing you for some values already. If he had 10 tricks in his own hand he would open 2c.

So if you have an ace and a king, be happy about it when you lay down dummy, but do not bid. Now if you have xxx AKxxx Kxxx x and it goes p p 4s p, I think you owe pard a slam try. Not that you might not get to 5s off one, but in the long run you will get to more good slams than going off in 5.

If you play 2/1, passing allows you to bid 2/1 with less than game forcing hands. So keep in mind that partner may pass your 2/1 bid.

This is true in sayc also. The forcing nt is also only semi-forcing after you have passed. My rule is that responding to a semi-forcing nt shows a full opener and confirms a 5 card major (or shows a good two suited hand). Most people play reverse drury as passed hand. This tells partner that I have a limit raise or better in his major suit opener and promises at least three card support. In this way we show a fit immediately, and do not have to be worried about being passed in another suit (or 1nt) or hanging partner for opening light in 3rd seat. All responses are natural to 2c (rev drury). A rebid of 2s says I opened light, all others show a suit and a full opener. Even with a full opener opposite a limit raise, it is possible to play in 2s or 3s.

In bidding after having passed vs silent opps, almost all systems are on just as though you were not a passed hand. I play new minor forcing for one round still. But it makes no sense to play 4th suit forcing to game, since a passed hand hardly can have game forcing values without a fit. Over one of a minor, 2nt should show close to an opener. A jump to 3nt over 1m says I should have opened to start with :))))). A splinter can be somewhat relaxed as passed hand.

p p 1M p 3M (or 4M) are both pre-emptive since drury is available for better hands.

When the opps open or compete, I play basically the same system as I do when I am unpassed. Neg and resp dbls are still on. But now free bids are not forcing. p p 1d 1s 2h by you, shows hts and values but can be passed. Of course partner, with honor 3rd in hts and full opener should give you a courtesy raise. This is also nonforcing, and should not be taken as extra values on his part. Something like xx Axx Akxxx Kxx is plenty sufficient to raise 2h to 3h in that sequence. So with xxx KQJxx xx Axx you will bid game, and with less you can pass 3h. A pre-emptive jump shift by a passed hand usually has special connotations. This is because one had the opportunity to pre-empt the first time and chose to pass. This usually means values in a major (or other major) also. So with Qxxx x KQJxxxx x, one will not open 3d because spades very well may be superior spot, but when the bidding goes p 1h p 1s or p 1d p 1h one likely might bid 3d. Hopefully pard can read that you have a major and which one it is by the bidding and his hand.

In bidding as a passed hand opposite a partner who has also passed, it is very important to have good suit quality if you bid it.

Dont compete just to let your opps know where the high cards are.

If the opps likely have game, (ie p 1h p 2d) unless you have reason to believe that you have a good sacrifice in spades or you want a particular lead there is little reason to bid. This is especially true if the opps have the spade suit. Unless you have reason to believe that you have a good sacrifice, that the hand may belong to you, or you want a particular lead, keep quiet and let the opps figure out where the high cards are themselves.

As a note, when your pard overcalls in a dangerous situation and you are on lead, unless you have a compelling reason not to, please lead their suit. There is little more irritating than when partner does not lead your suit and they are wrong. This is not so much a question of right and wrong as it is partnership morale.

As a general rule, when one is a passed hand, one can shade the values for bidding, without being punished. But this does not mean one can bid freely on anything. Each bid shows some type of values, and partner has to make decisions based on what you show.

The key is not to punish partner for opening light, or for balancing, or for shading values as passed hand. Keep in mind that they also may have full values or extra values also. Bidding is largely judgement. So use your best judgement when opening or passing and then bidding later.