

WEEK 3 – 13 CARDS AND INTRODUCTION TO BIDDING

In the first two weeks, we introduced the rules for taking tricks (including a trump suit). In the handouts were several examples of the play with everyone having all 13 cards – quite a lot to digest!

Before the play of any cards takes place, there needs to be an auction (“the bidding”). Just as the cards/tricks are played clockwise around the table, the auction also goes in that direction. The Dealer (person who dealt the cards) gets to bid first. He can “Pass” (choose not to make any bid at all) or he can predict (bid) the number of tricks he thinks he can take. Along with the number of tricks, he also designates a suit to be the trump suit (this would typically be his longest suit), or he can designate notrump (saying he is willing to have the deal played without a trump suit).

Before we discuss the significance of a bid, let’s see if we can think in terms of “predicting tricks.” Suppose you had a hand like this:

♠A87 ♥A65 ♦A43 ♣A765. How many tricks do you think you would win? Right, four tricks. What about this hand:

♠AKQJ1092 ♥A432 ♦32 ♣--

This is a tougher question. If you could designate that spades is the trump suit (surely, you’d want to), you’d take at least eight tricks. All seven spades are winners, along with the ♥A.

When you bid for the contract, you not only predict a number of tricks, but you also get to name what suit you want as trump (clubs, diamonds, hearts or spades). You can even bid in “notrump” saying you don’t necessarily want there to be a trump suit. You’d likely bid notrump when you have a bunch of cards in every suit, but designate a suit as trump if you have a lot of cards in that suit.

ADD 6

To bid, you must predict you will take *at least seven tricks*. If you don’t want to predict seven or more tricks, you Pass. If all four players Pass, the deal is thrown in and it is called a “Passout.” The cards are shuffled and dealt for a new deal to be played.

Since any bid starts with a prediction of at least seven tricks, the technical announcement of the bid is to just say “one.” *One really means seven*. This is

confusing at first, but eventually becomes routine. To predict eight tricks, you would bid two. To predict all 13 tricks (a rare occurrence), you would predict (bid) seven. You never would bid eight, since it is impossible to take 14 tricks. The bid you announce always means “six tricks to start and that number of tricks in addition.”

So, to predict seven tricks with hearts trump, the bid would be “one heart.” This is

Note: In bridge writing, a bid is designated by a number from one through even, followed by “NT” for notrump or a suit symbol (♠, ♥, ♦, or ♣). So, a bid of three hearts is indicated by “3♥.” A bid of one notrump is written as “1NT.”

designated as 1♥. A bid of 4♠ would predict ten tricks with spades as trump. A bid of 6NT would predict 12 tricks without a trump suit. *The prediction is for the partnership* (not just “South” or “North” alone).

SUIT ORDER

If you make a bid, does that end the auction and become the final contract? No. Any other player (in clockwise order) can make a higher bid. In order to know what “higher” means, we have to define the rank of the suits. Fortunately, it is easy to remember because they are in alphabetical order: Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts, Spades. So, a bid of 1♣ can be topped by a bid of 1♦ (or 1♥ or 1♠). Notrump is the highest of all. So, a bid of 1NT (“One Notrump”) tops a bid of 1♠. Going to a higher level (in any suit or notrump) outranks a previous bid that was made on a lower level. A bid of 2♣ higher than 1♥. So, these are all the bids in order:

1♣-1♦-1♥-1♠-1NT-2♣-2♦-2♥-2♠-2NT-3♣-3♦-3♥-3♠-3NT-4♣-4♦-4♥-4♠...7NT.

The bidding ends when three players in a row opt to Pass (as in “no further interest.”)

Below are some examples of legal auctions (note that the player who dealt the cards goes first – with either a pass, or a bid of 1♣ or higher):

A)

| West (Dealer) | North | East | South |
|---------------|-------|------|-------|
| 1♠ | Pass | Pass | Pass |

B)

| West | North (Dealer) | East | South |
|------|----------------|------|-------|
| -- | Pass | 1♣ | Pass |
| 1NT | Pass | Pass | Pass |

C)

| West | North | East | South (Dealer) |
|------|-------|------|----------------|
| -- | -- | -- | Pass |
| Pass | Pass | 1♥ | 1♠ |
| 2♥ | 2♠ | 3♥ | 3♠ |
| 4♥ | Pass | Pass | Pass |

By the end of the auction (three consecutive passes are made), the contract, declarer and opening leader have all been determined.

The contract is whatever the highest bid was. So, using the examples above, in A), the contract is 1♠. In B), the contract is 1NT. In C), the contract is 4♥.

The declarer is the person who will play not only his hand, but the faced dummy (declarer's partner) opposite. The person who first named the final trump suit (or notrump) is the declarer. So, in A), the declarer is West. In B), the declarer is West and in C), the declarer is East (he named hearts first—even though West was the one who made the 4♥ bid, the the final contract).

The opening leader is the person (one of the “defenders”) who plays first—and is always to the left of the declarer. The partner of the opening leader is the other defender. On the auctions above, the opening leader is North on A) and B) and South on C). After the opening lead is made, the dummy faces his cards.

So, from the bidding, we have a contract, a declarer, an opening leader, a dummy and two defenders. To test your understanding, look at the auction below and decide what is the contract, who is the declarer, who makes the opening lead, who is the dummy and who are the defenders.

| West | North | East | South (Dealer) |
|------|-------|------|----------------|
| -- | -- | -- | Pass |
| Pass | Pass | 1 ♥ | 1NT |
| 3 ♥ | 3NT | Pass | Pass |
| Pass | | | |

Answers:

Contract: 3NT (the highest bid)

Declarer: South (the person who first named the final suit or notrump)

Opening Leader: West (left of or “after” the declarer)

Defenders: East-West (the side not declaring)

Dummy: North (partner of the declarer)

So, if South is playing in 3NT (as in the auction above), West would make the opening lead. After he plays his card, the North player would face all 13 of his cards. South (declarer) would call for a card from the North hand and after East plays, South would play a card from his own hand. His goal would be nine tricks since he is in 3NT. If he takes nine (or more tricks) he makes his contract and gets rewarded in the scoring. If he takes eight (or fewer tricks), he gets a minus score and loses points. Scoring will be explained a little bit down the road.

DOUBLE

Aside from Pass and the bids (1♣ through 7NT) there is another option. When it is their turn to bid, a player can say “Double” (as long as something has already been bid – you can’t double to start the auction). When bridge was first invented, double was used to say that you want the score for that deal to be doubled.

Nowadays, it usually means something else. It is a way to tell your partner you have the “other suits.” So, if your opponent opens the bidding with, say, 1♣, and you double, it is like you are bidding “one diamond/heart/spade.” Double tells our partner we have some length (typically three or four cards) in each of the other suits. This is called a “takeout double.” It doesn’t mean you want the contract to be 1♣ with the score doubled, but that you want your partner to choose one of the other three suits.

There are other kinds of doubles (even something called a “redouble”) to learn about as you gain more experience. For now, the “takeout double” is enough to get started.

BONUSES

One of the main goals in bidding is to reach a certain level which rewards the partnership in the scoring with a bonus. The first level that receives a big scoring bonus is “game.” If your side plays in 3NT and makes nine or more tricks, you get a game bonus. There is also a game bonus for bidding and making 4♥, 4♠, 5♣ or 5♦. Another level of bonuses is awarded for predicting 12 tricks (a six-level bid which is called a “small slam”) and even more for predicting all 13 tricks with a bid of seven (called a “grand slam”). If you bid and make your contract, you get the bonus(es). Any additional tricks (called “overtricks”) do count in the scoring, but quite insignificantly. The main goal is to make enough tricks to fulfill the contract.

Consequently, when your opponents buy the contract, your goal (on defense) is to “set” the contract. If the opponents contract for, say, 10 tricks, your goal is four tricks. If you take four, the most they can take is nine—so they will be set and you will get a plus score. The exact amounts for the scores and bonuses are explained in future lesson notes.

There is more to bidding than just “predicting how many tricks. Next week we will get you started with the basics of bidding. You will see what the first few bids of each auction mean, and how to determine what your hand is worth.