

Fully Qualified, Forcing or Not Forcing

Opener's Jump Shift, Episode 4

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This is the continuation of a series of articles on forcing bids. In modern bidding one must know which bids, - made either by you or your partner, as a response or a rebid, - are forcing or can be passed. This is the foundation of good bidding.

PREREQUISITES

Please refer to my first article in this series, episode 1, for a consideration of bids that fully qualify the opener's hand. Refer to episode 2 for an in depth discussion of the essential elements that indicate a Reverse bid by opener. Since this is a series, each episode builds on the concepts and theory presented in previous articles. I may even use terms presented in those episodes.

RESPONDING TO OPENER'S REVERSE BID

Consider the following hand: Most would agree with an opening bid of 1♣.

♠ x
♥ AKQx
♦ xxx
♣ AKJxx

If responder bids 1♠, opener has a perfect opportunity to reverse by bidding 2♥. The beauty of the reverse allows the opener to show a big hand, 17-21 HCP, a longer first bid suit, and all this without jumping. Exquisite!

The Ingberman Convention was named for Monroe J. Ingberman, 1935-1985, mathematician and bridge player. I will place his words in quotes for you now:

“The concept of the Ingberman convention deals with bidding situations, in which the partner reverses and the responder is holding minimum values of 5-7 high card points. The point count, from the perspective of the responder is insufficient to guarantee game and the responder must communicate this information to his partner, in the case that the partner, who has reversed, also has minimum values.”

The responder having 5-7 HCP would bid 2NT following the reverse bid by opener. The 2NT response is a relay to 3♣ regardless of opener's first bid. Responder then has the option to further describe their hand. Let's take another peek.

		The Bidding	
Opener	Resp	Opener	Resp
♠ x	KQJx	1♣	1♠
♥ AKQx	xx	2♥	2NT
♦ xxx	xxxx	3♣	Pass
♣ AKJxx	xxx		

What if opener has started with 1 Diamond?

		The Bidding	
Opener	Resp	Opener	Resp
♠ x	KQJx	1♦	1♠
♥ AKQx	xx	2♥	2NT
♦ AKJxx	xxxx	3♣	3♦
♣ xxx	xxx		

In the first example, opener has a minimum reversing hand with longer Clubs. Responder has a hand which is not strong enough to force game. Bidding 2NT shows 5-7 HCP and is a relay to 3♣. Responder chooses to pass 3♣.

In the second example, opener has a minimum reversing hand with longer Diamonds. Responder has a hand which is not strong enough to force game. Bidding 2NT shows 5-7 HCP and is a relay to 3♣. Responder chooses to correct to 3♦.

I propose the following theory: (These are my words not Mr. Ingberman's). If partner reverses they have shown a minimum of 17 HCP or the values to reverse. We saw a hand in episode 2 that had fewer HCP but extreme distribution. I must assume a minimum of 17 HCP and since the first bid is at least 5 cards long I can add one evaluation point for length. This gives a total of 18.

I then draw a line between 7 and 8. Fewer than 8 HCP (5-7) may not produce a game and I must bid 2NT to show 5-7 HCP. However, 18 + 8 = 26 evaluation points and has a very good chance of producing a game. Those who insist on 18 – 19 HCP in order to reverse often consider the reverse to be forcing to game.

Another example of a minimum hand opposite a reverse:

		The Bidding	
Opener	Resp	Opener	Resp
♠ x	xxxx	1♦	1♠
♥ AKQx	Jxx	2♥	2NT
♦ AKJxx	xx	3♣	3♥
♣ Axx	KQxx	4♥	

In this example the responder has shown 5-7 HCP following opener's reverse. Opener accepts the relay to 3♣ and responder shows support for Hearts. With such a huge opening hand and most likely a 4-3 Heart fit, opener bids 4♥.

One more example:

		The Bidding	
Opener	Resp	Opener	Resp
♠ xx	Jxx	1♣	1♥
♥ Ax	Kxxx	2♦	2NT
♦ AKJx	Qxxx	3♣	3♦
♣ AKxxx	xx		

In this example opener shows longer Diamonds than Clubs. Both opener and responder are waving red flags to suggest that their Spades are not good enough to play the hand in No Trump. Opener settles for a partial in Diamonds. Could this hand make 5♦? Possibly. Is this system perfect? Does it work every single time? Of course not. But neither does any other.

Following a reverse, showing opener a meager 5-7 HCP by responder is very important. Bidding 2NT is a wonderful way to do that. So, what do you do if you have more?

Just bid something other than 2NT. What could be simpler?

		The Bidding	
Opener	Resp	Opener	Resp

♠ AKxx	Qx	1♥	1NT
♥ AQJxx	xx	2♠	3NT
♦ x	KJxxx		
♣ Axx	KJxx		

In this example, opener has opened one Heart and reversed into Spades. 9 of their cards have been accounted for. Opener is exposed in one or both of the minors. I am sure you would like the “big” hand to play it but what can you do? If you bid 3♣ does it promise a Diamond stop? Opener may raise clubs. Your best bid is 3NT. Normally with 8-11 HCP and stoppers in the two remaining suits, 3NT is a reasonable choice.

The Bidding			
Opener	Resp	Opener	Resp
♠ Qxx	AJxxx	1♣	1♠
♥ A	QJx	2♦	2♠
♦ AKJx	Qxx	4♠	
♣ AJxxx	xx		

In this example, opener has opened 1♣ and reversed into Diamonds. Responders rebid of 2♠ shows 8+ HCP and 5+ Spades. With a Spade fit and enough HCP for game, 4♠ seems to be a reasonable place to land.

The Bidding			
Opener	Resp	Opener	Resp
♠ AKxx	QJxx	1♥	1NT
♥ AQJxx	Kxx	2♠	4♥
♦ x	xxxx		
♣ Axx	Jx		

In this example, Opener has opened 1♥. Responder makes a cautious 1NT which they play as forcing. Opener reverses into Spades. With a Heart fit and enough for game but not slam, responder bids 4♥.

SLAM INTEREST?

A principle of slam bidding which should be part of everyone’s bidding repertoire:

When the partnership is on a game forcing auction, supporting partner below game is a slam try, while bidding game denies slam interest.

As in the above example.

The Bidding			
Opener	Resp	Opener	Resp
♠ AKxx	QJxx	1♥	1NT
♥ AQJxx	Kxx	2♠	3♥
♦ x	xxx	4NT	5♣
♣ Axx	KQx	6♥	

In this example opener starts with 1♥. Responder bids 1NT planning to give a delayed limit raise. Surprise surprise! Opener reverses into Spades. Responder is definitely interested in slam and only has to bid 3♥ to show it. Opener asks for controls and bidding the slam is reasonable.

The Bidding			
Opener	Resp	Opener	Resp
♠ xAQ	1♣	1♥	
♥ AJx	KQxxx	2♦	2♥
♦ AKJx	xx	3♥	3♠

♣ AKxxx Qxxx (control bid)
 4NT 5♠
 (2 controls w ♥ Q)
 7♥

In this example, opener has opened 1♣ and reversed into Diamonds. Responders rebid of 2♥ shows 8+ HCP and 5+ Hearts. Opener's hand grew by 3 evaluation points and bids 3♥ to show Slam interest. Responder shows a Spade control by bidding 3♠. The Heart fit is established. Opener now asks for controls. Playing 1430, responder shows 2 controls (A♠ and K♥) plus the Q♥. Opener valiantly bids the Grand Slam!

I have taught this pattern to many people who have used it successfully. No matter what you do, you need to use reverses properly and have a method of responding to the reverse. It will definitely improve your game and your results at the table.

Next time, we will talk about the opener's jump shift and responding to it.

STAY TUNED! ♣