

Hamilton Bridge Centre

Captains And Privates

Who's the boss?



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Introduction

The idea behind this article is to clarify some important **general principles** in bidding:

1. Once you have shown the strength and distribution of your hand, **stop bidding** (unless partner continues to make forcing bids).
2. Once you have shown the strength and distribution of your hand, **your partner is in charge**. Often, your partner will have the weaker hand. That doesn't matter; partner is still in charge.

1 NT Opening Bids

You have fully described your hand with your opening bid. This means that your partner is now in charge of the auction. It doesn't mean you never bid again; it means that you only bid when partner asks a question, forces you to bid, or asks your opinion.

This section assumes that you use Stayman and transfer bids over a 1 NT or 2 NT opening. If you don't, then you should learn them. They make bidding so much easier and more accurate.

Let's look at some examples:

Example 1

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1 NT	Pass	2♣	Pass
??			

In this example, partner has asked you a question by bidding 2♣. This is the **Stayman convention**, and partner wants to know if you have a four card major suit. If you do, then bid it (2♥ or 2♠). If you don't, then bid 2♦. **Never respond 2 NT to a Stayman bid.**

Example 2

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1 NT	Pass	2♥	Pass
??			

In this example, partner is using a **transfer bid**. Partner is **commanding** you to bid spades. You must respond 2♠ (more experienced players may know that you can respond 2 NT or 3♠ in certain cases; you're too smart to be reading this).

Example 3

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1 NT	Pass	2 NT	Pass
??			

In this example, partner is **inviting** you to bid 3NT if you have a suitable hand. You should accept this invitation whenever you hold 17 points, or whenever you hold 16 points with a strong five-card suit (which will normally be a minor). Never accept the invitation if you hold only 15 points.

Example 4

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1 NT	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	2 NT	Pass
??			

In this example, partner started with Stayman to ask if you hold a four-card major. Your response said no, you don't. Partner is now **inviting** you to bid 3NT if you have a suitable hand. Follow the same guidelines given in Example 3 to make your decision.

Conclusion

In all of these examples, the **opening bidder is the private**, and **responder is the captain**. It is responder's job to direct the bidding. Opener only bids when commanded, or when invited.

Opening Bids Of One In A Suit (Minimum Hands)

Most partnerships don't have too much trouble with notrump openings; that's why I discussed them first, to get the easy part out of the way. Where the trouble starts is when opener starts with a bid of one in a suit, and doesn't know when to stop.

Especially when opener has a minimum hand (12 to 14 or 15 points), opener must keep the general principles (given in the Introduction) in mind. **Stop bidding** when you have shown the strength and distribution of your hand.

Let's start with some examples:

Example 5

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	South	
1♥	1♠	♠ 7
2♥	2♠	♥ A Q 9 8 7 4
??		♦ K Q 8
		♣ Q 3 2

Sitting North, you hold this hand. Your 2♥ rebid tells partner three things: you have a minimum opening bid, you have six hearts, and you probably do not have another biddable suit. You have fully described your strength and distribution. That means you are now the private, and partner is the captain. Partner's 2♠ bid is not forcing. Therefore, do not bid again. Your singleton spade is a bad sign; don't make things worse.

Example 6

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	South	♠ K 7
1♥	1♠	♥ A Q 9 8 4
2♦	2♥	♦ K Q 10 8
??		♣ 3 2

Sitting North, you hold this hand. Your bidding tells partner that you have a minimum hand with five hearts and at least four diamonds. Again, you have described your strength and distribution with your second bid. You are now the private, and partner is the captain. Partner has taken a preference to hearts. This is not an encouraging bid; if partner really liked hearts, he would have raised the first time. Partner probably has two hearts and less than four diamonds. Do not bid again; partner is showing **reluctant** support with a weak hand.

Opening Bids Of One In A Suit (Stronger Hands)

When opener has a stronger hand and opens with one of a suit, it can be tempting to keep bidding even when partner does not show strength. Avoid this temptation and remember the general principles: stop bidding when you have shown the strength and distribution of your hand.

Example 7

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	South	♠ 3
1♥	1♠	♥ A K Q 9 4
3♦	4♥	♦ A K 10 8 7
??		♣ K 7

Sitting North, you hold this hand. Your bidding tells partner that you have a very strong hand (19 to 21 points) with five hearts and at least four diamonds. Again, you have described your strength and distribution with your second bid. You are now the private, and partner is the captain (even though you have the best hand at the table). Partner has decided to bid game in hearts. Do not continue bidding, expecting to find a slam. Partner knows the value of your hand, and can evaluate his accordingly. If a slam is possible, **partner should be looking for it**. Respect partner's decision to sign off in game, and pass.

2♣ Openings

This article does not cover 2♣ openings and the responses. These topics are covered in the article on [bidding strong hands](#).

Opening Preempts

This section applies to weak two opening bids, weak jump overcalls, and to any opening bid at the three level.

This one is easy: **once you have preempted, you are the private and partner is the captain**. You do not bid again unless partner forces you to. Also, do not overrule partner's decision even if you have the opportunity.

Here are some example auctions:

Example 8

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
??			

You have opened with a weak two bid in spades, and partner has raised to three. **This is not an invitation**. Partner is merely "pushing" the preempt a little higher to make life difficult for the opponents. Under no circumstances do you bid again.

Example 9

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
2♠ ??	Pass	2 NT	Pass

In this example, partner's 2 NT bid does command you to bid again. The most common use for the 2 NT response is to ask for a feature; in other words, a high card in a side suit. If opener has a high card in a side suit, he bids that suit. Otherwise, opener repeats his original suit (in this case, North would bid 3♠ with no high card in a side suit).

Example 10**East dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
— 4♥	1♣ 4♠	2♥ ??	2♠

This example actually came up in a recent tournament. South made the mistake of bidding again (5♥), which was doubled and went down quite a few.

In this example, **South must not bid again**. South has shown his hand with the weak jump overcall. South does not know why North raised to game, but it's none of South's business. North knows why he raised, and should know what to do next. North may have raised for a number of reasons: to try and talk the opponents out of bidding 4♠; to push the opponents into 4♠ for a penalty double; or simply because he didn't know who can make what, and wanted the opponents to guess. Regardless of North's reason, **South must not bid**.

Example 11**North dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
3♣ ??	3♥	Pass	4♥

Again, North must pass. South is the captain and will decide what to do. Whenever you preempt, your partner decides whether to sacrifice, not you.

Responder As The Private

Usually, the opening bidder is the private and responder is the captain. This happens because responder's first bid doesn't always limit his hand, whereas opener's second bid generally does.

Look again at Example 5. South's initial 1♠ response promises 6 points, but there is no real upper limit. South could conceivably have 20 points in his hand, and still start with a 1♠ response.

However, North's second bid of 2♥ does limit North's hand, so North is now the private and South is the captain.

Sometimes, however, responder's first bid does limit his hand. This happens when responder raises opener's suit or bids notrump. Here are some examples:

Example 12**North dealer, neither side vulnerable**

North	East	South	West
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1 ♠	Pass	2 ♠	Pass
??			

South has limited his hand. He holds 6 to 9 points, with either three or four spades. South is now the private, and North is the captain. If North has a better than minimum opening hand, North can either invite South to bid game or bid game himself.

Example 13

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1 ♠	Pass	4 ♠	Pass
??			

South has limited his hand. He holds 6 to 9 points, with five or more spades. South is now the private, and North is the captain. However, North should only continue if he has an extremely good hand. Remember: South can have as few as 6 points.

Example 14

North dealer, neither side vulnerable

North	East	South	West
1 ♠	Pass	1 NT	Pass
??			

Again, South has limited his hand. He holds 6 to 9 points, but does not have spade support. South is now the private, and North is the captain. North can pass or bid again, but South will normally pass any non-forcing bid North makes (see the article on [Is It Forcing?](#) for more information).