

Where Are We Now?

An Introduction to Cuebidding

What is a cuebid?

There are many, many types of cuebids out there in the world. There is the Michael's cuebid, the Western cuebid, the Eastern cuebid, the control showing cuebid, the stopper asking cuebid and a host of others. What's a body supposed to make of all these cuebids? Though each of these types of cuebids warrants a great deal of discussion on their own, this lecture is going to deal specifically with control showing cuebids in slam going auctions.

An Analogy

On of the first decisions we faced when we started playing bridge was trying to decide what to do after 1♠-2♠. Should I bid 4 or pass 2? Well, some clever person then realized that "Hey! There is another bid in between 4 and 2. I'll bid 3; if pard has a maximum he will bid 4 and if he has a minimum he can pass."

This was a great improvement in bidding, however, we still missed games such as AJxxx, x, AQxx, Axx vs. KTxx, xxxx, Kxx, xx produced a very good game, but partner would routinely pass an invitational 3♣ being at a dead minimum for his 2♠ bid. Realizing that how the hands fit together was just as important as how many high cards each partner made for a great improvement in bidding. Therefore, we refined our bidding even further to make help suit game tries where we could convey not only high card strength but some distributional information as well. Take the hand above (KTxx, xxxx, Kxx, xx) for example. After 1♠-2♠; 3♣ would you bid a game? How about after 1♠-2♠; 3♦?

Slam try auctions are really very similar to game try auctions. How often do you really need to know *just* about aces? Many times it is important to know whether partner has a minimum or maximum opening bid, or even more importantly, how the hands are fitting together.

After partner opens 1♠ would you launch into Blackwood with Txxx, AKx, AJx, AJx? If you do bid Blackwood partner might have AQxxx, xx, Qxx, KQx and you will bid a slam with very little play since you have enough keycards. On the other hand, if you just bid a game partner might have AQT9x, xx, Kx, KQxx where you are a little over 50% to make seven! What we need to do is to bring partner into the decision by making an invitation to slam. If partner has a good opening bid he can help us bid on to slam while if he has a poor opening bid we can stop at the four or five level.

Definition

A cuebid is a bid which is meant to convey some information about a suit without being an attempt to play in that suit. In the early rounds of an auction the most important thing to do is to locate your best fit. After a fit is established bids start to have other meanings.

What does a cuebid show?

A cuebid conveys two pieces of information; it has some quantitative information about hand strength and also some control information about the suit bid.

When should I cuebid?

There are three basic situations where you should cuebid:

You want to invite a slam. Suppose you hold Qx, Kxxx, Axxx, Axx and the auction goes 1♣-1♥; 3♥-?. If partner has KJx, AQJx, x, KQxxx you surely want to be in a slam. However, if pard has Kx, AQxx, Qx, KQJxx you have virtually no play for slam.

You may have two fast losers in an unbid suit. Suppose you hold KJxx, QJx, AKxx, KJx and the bidding goes 1♠-2NT; 3NT-?. Let's assume that 3NT shows 15-17 HCP so you have plenty of HCP, but which HCP are they? If you launch straight into Blackwood, opener might hold AQxxx, xx, QJx, AQx and though you have enough controls you're likely to go down in a slam.

You have a void. When you hold a void you won't know how to use partner's response to Blackwood. For instance, partner opens 4♠ and you hold Kxx, -, AKQxxx, KQJx. You bid 4NT and partner has two keycards, but what should you do now? Which aces does he have?

Note that the other side of this coin is the **common Blackwood mistakes:**

Blackwood as a slam try. You have enough controls but might not have enough other values to make slam.

Blackwood with no control in an unbid suit. We have enough aces and enough values but may be off the AK of some suit.

Blackwood with a void. We have enough aces but are they the right aces?

Though Blackwood is not appropriate on many hands, asking ourselves why partner didn't choose to use Blackwood will steer us in the right direction in answer the question why partner cuebidding.

Where Are We Now?

What is the most fundamental meaning of a cuebid? When asked this question, most people will answer that a cuebid shows a first or second round control in the bid suit. However, I'd like to take a different approach. I propose that the most important thing about a cuebid is the fact that you are *making* a cuebid. Why you choose to make a cuebid is of much greater importance than the specifics of what that cuebid shows. The reason that I titled this lecture "Where Are We Now?" is that in order to get the full value from our cuebidding we need to know where we are in a hand. In other words, we need to be able to interpret the situation that both we and our partner are in to be able to figure out all the implications of our cuebids. Asking ourselves where we are in a hand will help determine which of the three reasons for cuebidding outlined above apply to our auction. The questions we want to ask ourselves in an auction are:

- 1) What is my range?
- 2) What is partner's range?
- 3) Have all the controls in other suits?

Let's take this hand for example:

xxxx, Axxx, xx, AKx
1♠-3♠; 4♦-4♥; 4♠-?

Should we bid on? Let's ask ourselves, where are we now? What is our range? What is opener's range? What do we know about controls? The range for a limit raise is a very good 9 HCP to a very bad 12 HCP. Therefore, for partner to be making a slam try he must have a very good hand. Also, we know that his hand is unbalanced in some way, since his normal maximum balanced hand would be 19, which when added to our maximum of 12 HCP isn't the required 33 HCP. So, where are we now? What do we know about controls in other suits? How do we like our hand against opener's unbalanced strong hand?

Opener has AKQxx, x, AKxx, Qxx.

Let's try another hand. The auction goes 1♠-3♠; 4♣ and your hold:

- a) Qxxx, Axx, Kxxx, Qx
- b) Qxxx, AJx, Kx, xxx
- c) QJxx, AJx, Qxx, xxx

Opener has AKxxx, xx, Ax, AKxx.

Is one handed tightly limited?

This is a good example of the simplest cuebidding situation where one hand has a very tightly defined range. In this situation, it is very easy to interpret cuebids since quantitative information is implied by the fact that a cuebid has been made. When one hand is limited, our cuebids are just about controls and general fit. However, there is a second type of auction where both hands have very wide ranges. Which are much harder to handle. In these situations, both partners need to make cuebids on suitable minimum hands in case the other player has a good hand. But how do we know if we are showing extras or not? A good rule is: The hand that goes past game has extras. Let's try a common situation:

You hold Qxxx, Axx, KJxx, Axx
1♠-2NT; 3♥-3♠; 4♦-4♥; 4♠-?

Where are we now? What could be the reasons we are cuebidding here? Although you have a club control, you wouldn't go past game to cuebid here since you don't have extras.

Here is a disaster from the recent World Championships - Argentina vs USA1.
AKxxxxx, A, QJxx, x vs QJx, QT9xx, Kxx, Ax 1♥-2♠; 3♠-4♣; 4♠-P
What went wrong?

Should I cuebid a first or second round control?

This is a very big question but one with a very clear answer.

- bid the thing that makes your partner's hand go
- make the least mis-descriptive bid possible
- don't deny a control by going past a cuebid

Rule: bid first and second round controls equally below Blackwood

Should I cuebid shortness?

The answer to this question is yes and no. Cuebidding a singleton or void can easily be the control you need in a suit, so yes, cuebidding shortness is fine. However, if you cuebid a suit partner is known to be long in, he will expect a high card in that suit since it is likely to be your sides primary place to take tricks. So, the answer is no, not in a suit partner is known to be long in.

Review

There are many reasons cuebidding, however, the main reasons are:

- 1) Invite slam
- 2) Two fast losers
- 3) Have a void

To answer the question “Where are we now?” in cuebidding auctions we ask ourselves:

- 1) Is one hand tightly limited?
- 2) Why didn't partner use Blackwood?
- 3) Is this just a control issue?

A couple of handy cuebidding rules are:

- 1) Cuebid the thing that will make your partner's hand go.
- 2) Cuebid first and second round controls equally below 4NT.
- 3) The hand that goes past game has extras.
- 4) Don't cuebid shortness in partner's suit.