

COMPETITIVE BIDDING

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When to 'protect' – and how far to go

IN the first article in this series (June 2008) we saw that with balanced hands of up to a poor 15 points you might have no alternative to pass, once your right-hand opponent has opened the bidding. The main natural options available to East in *Auction 1* are shown below:

Auction 1

West	North	East	South
	1♥	?	

1♠ (one-level overcall) = 8-17 HCP
 2♣ (two-level overcall without jump) = 10-18 HCP
 Double (take-out) = 11+ HCP
 1NT = Good 15-18 HCP

Clearly West cannot use the same criteria in *Auction 2*, otherwise both players may pass with 14 balanced points and an easy game is missed. Equally, there are the large numbers of hands where the points in the pack are roughly evenly split between North-South and East-West. I call these '20/20 hands'. Frequently each side can make a part-score in its chosen suit and it simply doesn't pay to sell out to your opponents' choice of one-level contract.

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Auction 2

West	North	East	South
?	1♥	Pass	Pass

This position is called the Protective position because West must 'protect' the possibility that East has been forced to pass with opening values. Bidding with few values is relative safe here: if West has only 8 points then he knows East must have quite a bit, otherwise why are North-South passing out 1♥? West should be looking for reasons to bid, not reasons to pass! On the whole West pretends he has an extra useful king (effectively borrowing it from East) and then chooses his bid. This is called: 'transferring a king'. The bidding criteria for West in *Auction 2* are summarised as follows:

- 1♠ (one-level overcall) = 5-14 HCP
- 2♣ (two-level overcall without jump) = 7-15 HCP
- Double (take-out) = 8+ HCP
- 1NT = 11-14 HCP

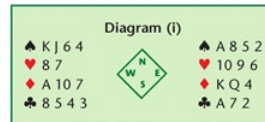
Some bids in fourth position don't quite fit this pattern of bidding with 3 fewer points:

- 2NT shows a balanced 20-22, because it is not possible otherwise to cater for strong balanced hands too good for a protective 1NT.

2♣, a jump overcall, should be played as 12-16 HCP with a six-card suit, irrespective of what you play immediately over the 1♥ bidder.

Michaels Cue-bids should remain largely unaltered, though there is not much point in bidding on complete rubbish when you can pass the hand out.

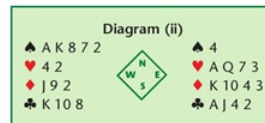
The time for West to pass in *Auction 2* is when he has great length in opener's suit and is worried that if he bids North-South might find a better contract.



Auction 3

West	North	East	South
	1♥	Pass	Pass
Dble	Pass	2♣	All Pass

The East-West hands in *Diagram (i)* are bid as shown in *Auction 3*. Of course if West had been next to bid after 1♥ and had doubled in that position, East would be insisting on game, but East is aware that West has added a king to his assets. Therefore East has to correspondingly subtract a king.



Auction 4

West	North	East	South
	1♥	Pass	Pass
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2NT	Pass	3NT	All Pass

The East-West hands in *Diagram (ii)* are bid as shown in *Auction 4*. East's 1NT might look like a huge underbid, but opposite a standard one-level overcall 1NT shows 9-12 points. If East subtracts a king, then he will need to have started with 12-15 points.

Remember: West could have protected with 1♠ with as few as 5 points! With 11 points, West makes a game try of 2NT and now East has a comfortable raise to game.