

How hard is Bidding?

by MATTHEW MCMANUS



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A bidding quiz with a small difference. On each of the following problems you are sitting South. You are playing teams and you need to decide what call to make. When you have made your bid, there is another question to answer....Rate how difficult your decision was on each hand: 1 – easy, 2 – average, 3 – hard:

Hand 1

♠ A3
♥ T42
♦ 973
♣ K9842

Dealer E | Vul Nil

W	N	E	S
		1S	P
2S	4H	4S	?

Hand 2

♠ Q987
♥ Q
♦ JT732
♣ 853

Dealer E | Vul All

W	N	E	S
		1H	P
2H	3D	4H	?

Hand 3

♠ 9872
♥ J43
♦ KQ2
♣ KQ7

Dealer E | Vul E-W

W	N	E	S
		1C	X
1H	3D	4H	?

Hand 4

♠ AJ4
♥ K7
♦ AK86
♣ T932

Dealer E | Vul All

W	N	E	S
		1H	X
3H	3S	4H	?

Hand 5

♠ 5
♥ T9865
♦ J8
♣ KT976

Dealer N | Vul All

W	N	E	S
	2NT	4S	?

All five of these problems arose at various congress events in the last month.

There were quite a few other common factors:

In each case

- South decided to pass
- South thought for at least 30 seconds before passing
- North then decided to take another action
- there was a call for the director after the hand was over

That South should think for so long in every case indicates that the player at the table would have given each problem a “3” rating on the difficulty scale.

You may have guessed by now that, in all cases, it would have been best for his side if South had taken some action other than passing.

On Hand 1, NS can make 5H, EW go one off in 4S.

On Hand 2, 4H makes while 5D is just one off. (Even more spectacular is if South has available and can find a negative double of 4H showing four spades. NS may, with some good play, be able to make 4S.)

On Hand 3, NS have an excellent sacrifice in 5D.

On Hand 4, both 4Hand 4S should go down, but either may make if the defence slips up.

And on Hand 5, NS can make 11 tricks in either of South's suits with some good guessing, while 4S is going just one down.

The other common factor which led to the director calls is that in each case North's decision to take another call was quite marginal. It was not at all clear cut that he should bid again, but in every case he did. When NS ended up with a good score, the director had no option under the laws but to change the score back to what would have happened had North followed South's lead and also passed.

So who was the culprit here? North, for taking the marginal action? The Director, for taking away NS's good score? I am going to suggest that the fault lies fairly and squarely with South. The amount of time South spent "in the tank" indicates that he was clearly considering some action other than pass. When the player follows up all this thinking with a pass, he places significant ethical pressure on his partner to take no notice of that information. That can be very hard to do.

The message that these hands send is that if you have a hard decision to make, and you need to take some time to consider it, then when it comes down to a 50-50 choice (or close to it) you should always come down on the side of taking some action rather than passing. Your results will probably improve and you will make life much easier for your partner. ❤️