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CAMOUFLAGE AND WAITING BIDS IN COURSE OF BIDDING

The word 'camouflage' comes from French and means camouflaging, masking, concealment, to cover tracks. In my opinion, in the 21st century it will be one of the main postulates in the modern bridge theory. Until now, bridge theoreticians, improperly, have disregarded the need of camouflage. I had an opportunity to watch pairs bidding without any partnership agreements, shooting off the cuff in a primitive way. Occasionally it was a shot right on target because it was consistent with the idea of camouflage. Without much information derived from the bidding, defenders are at loss and finding the optimal opening lead is more difficult. This analysis should inspire conclusions. Our bidding tools should be used skilfully. In a situation when players do not required precise information to arrive at the final contract, such exchange of information should be limited to basic things. I think that modern systems are not constructed in compliance with the idea of camouflage.

Short Camouflage Glossary

Atonality of bidding – final contract has no link to specific bids between the partnership

Pot-boiling – colloquial term for bidding sequence driving to the final contract

Courtyard bidding – combines courtyard bidding with elements of conventions applied without rhyme or reason

Bidding dissonance – bid that is inconsistent with former bids

Feeling bidding – bidding based on intuition when a player is in a good form

Improvisation – as the name shows, it is unique, characteristic for an outstanding player and his personality

Flippant bidding – solo bidding in order to show off is monkeying about

Musicality of a bridge player – general sensitivity to bidding, its beauty, tempo, and rhythm

Free Style – will always be popular. Its disadvantage is atonality and breaking the cooperation

I used to think that the fashion for chaotic bidding would fade away. I was wrong.

1. EXAMPLES OF CAMOUFLAGE

1.1. Stayman without a four card major (de-camouflage)

The example of pathetic de-camouflage will demonstrate in the best way the need of camouflage.

The ultimate absurdity was invitational bid after 1NT opening with the use of Stayman convention without a four card major.

W		E
1NT	-	2♣
2♥	-	2NT
?		

In this way, we used to invite partner to a thin game, disclosed our hand and eliminated a favourable opening heart lead that might have given the contract away.

There is a theoretical solution of this problem. In many systems we need 2NT bid as a transfer to diamonds but we may assign an extra meaning to the transfer to clubs bid – invitational without a four-card major with 8-9 HCPs.

W		E
1NT	-	2♠
?		

2NT – minimum
3♣ - maximum

These bids do not show the quality of a club fit and this is a slight disadvantage.

1.2. Further relays after Stayman

The Stayman convention with further relay asking about a precise hand distribution is *passé*, which does not mean that we should get rid of this mechanism in order to get precise information when we really need it.

W	E
1NT	- 2♣
2♦	- 2♠ (waiting)
?	

2NT – I do not want to show anything because I do not have a good hand – camouflage!

3♣ - 5 clubs and a good hand
3♦ - 5 diamonds and a good hand
3♥ - 2-3-4-4 distribution and a good hand
3♠ - 3-2-4-4 distribution and good hand
3NT – 3-3-3-4, 3-3-4-3 distributions and maximum

When a poor hand will discourage us, the opener's hand will not be disclosed. If, however, we want to know about partner's hand, we can use another waiting bid.

W	E
1NT	- 2♣
2♦	- 2♠
2NT	- 3♣ - Come on; just show me what you have!
?	

3♦ - I have a five-card minor
3♥ - 2-3-4-4 distribution
3♠ - 3-2-4-4 distribution
3NT – 3-3-3-4, 3-3-4-3 distributions

This is the full sequence:

W	E
1NT -	2♣
2♦ -	2♠
2NT -	3♣
3♦ -	3♥ (which five-card suit?)
?	
3♠ -	clubs
3NT -	diamonds

Similar sequence follows a two-heart response:

W	E
1NT -	2♣
2♥ -	2♠ - waiting bid
?	

2NT – poor hand
3♣ - four clubs
3♦ - four diamonds
3♥ - five hearts

The main point is not to disclose declarer's hand when our partner gives up the idea of playing a slam. We should not make the opponents' life easy. This mechanism has some advantages. After a two-spade waiting bid and a negative response, 4NT invitational has somewhat different character. We are asking our partner whether he has some positive values within his poor power and distribution. Similar situation is when the answer is positive. An invitational 4NT bid means - do you really have super-maximum, partner?

1.3. Camouflage of the minor suits on the opening

An idea of a one-diamond opening with a five-carder (if four cards then only with a three-suiter shape) was a strong point of the Polish Club system. Such information is essential. All balanced hands within 12-14 HCPs range were included in a one-club opening. I remember discussions with American players, who were not able to understand that after a typical sequence like the one below:

W		E
1♣	-	1♠
1NT	-	3NT
pass		

the opener may have four clubs and two diamonds or four diamonds and two clubs.

It is much easier to lead against players opening a “better minor.”

1.4. Major suit preference

The major suit preference that was en vogue some time ago played a similar camouflage role.

W		E
♠A873		♠KQ64
♥75		♥108
♦AJ1062		♦Q8
♣QJ		♣AK1094

The classical bidding will proceed as follows:

W		E
1♦	-	2♣
2♦	-	2♠
3♠	-	4♠
pass		

After this course of bidding, the opening heart lead is almost a certainty. All experts will recommend an aggressive opening lead because hearts may be disposed on diamonds or clubs. It is possible to take even worse, more transparent, course of bidding:

W		E
1♦	–	2♣
2♦	-	2♠
3♠	-	4♣
4♦	-	4♠
pass		

We are exposed to an opening heart lead. The major suit preference will reduce the bidding to the following sequence:

W		E
1♦	-	1♠
2♠	-	4♠
pass		

It is obvious that defenders' position is now much more difficult. I definitely support the major suit preference. Modern bidding methods provide the tools for finding a solution in this delicate position.

W	E
♠A9	♠K652
♥A10432	♥J
♦Q83	♦AKJ9742
♣Q42	♣K5

Classical bidding:

W		E
1♥	-	2♦
2♥	-	2♠
3♦	-	?

We are at the level of three and know very little about the opening hand. In the major suit preference approach, the bidding will go as follows:

W		E
1♥	-	1♠
1NT	-	2♣
2♦	-	3♦
4♦	-	4NT
5♠	-	6♦
pass		

2♣ - waiting bid
 2♦ - minimum, without three spades
 3♦ - 5+ diamonds – forcing
 5♠ - two Aces + ♦Q

At the level of two diamonds, we know about spade doubleton, three card diamond fit, and minimum strength. There is enough room to convey the intention. Agreeing a suit at the level of four is based on card evaluation. With the minimum power range, the opening hand has two aces and a trump queen. The club queen is also a positive value.

With less attractive hand, like the one below:

♠ Q10
 ♥ KQ985
 ♦ 1083
 ♣ AJ4

partner will respond with a negative 3NT