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Professional Slam Bidding

Part I

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PREFACE

Bidding in the slam zone is an art. It requires good hand evaluation, a well-prepared set of bidding tools, and a large number of additional agreements with particular emphasis on competitive auctions.

It helps to have the ability to make decisions under pressure and camouflage information on those hands where the final contract depends on the opening lead.

A good imagination is crucial, and accurate assessment of a situation often depends on being able to draw the right conclusions from the opponents' bidding.

I have studied many books covering the world championships in the past two decades. What I have found is shocking.

Top professional pairs made a lot of mistakes due to bad hand evaluation and the wrong interpretation of particular calls.

Practically in every element of slam zone bidding professional pairs leave room for improvement.

The difficulty lies in the fact that slam zone bidding consists of several stages, each of which requires considerable expertise. Both players in the partnership have to have sufficient knowledge on this topic.

Slam zone bidding demands precision and a great deal of intellectual effort. However, precision in bidding contradicts the idea of camouflage.

Professional Slam Bidding is a look at the slam auctions bid at the table by professional players. There are over 150 deals in the slam zone bid by championship pairs with my comments and proposed solutions, concepts, conventions, and agreements.

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THE FOUNDATION

The foundation I call the stages of bidding that try to exchange the maximum amount of information without going past 3NT. Further stages are cue bidding, Blackwood, etc.

We need to create bidding tools that allow us to camouflage the bidding when our goal is to bid game and exchange all information and intentions when we're driving to slam.

For example:

1♠ — 2♣
2♠ — 2NT
3♥ — “I have 6+♠”

Responder can bid 3♠ — “I need more information.”

1♠ — 2♣
2♠ — 2NT
3♥ — 3♠
3NT — no shortness
4♣, ♦, ♥ — shortness
4♠ — super minimum — or “I'm only trying to get to the best contract.”

Obtaining complete information about partner's hand allows us to effectively transition to cue bidding.

Cue bids serve not only to check controls, but also to communicate our intentions.

How did a world class pair handle the basics?

BEIJING 2008
OPEN TEAM CHAMPIONSHIPS, THE FINAL

♠ A J 9	N	♠ 8 7
♥ 7 5	W E	♥ 8 4
♦ K Q 9 8 6	S	♦ J 7 4 3
♣ 8 6 5		♣ A Q J 7 3

♠ —
♥ Q J 10 9 6 3 2
♦ A 2
♣ K 10 4 2

♠ K Q 10 6 5 4 3 2
♥ A K
♦ 10 5
♣ 9

Both vulnerable

W	N	E	S
Versace	Sandqvist	Lauria	Malinowski
	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♦
Pass	2♥	Pass	4♠
Pass	...		

Sandqvist didn't give even an approximate picture of his hand.

Better would have been an opening 4♥ bid (recommended because of the spade void).

If in this pair's style the hand is too strong for a 4♥ opening, then I could settle for this sequence:

1♥ — 1♠
4♥

W	N	E	S
Townsend	Sementa	Gold	Duboin
	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	3♥	Pass	3♠
Pass	4♥	Pass	5♣
Pass	5♦	Pass	5♥
Pass	6♥	Pass	...

Regardless of the bidding agreements held by the Italian pair, Sementa falsely expressed his intentions (as evidenced by Duboin bidding on).

Accepting the slam invitation shows a lack of self-preservation.

SHANGHAI 2007

WORLD TRANSNATIONAL OPEN TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP, THE FINAL

♠ 4	N	♠ K Q 7 6 5
♥ Q 8 4 2	W	♥ A K J
♦ K Q 9 7 3	E	♦ A 8 4
♣ A K 5	S	♣ Q 8
♠ A J 10 3 2		♠ 9 8
♥ 9 3		♥ 10 7 6 5
♦ J 10 5		♦ 6 2
♣ 10 7 2		♣ J 9 6 4 3

W	N	E	S
Zmudzinski	Fantoni	Balicki	Nunes
	Pass	1♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	2♠	Pass
3NT	Pass	4♦	Pass
5♣	Pass	5♦	Pass

By bidding 3NT Żmudziński lost an entire level of bidding for no reason.

After the 5♣ bid should Balicki have risked the slam?

There wasn't enough space to precisely convey all the necessary information.

W	N	E	S
Zimmerman	Gromov	Multon	Dubinin
	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♦	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♦	Pass
3NT	Pass	4♥	Pass
6♦	Pass	...	

The pair from Monaco tried to describe their hands as best as possible using all available bidding space.

The optimal contract without a doubt is 6NT.

SHANGHAI 2007
 BERMUDA BOWL, THE SEMI-FINALS

♠ K 8 3	N	♠ A Q 9 6 5 2
♥ A K Q 4 3 2	W E	♥ 10 6
♦ 10 6	S	♦ A Q
♣ Q 10		♣ A 8 3
	♠ 10 7 4	
	♥ J	
	♦ J 8 5 3 2	
	♣ 7 6 4 3	

W	N	E	S
Weinstein		Garner	
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	2NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	4♣	Pass
4♠	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♠	Pass	7♥	Pass
2NT	— forcing		
4♣, ♠	— cue bid		
5♠	— 2 keycards + the Q♥		

W	N	E	S
Bakkeren		Bertens	
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♥	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♠	Pass	6♠	Pass ...

Both pairs ran into big trouble in the beginning stage of the bidding, despite having specific agreements.

Weinstein – Garner — 2NT forcing

Bakkeren – Bertens — 3♠ forcing

I agree with the concept of 2NT as forcing. A mechanism is needed for – “I need more information.”

My suggestion?

Sequence 1.

W	E
1♥	— 1♠
2♥	— 2NT (waiting)
?	
3♣	— 3 spades
3♦	— singleton diamond (2614 with bad clubs or 2713)
3♥	— singleton or void in spades
3♠	— singleton club (2731 or 2641 with bad diamonds)
3NT	— 2623 or 2632 distribution

Sequence 2a.

W	E
1♥	— 1♠
2♥	— 2NT
3♣	— 3♦ — waiting. I need more information.
3♥	— singleton club
3♠	— singleton diamond
3NT	— no shortness
	♠ A Q J 2
	♥ Q
	♦ K Q J 9
	♣ 10 9 4 3

After 3♥ (singleton ♣) E should bid 4♣ partner your choice (4♥ or 4♠). After 3♠ (singleton ♦) E like play 3NT. After 3NT — no shortness, he may pass.

Sequence 2b.

W	E
1♥	— 1♠
2♥	— 2NT
3♣	— 3♥ — “What about slam in hearts?”
3♠	— “I have a void (in a minor).”
3NT	— no shortness, positive
4♣	— singleton club
4♦	— singleton diamond
4♥	— no shortness, negative

Sequence 2c.

1♥	— 1♠
2♥	— 2NT
3♣	— 3♥
3♠	— 3NT — “Do you have a void? Where?”
4♣	— void in clubs
4♦	— void in diamonds

Sequence 3.

- 1♥ — 1♠
- 2♥ — 2NT
- 3♣ — 3♠ — “What about slam in spades?”
- 3NT — “I have a void”
- 4♣ — singleton club
- 4♦ — singleton diamond
- 4♥ — no shortness, positive
- 4♠ — no shortness, negative

Sequence 3a.

- 1♥ — 1♠
- 2♥ — 2NT
- 3♣ — 3♠ — “What about slam in spades?”
- 3NT — 4♣ — “Do you have a void? Where?”
- 4♦ — void in diamonds
- 4♥ — void in clubs

How can we invite partner to a game contract? Occasionally, we feel the need for a 2NT invitational bid. However, nobody can deny that a waiting scheme provides considerable bidding comfort.

Why does 3♣ mean “I have 3 spades”?

The right kind of bidding foundation must have the possibility of getting to the slam zone with the right trump suit agreed.

In the old version of this sequence

- 1♥ — 1♠
- 2♥ — 2NT
- 3♠ — 3622 — a cue bid by responder would agree hearts or spades.

This approach leaves something to be desired. Why?

♠ 9 8 3
 ♥ A K Q 4 3 2
 ♦ 10 6
 ♣ Q 10

If partner is interested in a heart slam, then my reaction is one of enthusiasm.

A slam in spades doesn't interest me.

This leads to the next obstacle:

1♥ — 1♠
 2♥ — 2NT
 3♣ — 4♣
 4♥ — is this a signoff or a cue bid?

Let's see how the bidding would look with the authentic deal.

♠ K 8 3	N W E S	♠ A Q 9 6 5 2
♥ A K Q 4 3 2		♥ 10 6
♦ 10 6		♦ A Q
♣ Q 10		♣ A 8 3

W	N	E	S
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♠	Pass
5♥	Pass	?	

- 3♣ — “I have 3 spades.”
- 3♠ — “What do you think about a spade slam?”
- 5♥ — “I'm excited, but...I don't have cue bids in the minor suits, an opening (+12PC) with concentrated points in the majors.”

Based on the information gained from the auction East can count up the tricks to get to the contracts of 7♥, 7♠ and 7NT.

Of course, it makes sense to play 7NT only in a fairly high level pair game.

PARIS 2001. BERMUDA BOWL, THE SEMI-FINALS

		♠ A J 8 4	
		♥ A J 9 7 5	
		♦ K 3	
		♣ K 5	
♠ Q 10	N	♠ K 9 7 3 2	
♥ 8 3	W E	♥ —	
♦ J 6 5 2	S	♦ Q 10 9 8	
♣ Q J 10 9 7		♣ 6 4 3 2	
		♠ 6 5	
		♥ K Q 10 6 4 2	
		♦ A 7 4	
		♣ A 8	

W	N	E	S
Sontag	Balicki	Weichsel	Żmudziński
			1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♥
Pass	3♣	Pass	3♦
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♣
Pass	4♦	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♠	Pass	5NT
Pass	6♥	Pass	7♥
Pass	...		

This is an example of the consequences of not having a bidding device that says “I need more information.”