Balancing

Perhaps, the most difficult aspect of defensive bidding is that of "balancing" which can probably best be defined as "keeping the bidding open when a pass by you would complete the auction." It is a very risky proposition as many unpleasant things can happen once you decide to give the opponents another chance to bid. On the more positive side, it also gives partner the opportunity to compete whenever he had no clearcut call previously.

It will be assumed that the partnership uses sound two-level overcalls and fairly sound takeout doubles in the direct position, and that overcalls at the one level show five card suits and a minimum of 9+ high card points. (If it is your style to bid with very minimum values in the direct seat, balancing may not be necessary.) It should also be noted that balancing is primarily a Matchpoint tactic; many consider it too risky at Imps.

The most common situation in which balancing becomes a factor is when LHO's (left hand opponent's) opening bid of one of a suit has been passed around to you. This is one of the best times to bid because (1) the bidding is still very low, (2) RHO has indicated weakness so you know where at least some of the missing high cards will be, and (3) partner could have many fairly good hands with no overcall available and a T/O double unreasonable. It should be noticed that many actions in the balancing seat are the same as those in the direct seat....but with one important difference. They can be up to a King or Ace lighter. Your options include:

- (1) Double Any hand which would have qualified for a T/O double in the direct chair also qualifies in the reopening seat, but it can also be made by hands with the right shape for a T/O double that are about 3 to 4 HCP's short of the required HCP's for a double in the direct position. Balanced hands that are too good for a 1NT or a 2NT bid in the balancing position (which show 11-14 and 19-20 respectively) must start with a double. Therefore, a double can range from a very good balanced hand to a semi-balanced 8 HCP's. Responder's actions to T/O doubles by a balancing partner are fairly straight forward...they are about the same as they would be to T/O doubles in the direct seat but the responder should first subtract about 3-4 HCP's from his hand. Responses would then be as follows:
 - (a) 1NT = 9-11 HCP's with stopper.
 - (b) One of suit = 0 bad 11 points
 - (c) Jump to two of major = good 11 to 13 points, four card suit. (Tends to deny decent five card suit because he didn't overcall)

- (d) Jump to three hearts (after opening bid of 1S) = good 11-13 points, five card suit or good four card suit.
- (e) Jump to two diamonds = no four-card major, 11-13 points, five card suit.
- (f) Jump to three of minor = good five card suit, 12-14 points.
- (g) Jump to 2NT = 12 14 HCP's, balanced hand, usually no unbid four card major.
- (h) Jump to 3NT = unlikely, but just short of NT overcall.
- (i) Cuebid = good hand, promises another bid unless game has been reached.
- (j) Pass = shows values with good trumps.
- (2) 1NT This bid should be used to show a balanced 11-14 hand if the opening bid was one of a minor suit. If the opening bid was one of a major and your stopper in the major-suit bid is suspect or only partial, the upper limit of the NT bid can be raised to 15. Once again, the balancer is overbidding by 3-4 points, so, therefore, the responder should underbid by 3-4 points when answering his partner. Many people play "systems on" (2♣ being Stayman and all transfers on) after a balancing NT. Other responses by a passed hand partner can be:
 - (a) Pass = no interest in game, fairly balanced hand.
 - (b) 2NT = 10-11 HCP's, no interest in any other game.
 - (c) New suit at the two level = not forcing and not invitational, five card or longer suit.
 - (d) New suit at the three level = not forcing but invitational, five card or longer suit.
 - (e) Cuebid = Stayman asking about unbid four card majors, and showing at least invitational values (10+ HCP's).
- (3) One of a suit With a five card suit only about 6 HCP's are required for balancing. If balancing with a four-card suit, the suit should be good and/or the hand should be better. There is no maximum for a one level suit bid in the balancing position, but one must be careful because a suit bid is NOT forcing. Sometimes, it may not be possible to reopen with your longest suit. For example, with four good spades and five clubs, it is probably best to reopen with one spade after 1D or 1H. Responses should be as follows:
 - (a) simple raises 8-12 points with three card support.
 - (b) 1NT 9 to bad 12 HCP's with stopper in opener's suit.
 - (c) 2NT good 12 to 14 HCP's with stopper.

- (d) New suit at one level no fit for partner, bad five card or longer suit that wasn't good enough to overcall, not forcing.
- (e) Jump raise good fit with four-card support, unbalanced hand, 11+ points.
- (f) Cuebid good fit with three-card support, usually more balanced, 11+ points, intending to pass any minimum rebids by the balancer, but will bid game otherwise.
- (g) New suit at the two level no fit for partner, five-card or longer suit, hand or suit didn't qualify for original two level overcall, not forcing.
- (4) Two of a lower ranking suit guarantees a five card suit of decent quality. Since the bidding is being elevated a level, this bid also shows extra values in terms of high cards (10+ HCP's). Additionally, reopening with a suit at the two level tends to show disinterest in suits between the opening bidder's suit and the one you are bidding. Also, one should remember that RHO may well have length is suits lower ranking than opening bidder's but couldn't bid with marginal values whereas he may well have responded in a suit higher ranking than opener's if he could have done so at the one level. Responses are much the same as in (3) above.
- (5) Reopening jump to two level shows a minimum of a good six-card suit with about 13-14 HCP's. If the suit is a seven-card suit, the point count range can be lowered to about 11-12.
- (6) Reopening jump to three level shows a minimum of a very good six or seven card suit with some outside strength. Usually this is a minor suit and is primarily aimed at getting to three notrump.
- (7) Reopening jump to 2NT shows about 19-20 HCP's and a balanced hand. It is not unusual. (Double followed by a jump in NT shows more about 21-22.) Again, systems can be "on". Other possible responses include:
 - (a) Cuebid Stayman for the majors
 - (b) New suit at the three level five-card suit, forcing to game.
 - (c) Raise to 3NT 5+ points.
 - (d) New suit at the four level natural and forcing if not game.

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