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This Week in Bridge

(71) Control-Showing Cuebids

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Level: 2, 3

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General

Having *control* in a suit means not having two quick losers in that suit. More specifically, we call it *First Round Control* if we have the Ace or a void in the suit – no quick losers. We call it *Second Round Control* if we have the King or a singleton in the suit – only one quick loser.

Control-Showing Cuebids

Level: 2

When we are attempting to explore slam and we are considering how to exchange information about the hand we often have a choice in how to approach things.

- On some hands, it is most useful to have holistic information in order to judge what to do. This information is the number of Aces and is discovered by bidding Blackwood (or Keycard.)
- On other hands, more specific information is needed in order to make a good decision about slam. This specific information is not “how many” Aces partner has, but “which” Ace partner has – this is discovered by using *Control-Showing Cuebids (CSC)*.

These CSC can be used to discover voids and singletons as well – other specific information.

Note: We are using the term “Control-Showing Cuebid” (or CSC) instead of “Cuebid” in order to distinguish it from a cuebid of the opponent’s suit.

How to Make a Control-Showing Cuebid

Level: 2

To make a CSC, we need the following conditions to be satisfied:

- We have discovered a fit (8+ cards)
- We are in a game forcing auction
 - Examples -- 2/1 GF, Jacoby 2NT, Splinter, etc...
 - Some bids force to game as they start cuebidding: 1M- 3M - 4♣.
(Usually not a jump.)

Under these conditions, then we will make CSCs just below game (usually).

- In a Major, a CSC will be other suits bid between 3-Major and 4-Major.
(Sometimes we can show CSCs at higher levels as well, but this is rarer.)
- In a minor, a CSC will usually be other suits bid between 4-minor and 5-minor.
(Sometimes we can make a cuebid in 4♣ when 4♦ is the suit.)

American Style Cuebids

Level: 2

Once we have the right conditions and are at the proper level then we make a CSC. We do this by bidding a new suit at the appropriate level.

We will first examine American Style Cuebid. We bid our first round controls up the line. When we bid a new suit playing traditional American Style Cuebids, this shows 1st round control - Ace or void.

Example

1♠ 3♠
4♣ 1st round control in ♣.

When we bypass a suit we deny 1st round control in the suit.

1♠ 3♠
4♦ 1st round control in ♦. No 1st round control in ♣.

1♥ 2NT*
3♥ 4♣ 1st round control in ♣. No 1st round control in ♠. ♦ unknown yet.

Note: After we have shown our 1st round controls we proceed to showing our 2nd round controls.

When / How to Use Control Showing Cuebids Effectively

Level: 2

So now that we know a bit about when CSCs apply and what they mean, we want to discuss how to make use of them to make us better slam bidders.

Imagine the following situation - you have a very good hand and a ♠ fit, but you have two small ♣. If you bid 4NT and ask for Aces (Keycards), you might find out you are missing one Ace. At that point you will not know if it is safe to bid slam.

You might know you have lots of tricks if you can get on lead, but the opponents might be able to take the first two ♣ tricks. If you knew that one of partner's Aces was the ♠A then you could more confidently bid the slam. CSCs can help accomplish this:

1♠ 2NT

3♠ 4♣

4NT 5♥

6♠ Knowing you are not off the first two tricks in ♣.

One of the general uses of CSCs will be to help us know if it is ok to bid a slam even though we are off an Ace and have two small in a suit.

As you can imagine there are many situations where knowing specifically which Ace(s) partner holds can be incredible useful in helping us properly evaluate our hand. For example, if partner has the Ace opposite our KQTx we are very happy, whereas if partner has another Ace (say opposite our void or singleton), then we are not as happy. So getting (or not getting) a cuebid from partner can be what helps us stop in 4-Major on hands where that is the last making spot – otherwise we would have bid to 5-Major and gone down one.

Most importantly, the process of CSCs is a cooperative decision-making process – we show information about our hand and partner tells us information about their hand. Compare this with Keycard, which is a unilateral process -- only one player says anything about their hand. Sometimes a cooperative process (CSC) is what is needed to make a good decision about slam.

Other Control Showing Cuebidding Styles

Level: 3

Italian Style Cuebids

Some players choose to play a different style of cuebids where they bid 1st or 2nd round controls the first time they make a CSC in a suit.

1♠ 3♠

4♣ 4♣ shows a singleton, void, King, or Ace.

This style of cuebidding is less specific about what it shows, but it provides much stronger negative inferences – if partner bypasses a suit we know they have two quick losers in that suit. This allows us to immediately stop investigating slam when we also have two quick losers.

Note: The downside of this style of cuebidding is that we don't know exactly what partner's cuebid shows. CSC in this style then becomes less specific.

Modern Style Cuebids

A modern blend of cuebidding styles is probably superior to both of these more traditional styles (American or Italian Style):

- Cuebid Aces or Voids in unbid suits.
- Cuebid Aces in your own suits.
- Cuebid Aces or Kings in partner's suits (of known 4-cards or longer)
- Do not cuebid shortness in partner's suit.

This modern style of CSC is an excellent balance between communicating to partner our useful cards while not giving up specific information (clarity) to our overall CSC.

Conclusion

Control Showing Cuebids are a complex addition to our slam bidding tool set. The specific information CSCs allow us to obtain will greatly help us visualize partner's hand and determine if a slam will have excellent or poor play. This is always our goal for developing a new slam bidding tool.