



# Adventures in Bridge

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## ***This Week in Bridge***

### **(72) Forcing Passes**

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Level: 2

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#### **General**

It is important that we know, clearly, if we are in *Forcing Pass* auction or not because it dramatically affects the meaning of our calls.

- In a forcing pass auction, a direct double votes for defense and asks partner to defend.
- In contrast, in a non-forcing pass auction, double becomes much blurrier – it shows extra values and says it is not sure what to do.

Before we tackle some additional (low-level) forcing pass auctions, let's talk about some other situations where we could agree that forcing passes apply.

#### **Could a Forcing Pass Apply? More Options**

*Note: This is an optional agreement to be discussed with partner.*

In addition to the simpler forcing pass auctions (where we are in a game forcing auction) we could agree to play forcing passes where we have shown a substantial amount of values (more than the opponents.) The usual situation to discuss with partner is to play forcing passes when we open the bidding and partner shows invitational+ values – with or without a fit.

#### *Example*

1♥ (1♠) 2♠ (4♠) 2♠ shows a limit raise or better in ♥.

This is a playable method, but something you must decide with partner. The only problem with this method is you will be forced to double the opponents or bid on in the above example. In spite of us having a majority of the points, sometimes they will be able to make the doubled contract.

## Low Level Forcing Pass Auctions: 2-level & 3-level

Now let's examine how our thinking (forcing pass agreements) might change when the opponents enter our low level auctions. Let's focus on when we are in a 2/1 game forcing auction and the opponents bid at the 2- or 3-level. Unlike higher-level auctions, where we are worried about bidding too high and going down, we are now choosing between defense and offense based on which one will give us the largest plus score.

### Example

1♠ 2♣ (2♥)

In this kind of auction we need to focus more on our holding in the opponents' suit – how much defense do we have against the opponents' suit?

## Direct Seat Actions (Behind the Bidder)

- Bid – Distributional hands that have little defense (usually short in the opponents' suit.)
- Double – Penalty-oriented. Strong defensive hand (strong holding in the opponents' suit – usually 4+ cards.)
- Pass – Cooperative. Enough defense and trump to allow partner to double at such a low level if they want to. (At least 3-cards, usually Honor third, in the opponents' suit.)

## Balancing Seat Actions

If partner doubles in the direct seat, this is not unilaterally a penalty double. It wants to defend (has good trump) but if our hand is highly distributional (often singleton or void in the opponents' suit) and/or has a fit for partner's suit then we should pull the double and bid on naturally, choosing to play offense. Otherwise, we will leave the double in.

If partner passes the opponents' bid around to us then we know they have some length in trump. Thus, we do not need as strong a trump holding to now double in the pass out seat. If we play partner for Honor third and we also have Honor third (or better), then the opponents will likely be in trouble – even at such a low level if doubled. If we have a weaker holding or larger fit for partner, then we should choose offense and bid on to our “normal” game.

*Note: One of the important factors in whether to double the opponents or not is the vulnerability. Remember, we are trying to score more than our expected making game.*

## **Conclusion**

In the modern game the opponents rarely leave you alone - they always seem to be bidding in our auctions. It is important to have good agreements to make cooperative decisions with partner. Forcing passes (and the associated other calls) are valuable tools for helping us make good decisions in these difficult auctions.