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This Week in Bridge

(95) Walsh (BWS) and Extended Walsh

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Level: 1

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

The Walsh style of bidding will seem normal or obvious to many modern players. But we should understand the bidding concepts behind our agreements that lead us to bid how we do. The simplified version of this idea is that Majors and Notrump are the most important. Responder strives to bid their Major suits most of the time and Opener strives to show their hand type – most importantly, bid Notrump with balanced hands. Let's look at the details of these bidding approaches and what the modern versions of them are.

Walsh (Bridge World Standard Version, BWS) - Responder

On the ACBL Convention Card, under the minor suit openings section, you will see a box marked "frequently bypass 4+♦." This box is effectively the Walsh bidding approach. Years ago, players just bid their suits up the line in response to Opener's 1♣, treating every suit as equally important. But bidding 1♦ when partner opens 1♣ often makes very little sense – when partner opens 1♣ they are unlikely to have many ♦. The modern idea is that Responder should consider how good their hand is and how many bids they will be able to make on their hand.

- If Responder has a hand worth only one bid (6-9 points) then they should bid their 4-card Major opposite a 1♣ opening bid (even if they have lots of ♦).
- If Responder has a hand worth two bids (10+ points) they will still bid their Major if they have a 4-card Major and 4-card♦ suit.
- Responder will only respond 1♦ if they have 10+ points and a longer ♦ suit than their Major (usually, 4-5.) In this case they will bid 1♦ first and come back and bid their Major later in the auction (on their next call.)

Example

1♣ 1♦

1NT 2♥ 5+♦ - 4+♥, longer ♦ than ♥. 10+ points, Forcing 1-round (Responder's reverse.)

Note: If you play 2-Way NMF some of these agreements change because Responder can bid a direct 2♥ vs. relay (2♣ relay to 2♦) then 2♥.

Walsh (BWS) - Opener

Now that we have a good agreement about how Responder should bid opposite a 1♣ opener, let's see how Opener uses these agreements to better describe their hand. When the auction begins 1♣ - 1♦ the Opener knows that Responder has one of two hand types -

- No 4-card Major (with 6+ points)
- If they have a 4-card Major then they have 5+♦ and 10+ points - planning to bid their Major next.

Responder has the responsibility of introducing their Major in both cases. Thus, if Responder bids 1♦ over 1♣, then Opener does not need to focus on their Major. Instead, Opener can focus on showing their hand type -

- With a balanced 12-14 Opener can rebid 1NT.
- With a balanced 18-19 Opener can rebid 2NT.
- With an unbalanced 12-17 Opener can rebid their 4-card Major (1-Major) if they are 4/5 or 4-4-1-4.
- With an unbalanced 18 Opener can make a jump shift to 2M with 4/5 or 4-4-1-4.

Note: Most players are already familiar with this bypassing their Major to show their hand type by rebidding 2NT with a balanced 18-19.

Using these agreements when the auction goes 1♣ - 1♦ - 1♥, the Responder knows a lot more about Opener's hand - Opener is unbalanced with usually 4/5+ shape. This allows Responder to more easily visualize Opener's hand and drive the auction to the proper final contract.

Note: Just as in all our unbalanced vs. balanced hand auctions, we get to describe our balanced hands precisely by our second call. But with our unbalanced hands our second bid still leaves a lot of ambiguity in the value of our hand (12-17, two buckets.)

The Walsh BWS approach has become the expert standard in low-level bidding because it allows us to better describe our hand - including siding a potential Notrump contract (we usually want the balanced hand to declare.)

Extended Walsh

The concept of showing hand type (balanced) instead of something specific (our suits) can be extended for the 1♣ - 1♦ auctions to 1m - 1♥ auctions as well. We already use this approach with 4-card ♠ and balanced 18-19 points by rebidding 2NT, not 1♠ or 2♠. We can extend this idea to rebidding 1NT with all balanced hands (or almost all) and thus rebid 1♠ only on unbalanced hands.

1♣ 1♥
—?

- 1♠ 4-card ♠, 5+♣, 12-17 points
- 1NT Balanced 12-14 points, could have 4-card ♠, 2-3card ♥

Notice the 1NT rebid is a much better description in that it shows our hand type and bucket (HCP) much more specifically.

1♦ 1♥
—?

- 1♠ 4-card ♠, 4+card ♦ or 4-1-4-4, 12-17 points
- 1NT Balanced 12-14 points, could have 4-card ♠, 2-3 card ♥.

Conclusion

If we play an Extended Walsh concept (which is very effective) we can draw a lot of conclusions about Opener's hand from their opening bids and rebids.

- When Opener opens a suit and rebids that suit (1-suiter) we can deduce they are unbalanced or semi-balanced.
- When Opener opens one suit and rebids a second suit they are generally unbalanced (though they could be 5422.)
- With balanced hands Opener will open notrump or rebid Notrump (unless they find a fit.)

This ability to visualize the "big picture" of Opener's hand is a valuable part of effective bidding. Walsh and Extended Walsh change our focus from the specific to general - giving away less information to the opponents and making for more effective bidding.