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This Week in Bridge

(100) Fast Arrival vs. Picture Bids

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Level: 3

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General

Our “general approach” to game forcing auctions is our philosophy of how we show our hand. There are two general approaches to these kinds of auctions:

- *Fast Arrival* – The most common modern approach, and
- *Picture Bids* – An approach more common the 80s that has regained some favor with younger players on the West Coast.

Let’s look at these two approaches and see the advantages of each.

Fast Arrival

Most of us are aware of the concept of *Fast Arrival* (especially in game forcing auctions.) This is when we agree that jumps to game are the weakest action (showing a relatively poor hand) and “going slow” (bidding our fit below game, usually 3M) shows a better hand and thus at least mild slam interest. Fast Arrival has the advantage of allowing one hand to express slam interest or show worry about going on further. It can help our side put on the brakes when that is what we need to do. It also allows us to express values, make a mild slam try (or more). When we agree to use the *Principle of Fast Arrival* we leave room for cuebidding and other communication on the hands where we are interested in slam.

Note: The concept of Fast Arrival also has other useful applications, as in non-game forcing auctions.

Picture Bids

When our agreement is that jumps to game are *Picture Bids*, however, we agree to go slow with most hands (either good or bad hands) and only jump to game to show good hands (ones with some slam interest) that have a concentration of values in their own suits (usually the trump suit and their side suit – the other suit they have bid.)

Example

1♠ 2♣

2NT 4♠

Playing picture bids, this shows a concentration of values in ♣ and ♠. This will be a hand with decent playing strength, usually something like:

♠ AQ8

♥ 76

♦ 543

♣ AKJ92

These picture bids are valuable in showing hands that consist of good trump support and a source of tricks. They ask partner to bid slam if they have good controls in the outside suits and a fitting card for our suit. We should note that these picture bids give up Captaincy. Playing Fast Arrival, we would likely go slow, show slam interest, get partner to cuebid and then try to imply our hand to partner by what we cuebid (or more importantly by what we do not cuebid!)

Playing picture bids, we go slow (usually by bidding 3M) with most hands. Thus, there are no inferences about extra values when we do this – we will need to cuebid more often and be left with more ambiguity in some of these hands.

Note: Non-Serious 3NT (or Serious 3NT, either approach) is an important part of playing the picture bid approach because it allows us to further express our values – worst hand, non-serious hand, or serious slam try hand. Non-Serious 3NT is also an excellent tool that aids in slam bidding when playing the more traditional Fast Arrival bidding approach (we will discuss this more in the future.)

Conclusion

Fast Arrival is the most common approach these days because it allows us to show a very poor opening bid (which is important as bad as some openings bids are today.) Fast Arrival also is a simple agreement that is easy to adopt across the board in a partnership. The picture bid approach to bidding requires a better understand of when this agreement (method) applies (is being played.) These picture bids require a more complex set of agreements but they allow for excellent descriptions of more concentrated hands. The most important thing to take away from this discussion is not that one approach is better than the other (though certainly Fast Arrival is more common) but to understand that concentrated hands (with nothing outside to cuebid) are potential problem hands for most Fast Arrival bidders – knowing this in advance can help you try to find a way to make a slam try with these problem hands. Finally, knowing there is an alternative approach means that you should try to have a discussion with your partners and make sure you are both on the same page.