

“Game Forcing” Bids? Tales of Akarana



“Game Forcing” Bids?

Two pieces of interesting hand evaluation thrust partnerships up into the slam zone... but would they drive on to too high a level?

Let’s see:

The first board offered both partners a chance to value their hands. Let’s take the second piece of evaluation first:

This is your hand as North

♠ K543
♥ K965
♦ KQ83
♣ Q

and this is the bidding so far:

West	North	East	South
			1♣
Pass	1♥	Pass	4♦
Pass	?		

4♦ is a splinter...and before my mail-box is inundated with questions as to why you, North, did not bid 1♦ first time round (as you should with a game-going responding hand), let’s just say North had their reasons!

That’s part A to the question. Part B is would your answer be any different if 4♦ guaranteed a void?

We know that a holding of KQxx is not great opposite a singleton or a void but does that mean you should sign-off here? Signing off would mean that were partner to hold ♠ A7 ♥ AQT8 ♦ 6 ♣ AKT753, they would have to sign off as well. You responded on a six count, including wasted diamond honours. Can partner even risk the five level?

Well, even leaving aside those diamond honours, you have got more than a six count and have a card of huge potential value, that ♣Q. With you at the wheel, every suit is protected at trick 1. Opposite what might be a singleton diamond, it may be a marginal decision. Opposite a void, I feel one just has to move. The only drawback this time was that a Key Card response took you into the slam zone:

Board 2	♠ K 5 4 3	West	North	East	South
East Deals	♥ K 9 6 5			Pass	1 ♣
N-S Vul	♦ K Q 8 3	Pass	1 ♥	Pass	4 ♦
	♣ Q	Pass	4 NT	Pass	5 ♠
		Pass	6 ♥	All pass	
♠ Q 8 6 2	♠ J 10 9				
♥ A J 7	♥ 3				
♦ A 9 4	♦ J 10 7 6 5 2				
♣ 9 4 2	♣ K 8 6				
	♠ A 7				
	♥ Q 10 8 4 2				
	♦ —				
	♣ A J 10 7 5 3				

“Thanks for the extra heart, partner” but we were still left with the problem of finding the ♥J. Not one of the 8 declarers found this card successfully. For three of them, it proved very expensive as they were in 6♥.

What then of that 4♦ bid? I believe there are times where you can force to game without having to make a game force bid. Such an occasion is where you have minimal points. With both opponents quiet, surely North will have enough high card strength to raise to game over 3♥? You may argue that 3♥ from South on their second turn would have sent North slamwards too. Maybe but North could have expected more than 11 hcps for the game force. Yes, even a 12 count would have helped...that ♥J! You do not need to guess from which compass seat I was viewing this board..and perhaps had hearts broken 2-2, the discussion might have revolved around reaching rather than avoiding this slam.

On then to the next decision. and you are South:

♠ AQ764				
♥ T5	West	North	East	South
♦ A4				1♠
♣ A853	Pass	2♦	Pass	?

You have a nice 14 count and opposite partner’s presumed 10+ (you are playing Acol), you know that you are heading to game. Do you let partner in on the secret or do you make a “hold your breath that partner bids again” 2♠ call? There is a third kind of in-between bid, whichever no-trump bid shows 15-

17 balanced. Yes, only 14, but you have just said you want to be in game. So, call it 15.

What's your choice? The downside of a no-trump bid is your lack of a heart hold. Indeed, if you decide on upgrading by one point, then should you bid 3♣... and then get rather nervous as the bidding proceeds:

West	North	East	South	
			1♠	¹ 4 th suit forcing
Pass	2♦	Pass	3♣	² 0 or 3 key cards in support of spades. It's no time to lie!
Pass	3♥ ¹	Pass	3♠	
Pass	4NT	Pass	5♦ ²	³ Asks for ♠Q and outside kings
Pass	5♥ ³	Pass	5NT ⁴	⁴ "Yes" to the ♠Q but "no" to outside kings.
Pass	7NT	All Pass		

and partner looks at your dummy after a low heart lead....and does not claim!

Indeed, after the ♥8 lead, the play was extremely drawn out but, this time, every card was where the declarer wanted it!

Board 7
 South Deals
 Both Vul

♠ 9 3 2		♠ J 8 5
♥ Q 9 7 4 3		♥ 8 2
♦ Q J		♦ 9 7 6 5 2
♣ 9 7 6		♣ J 4 2

♠ A Q 7 6 4
♥ 10 5
♦ A 4
♣ A 8 5 3

After West inserted the ♥Q at trick 1, the declarer ended with 16 tricks! It was definitely correct to bid 3♣ this time but the lie of the cards is, as we know to our frequent cost, not always that friendly.

Richard Solomon