

Question from R. Venkatesh

In a live auction, what would be your recommendation for action in live or a pre-balancing situation at 1 or 2 levels? How does method of scoring, vulnerability and the fact that your are passed hand affect your decision? What are the various factors (like helping opps in dummy play, chances of winning the partial) you would consider?

On a live auction, 1d (by lho)-p-1s (by rho), suppose you hold the following hands:

- a) x, kxxxx, ktx, ktxx
- b) x, kqxxx, jx, qtxxx
- c) xx, akxx, kxx, qt9x
- d) xx, akjx, axxx, qxx

what would be the recommended action on each of the above factoring in method of scoring, vul and your earlier action (passed hand)

Similarly in a pre-balancing situation 1d(by rho)-p-1s(by lho)-p-2s(by rho), suppose you hold the following hands what would you recommend:

- a) x, kxxxx, kxx, ktxx
- b) xx, akxx, kxx, qt9x
- c) xx, akjx, axxx, qxx

Sridhar's Views :

Dear Venkatesh,

Balancing is a form of Overcall where the Partnership clearly understands that the bidder is bidding on COMBINED values – every partnership must distinguish overcalls from this. It will be a disaster if you balance and your partner construes that as an overcall – here your partnership runs the danger of assessing same values twice ! (this danger applies more to pre-balancing)

Some popular principles in balancing are :

1. Balance ONLY when they have found a fit .
2. 3 level belongs to opponents - I e the law of total tricks is followed.
3. balance with either length or shortness in enemy suit , eg with 1 OR 3 cards , avoid balancing with 2 cards in enemy suit .

Some not-so-popular –my own –principles are :

1. Never allow fear to interfere with your conviction, particularly when you are Vul – ask yourself the question “ How risky is NOT taking the risk ?”
2. When a player balances with a DOUBLE, he is consulting partner ; when he balances in a suit , he is not ; so be cautious in changing suits.
3. Balance aggressively Vs 1N , reason is it is the most difficult contract to defend .

At IMPs , the idea is to go plus - so defend a 1 / 2 level contract only when you are confident of beating it , else balance , it does not matter in what manner you go minus if the Board belongs to them .

In MP it is trickier as the diff between -100 / -50 and -110 is huge ; here I tend to forget the rule “ the 3 level belongs to opponents”

In both forms of game I balance more freely if opponents are the type who do not double OR known to be weak defenders – in general the average bridge player is a better declarer than defender, so it pays to balance in a sense.

To the examples In the first set ,

- a. I recommend a DOUBLE – risks missing a 5-3 Heart fit , but enhances chances of fit and brings partner into play.
- b. As a Passed hand I will bid 1N (2S, if unpassed) with the 2 suiter at MP ; pass at IMPs , reason for pass is bidding gives too much information to opponent , if they declare ; however , in MP , I like to declare , not caring about going minus (my chances of declaration are higher).
- c. A clear DOUBLE in both forms
- d. Again Pass at IMPS, DOUBLE at MP.

In the second set (pre balancing situation), LHO can still have a big hand,

- a. DOUBLE at both forms of game seems clear
- b. PASS at both forms since the 2 cards in spades are very unattractive to balance
- c. This is a case where it will be beneficial ONLY if partner balances, so I pass .

With best wishes,
Sridhar