

Setting Partner up for Failure

Neil Kimelman

In many of my articles and books I recommend developing a multi-pronged strategy on hands where certain conditions are met. The most important of those conditions is to ensure partner would not be misled and make a wrong decision as a result of your approach.

These hands occur, albeit infrequently. The majority of deals involve you taking calls and partner basing their future decisions on these calls. Despite this clear relationship between your bid and partners action I see time and time again players who make a call which only sets partner up for failure. The goal of today's article is to help you recognize those situations and avoid disaster-creating actions. I am going to examine this subject within the context of several specific situations:

1. Competitive auctions.
2. Bidding the right game.
3. Constructive game and slam bidding.

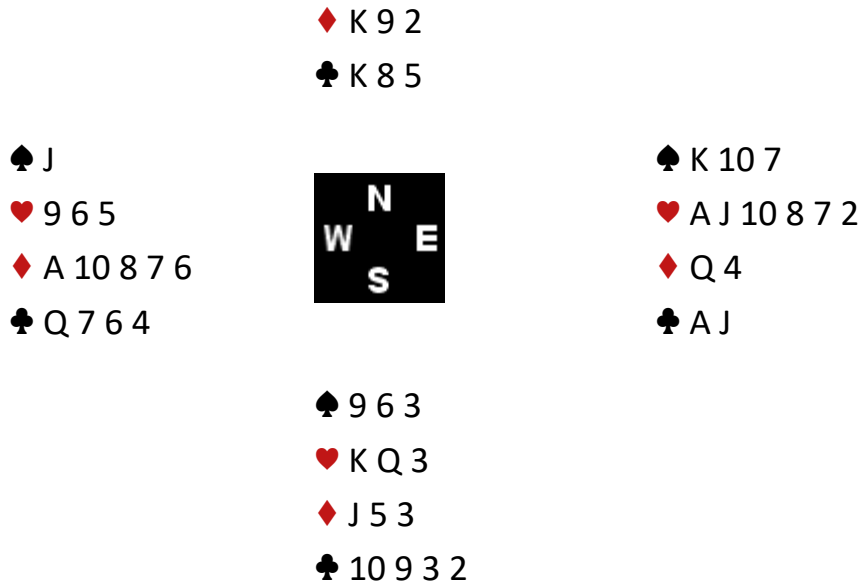
1. Competitive Auctions

This is an area I explored in my first two books. A simple example of leading partner astray: You hold ♠ 9 6 3 ♥ K Q 3 ♦ J 5 3 ♣ 10 9 3 2. Both vul, the bidding starts with partner opening 1♠ and RHO overcalling 2♥. Your call? Most players automatically will bid 2♠ and rest of the bidding will very often go something like this:

West	North	East	South
-	1♠	2♥	2♠
3♥	3♠	All Pass	

A possible full deal:

♠ A Q 8 5 4 2
♥ 4



Yes 3♥ will make on the nose for -140. However 3♠ will be either -300 or -800 if doubled! The problem was the 2♠ bid. South should pass at their first turn, as they know their meager values are only good for defence. If instead south passes, the bidding will either continue:

West	North	East	South
-	1♠	2♥	Pass
3♥	Pass	Pass	Pass


Or

West	North	East	South
-	1♠	2♥	Pass
Pass	Dbl	Pass	2♠
3♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

You are where you want to be – on defence. And you still have time to get to game as North will take another call with a very strong one opener. Here is a hand that came up at a local club game which I found very instructive: Matchpoints, with only E-W vulnerable, you hold as South ♠ J 8 7 6 3 ♥ A K Q 9 ♦ 7 5 3 ♣ 2. The bidding starts:

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♦	1♥	?

Again an automatic bid of 1♣ for 99% of players. However 1NT may be right and describes the key aspect of your hand: 8 – 12 HCPs and hearts stopped. 1NT was definitely right on this deal!

♠ K ♥ 10 7 6 5 ♦ A J 10 ♣ A 7 6 4 3		♠ A Q 9 ♥ J 8 3 2 ♦ K 6 ♣ 10 9 8 5
♠ 10 5 4 2 ♥ 4 ♦ Q 9 8 4 2 ♣ K Q J		
♠ J 8 7 6 3 ♥ A K Q 9 ♦ 7 5 3 ♣ 2		

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♦	1♥	1♠
2♥	2♠	Pass	Pass
3♥	3♠	All Pass	

-150 instead of + 200.

Had you bid 1NT the bidding will likely continue:

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♦	1♥	1NT
2♥	Pass	Pass	2♠ or 3♦
3♥	Pass	Pass	Dbl

All Pass			
----------	--	--	--

2. Bidding the wrong game

Quite often we bid suits that are weak in nature. This is often a necessity for constructive bidding, especially when introducing majors at the one level.

IMPs both Vul. As South you hold ♠ 9 7 5 3 ♥ A 2 ♦ K 5 3 ♣ K 10 9 3 and hear this auction:

West	North	East	South
-	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣	Pass	2NT or 3♣
Pass	3NT	Pass	?

You know partner is short in spades and has extra values to accept your game invitation. His most likely hand type is 1-3-5-4. The only other possible distributions for North are 2-2-5-4 and 1-4-4-4. In addition, partner is expecting you to have spades stopped. You don't have any high cards in spades. Not only does that clearly spells failure for 3NT, but five of a minor should be close to cold, and six will make on a good day. To verify this, take a typical hand for partner: ♠ 6 ♥ K 5 3 ♦ A Q J 6 4 ♣ A J 6 5. Opposite your ♠ 9 7 5 3 ♥ A 2 ♦ K 5 3 ♣ K 10 9 3 game in either minor is cold and six is on a club guess.

3. Constructive Bidding towards game or slam

Everything we do influences partner, either for the good or the bad. We want to, if possible, make bids that help partner correctly value their holdings. Here is a useful example: Partner opens 1♥ and you hold ♠ 6 ♥ K 5 3 ♦ A K J 9 ♣ 10 9 7 6 3. If our majors were reversed I would be 1NT with a misfit for spades. But with the heart fragment I want to force to game in hearts so a 2/1 is in order. Bid 2♦, not 2♣. Why? I am rather gung ho about this hand, and there are lively slam possibilities opposite a partner, who is short in clubs with a diamond fragment. If I bid 2♣ partner will over-evaluate length and high cards in clubs, and be conservative with a 'misfit' when he has a singleton or void in clubs.

Say they hold: ♠Axx ♥AQJxxx ♦Q53 ♣-. Only 13 HCPs yet 7♥ is 99%. Over 2♦ you will get to at least the small slam. But over 2♣ partner will rebid 2♥ and simply raise 3♥ to 4♥.