

Forcing Pass Auctions

By Neil Kimelman

Here is an article I wrote over a decade ago, that was picked up by the Bridge World, The New York Times and other bridge publications. NK

Bidding as we know can be very competitive. This occurs even when our side has most of the high card strength. The vulnerability, form of scoring and distribution all contribute to the opponents being able to bid at the four, five and six levels, making our lives difficult. Should we bid on? How high? Should we double? The Forcing Pass Principle is one of our main tools in our bidding toolbox to help our partnership define our hands, and decide what is best.

Many newer players may be unfamiliar with the Principles of Forcing pass auctions. Even for those that are, this is an area that is well worth reviewing with your partner(s). Many experienced players, even world class players, have gone wrong on specific hands. So the purpose of this article is to define the term Forcing Pass, when it is applicable, what bids mean, and to offer my own thoughts on the subject. Naturally I will include example hands.

I. Forcing Pass Definition

When your partnership has made a bid that has created a game forcing auction, the opponents cannot play a contract undoubled.

This is a simple definition and I will start with a simple hand.

Example 1:

West	North	East	South
-	-	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♥	5♦	

Assuming that 2♥ is game forcing then this becomes a forcing pass situation. If South passes 5♦, North cannot.

II. When else does a Forcing Pass situation occur?

i) Besides hands where the partnership are in a game forcing auction, forcing pass also applies when one hand opens and the other hand shows at least invitational values.

Example 2:

West	North	East	South
-	-	Pass	1♠
Pass	3♦ ¹	5♦	

¹Four card limit raise in spades.

This is a Forcing Pass situation.

ii) When your partnership bids game, and you are vulnerable versus non-vulnerable opponents.

Example 3, N-S Vulnerable:

West	North	East	South
-	-	Pass	1♠
2♥	2♠	4♥	4♠
5♥	?		

My partners and I play this is a forcing pass situation. ***At any other vulnerability it is not.*** This to me is a reasonable treatment, but may not be universal. The reasoning for this agreement is that we should have extra values to bid game and risk being doubled going for -200, -500 or more, versus the opponents' 420.

iii) When the opponents preempt and your partnership bids game.

Example 4, neither vul:

West	North	East	South
-	-	Pass	1♥
3♠	4♥	4♠	Pass

This is a forcing pass auction. This would be true even if East was not a passed hand.

III. What do bids mean in a Forcing Pass situation?

Each bid has a specific meaning. Let's look at Example 1 again:

Example 1:

West	North	East	South
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- - Pass 1♠
 Pass 2♥ 5♦

1. **Double** – This means, ‘Based on the information I have available I think we should double 5♦.’ It implies one or more of the following:

1. A doubleton diamond.
2. No fit for hearts.
3. Minimum values.

A typical hand for the double: ♠KQ543 ♥105 ♦105 ♣AKJ9

2. **5♥** - This means, ‘I have an offensive type hand and think we have a good chance to make 5♥, and I do not want to defend against 5♦. It often shows good distribution and short diamonds. A possible holding: ♠AQ10872 ♥A853 ♦2 ♣32.

3. **Pass** – Pass has two possible meanings:

- a) The most common meaning is, ‘I will leave the decision up to you – I can go either way.’ Whatever partner does you would pass. Something like: ♠AJ10862 ♥Q3 ♦2 ♣AJ42.
- b) The other meaning is: ‘I have a very good hand for my last bid, definitely want to bid on, and have some slam interest.’ If you have this type of hand you will **pull** partner’s double and raise if partner bids. For example: ♠AK1082 ♥Q53 ♦2 ♣KQ42. With this hand you would bid 5♥ if partner doubles 5♦, and bid 6♥ if partner bids 5♥.

Pass usually denies exactly a doubleton diamond; otherwise a double would be the expected bid. Although, if you have a good hand such as ♠AKJ82 ♥AJ2 ♦54 ♣KQ4 a pass would be a very reasonable exception to this guideline.

4. **Partner’s suit** – The normal meaning of such a bid is: ‘I want to bid on and suggest your first suit as trump. I don’t promise any extra values.’ Here is an example auction:

Example 5: neither Vulnerable, as south you hold: ♠K1082 ♥K53 ♦KQ742 ♣2

West	North	East	South
-	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♠	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	5♣	5♦

As suggested by this example, bidding 5♦ implies more length and sometimes strength in diamonds. This is often important when the bidding suggests that bad breaks are very possible.

5. New suit. Example 6; N-S Vulnerable:

West	North	East	South
-	-	Pass	1♥
3♠	4♥	4♠	5♣

There are three reasonable ways to play this bid:

1. 'I am trying for slam and have a club control.'
2. 'I am trying for slam and have a club suit.'
3. 'I have a club suit and am trying to help you decide what to do if the opponents bid 5♠.'

I have a strong preference for the 3rd option, as it has the highest frequency of occurrence. If I have one of the first two hands I can pass and then bid 5♣ if partner doubles 4♠.

IV. What are the pitfalls of Forcing Pass Auctions?

This might sound funny, but don't forget to look at the auction and your hand before making a decision. Here is an example to illustrate this point:

Example 7; E-W Vulnerable; as south you hold: ♠ AQ982 ♥ KJ105 ♦ 62 ♣ K5

West	North	East	South
-	-	Pass	1♠
2NT	3♣	3♦	4♠
5♦	Pass	Pass	?

¹Limit raise (or better) in spades.

On this auction I would bid on. I am not sure I can even beat 5♦. The opponents are vulnerable, so have some decent values. How much defence do you have? Not much. Partner does not promise the worlds fair for their limit raise. This could easily be the hand:

♠ KJ104
♥ A9873
♦ 8

♣ 987

♠ 53

♥ Void

♦ KQ10953

♣ AQ1042

♠ 76

♥ Q642

♦ A754

♣ J63

♠ AQ982

♥ KJ105

♦ 62

♣ K5

To emphasize this point here is an actual hand from the 2010 CNTC's:

♠ J8765

♥ KJ9742

♦ AJ

♣ Void

♠ 432

♥ A

♦ KQ10953

♣ A1054

♠ Void

♥ Q106

♦ 9754

♣ KQ9863

♠ AKQ109

♥ 853

♦ 102

♣ J72

At one table, that I am aware of, the bidding went:

West North East South

- 1♥ 3♣ 4♥

5♣ Pass Pass Dbl

All Pass

Despite N-S being in a forcing pass the opponent's are cold for 6♣!! South would have been better advised to bid 3♠, but that subject is for a future article!

I encourage you to read more on the Forcing Pass. There are excellent books available by Edwin Kantar and others.

Next issue: The story behind the first Winnipeg team to ever win the Canadian Team Championships.