

Negative Free Bids

“**Negative Free Bids**” have become a popular addition to many Partnerships. “**Negative Free bids**” are not classified as a convention (All of Responder’s and Opener’s bids are natural), rather as a bidding treatment or agreement wherein you and your Partner agree to lower the point requirements for some of Responder’s bids in competitive auctions. The use of these bids increases Responder’s ability to show a long suit after an Opponent overcalls, subsequent to Partner’s opening the bidding, and generally improves one’s chances of finding a fit.

A. Problem: Consider these two typical scenarios: Partner opens 1D, your RHO overcalls 1S, and you hold the following hands:

Example 1: XX KJXXXX XX KXX With standard bidding, a new suit bid at the 2-Level would promise at least 11 HCP’s. Here, the usual solution is to bid the “Negative Double.” Since Partner will seldom be kind enough to bid Hearts, you plan to bid 2H yourself over an anticipated 1-NT, 2C, or 2D re-bid by Opener. But what if your LHO raises his/hers Partner’s Spades? When the auction is passed back to you, you’ll have another dilemma—pass and lose a possible Heart part-score, or, even worse, risk a 3H bid which might be a disaster.

Example 2: XXX XXX QX KQJTX Here, the “Negative Double” is not even an option. You, more or less, have to “Pass” and hope to show your hand at a later bidding opportunity. Even if Opener were to re-open with a “Double,” you have no good way to describe your hand. A jump to 3C would show some values but would promise a 6-card suit; and 2C would be an underbid since you have more values than Partner could reasonably expect.

B. The “Negative Free Bid” Solution: This system allows Responder, under circumstances as shown above, to make a natural response at the 2-Level, *without* promising game-invitational values or catapulting the auction too high. A “**Negative Free Bid**” is used when an Opponent overcalls subsequent to Partner’s opening bid where Responder has a long suit that cannot be shown at the 1-Level. In the Examples shown above, one would make a “Negative Free Bid” (NFB) of 2H with hand #1, and 2C with hand #2. “**Negative Free Bids**” are called “*negative*” because they are always *non-forcing*.

| <u>Partner</u> | <u>RHO</u> | <u>You</u> |
|----------------|------------|------------|
| 1D | 1S | ? |

1. XX KJXXXX XX KXX (Bid 2H - A “Negative Free Bid”)
2. XXX XXX QX KQJTX (Bid 2C - A “Negative Free Bid”)
3. XX KXXX XXX AXXX (Bid a “Negative Double”)

A “**Negative Free-Bid**” is always a non-jump to a new suit between 2C and 3D. It is alertable and shows the following:

1. A good 6(+) card suit or a strong 5-carder
2. 5-11 HCP’s
3. If Partner opened 1H or 1S, no 3-card or longer support for Opener’s Major

Responder's new-suit response is not a NFB if the bid is made:

1. **At the level of 3H or higher. If Partner opens 1S and your RHO overcalls 3D, no "Negative Free Bid" is available. Any new suit bid of 3H or 4C is forcing.**
2. **At the 1-Level, Responder's new suit bid carries the standard meaning; i.e., 6 or more HCP's and a 5-card suit, since Responder would have, alternatively, made a "negative double" if he/she held only 4 pieces.**

C. Adjustments to Handle Stronger Hands: Since so many of Responder's new-suit bids are non-forcing when using Negative Free Bids, two (2) adjustments to handle stronger hands are, therefore, necessary.

1. **"Negative Double" Auctions:** Since Responder's "Free Bids" through 3D are not forcing, one needs a way to show a new suit with game-forcing values. To accomplish this, Responder first makes a "normal" "Negative Double." The meaning of this action will then be amended if Responder then makes a re-bid of a new suit later, which then denotes game-values. **"Doubles" by Responder are, therefore, alertable, since they have a two-way meaning.** Adding "Negative Free Bids" to your bidding system does not change the way you bid your normal "negative double" hands. As Responder, you still use the "negative double" to describe hands of limited high-card strength. The assumed meaning of your "negative double" is changed only if you re-bid a new suit later.

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| <u>Partner</u> | <u>RHO</u> | <u>You</u> |
| 1D | 1S | ? |

1. **AJX KXXX XX AJXX** (Bid a "Normal" Negative Double)
2. **X AQ KXX AKJXXXX** (Double and then bid Clubs)
3. **AQ QXXXX AXX QXX** (Double and then bid Hearts)
4. **X AKJXXX KXXX XX** (Double and then bid 4H)

2. **Jump-Shifts in Competition:** Shows an invitational hand (10-11 HCP's), and a strong 6 (+)-card suit.

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| <u>Partner</u> | <u>RHO</u> | <u>You</u> |
| 1D | 1S | ? |

1. **JX KQJXXX XX KJX** (Jump to 3H)
2. **XX QXX QX AQJXXX** (Jump to 3C)

In summation, the use of "Negative Free Bids" allows Responder, in competition, to show: (1) A long suit with a relatively weak hand by a direct response between 2C and 3D, (2) A strong game-forcing bid, by the use of an initial "double" followed by the bid of a new suit later, and (3) Hands of invitational strength by the use of a jump-shift following an Opponent's overcall.

Opponents must be alerted as to the two-way nature of a Responder's "double" in direct competition; i.e., Responder holds either a normal "negative double," else a forcing hand with an outside suit.

D. Opener's Re-Bids: After you open and Partner makes a NFB in competition, you may have enough information to place the final contract without further communication. Absent this, however, the Partnership must have an understanding as to the significance of any of Opener's potential re-bids. Assuming Opener's RHO passes your Partner's NFB, the suggested meanings of Opener's possible re-bids are as follows:

1. *Pass:* (**1D-1S-2H-Pass-Pass**) = A minimum hand (without a necessary promise of support for Responder's suit) and with no interest in higher contracts.
2. *A re-bid of Opener's suit:* (**1D-1S-2H-Pass-3D**) = A non-forcing minimum with a long strong suit and no fit for Partner's suit.
3. *2-NT:* (**1D-1S-2H-Pass-2-NT**) = Invitational high-card strength (16-18 pts.) with stoppers in the Opponent's suit. This usually denies a good fit for Partner's suit.
4. *A free raise of Partner's suit:* (**1D-1S-2H-Pass-3H**) = game invitational, showing a filling hand worth about 15-18 support points. Since Partner has promised a strong suit, a fit may be a good doubleton or better.
5. *A Jump to game in Partner's suit:* (**1D-1S-2H-Pass-4H**) = a minimum opener with a big fit and extra playing strength. If your hand has even greater high-card strength, start with a cue-bid if the auction allows you room to do so.
6. *A Cue-bid:* (**1C-2H-2S-Pass-“3H”**) = Forcing-to-game strength. The cue-bid usually suggests a fit, but also starts the description of other big hands (Opener denies the fit if he re-bids no-rump or his own suit later). You can use the cue-bid to ask for a stopper, start a slam-try sequence or just clarify that you have extra high-card strength and defensive values. This information may be critical in helping your Partner make a decision if the Opponents attempt to sacrifice.
7. *A Jump cue-bid:* (**1D-1S-2H-Pass-“3S”**) = a “Splinter”, showing a singleton, great trump support (4+ cards) and slam-try values.
8. *A Competitive raise of Partner's suit:* (**1D-1S-2H-2S-3H**) = a minimum with a fit for Partner's suit. A raise in competition is not invitational to game.
9. *A “Double:* (**1D-1S-2H-2S-Double**) = Some Partnerships may choose to treat a “double” as penalty, but many prefer to use it as positive, showing extra values but with no clear-cut action. It tends to describe a hand with defensive strength, but without length in Partner's suit, and without the ability to re-bid Opener's suit, as well.

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