

At CHAT bridge, questions are getting harder. A recent bidding question hit a *gray area* for me. Different convention cards change the bidding. I answered the questioner with “you could have bid this, or you might have bid...”. This response did not go over well. I got a smile followed by “I thought you were supposed to be the teacher!” Ouch!

But his person is “getting there”. She has entered Stage II of CHAT education. Stage I was to get help from mentors and learn bridge basics. Stage II is to help mentors improve their game. This is where you really start to “fit in” to the bridge club. Your demeanor changes from “Oh please help me. Thank you. Thank you, Thank you.” to... “...we understand that, but our question was more abstruse than what you must have been thinking.”

Back to the original bidding question. I went out to the bridge site examined this problematic hand. The Friday afternoon bridge players arrived at three different contracts. Whether you respond 1NT or 2♦ (or Pass) on your first bid makes a difference in the final contract. And the final contract decides who gets the “Above” and who gets the “Below” on that metallic scoring box that we all know and love. The play of the hand is secondary. It happens.

I’ve said it before; this is a difficult game for me. Sleeping at the table adds to this difficulty. Gray is my color. I see gray all the time (in the bidding and the play). The tough players at the club see less gray. Experience helps a lot. I suppose intelligence could be a factor.

But many areas of bidding are not gray. Bids that limit your hand for instance. Limiting your hand gives your partner information that is black and white. Clear. Bounded. Partner now has the guidance needed to keep the contract where it belongs. If partner screws it up, what more can you do? I suppose you can put yourself in partner’s shoes and show compassion and understanding. Or, if partner’s shoes do not fit you at all, you might choose to be just a tad more direct. It really doesn’t matter to me. I hate both forms. “Next hand” is best for me.

Here is an example of a very common limit bid that puzzled two different CHAT tables.

1♣-pass-1♥-pass-1NT.

- The 1♣ bid shows 12+ points and 3+ clubs.
- 1♥ shows 6+ points and 4 hearts.
- 1NT is a **limiting bid** from opener showing 12-14 points.

The discussion took place with responder. With 9 points she was pondering whether to invite partner to game. The limit bid shows that the partnership could have 23 points. Pass is the right bid here. You need to decide early if game is a possibility. If not, stop as low as you can.

A few other limit bids that you see frequently:

1♣-pass-2♣ Single raise, **6-9 points**, 5+ clubs

1♥-pass-3♥ Jump Raise (invitational): Heart support, **11-12 points**, 3♥ is not forcing.

NT openers: 1NT (**15-17 points**), 2NT (**20-21 points**)

1d-pass-1♥-pass-2NT (**18-19 points**)

Limit the gray!