

play bridge

A section designed with the newer player in mind

Using your Q-Tips

I walked into the bridge club the other day and a player walked up and asked me for some Q-Tips. Hmm ... I mulled to myself. We have a pretty extensive first-aid kit for bridge players — aspirin and Tylenol for headaches, Tums for acid stomachs and Band-Aids to protect those bruised shins and egos. But Q-Tips?

“Are you having trouble hearing your partner’s bids?” I joked.

“No, no. You are always talking about the cuebidding stuff, and I just don’t get it. I thought you might have some cue tips for me.”

At last I saw the light (and understood the question). So here are some cue tips that might prove useful in your competitive auctions.

There are lots of types of cuebids, but I will discuss two scenarios that have common applications.

After partner’s overcall

You and your partner are likely to have an agreement about overcalls at the one level, defining the bid as somewhere between 6 and 18 points. I am sure your range is slightly narrower than that, but most people use about a 10-point range for the overcall.

This leaves the overcaller’s partner (the advancer) with some pretty uncomfortable choices. If partner (the overcaller) has an 8-point hand, your side probably has a partscore; if partner has 15, your side probably has game.

Many people play that the advancer has no forcing bids except for a cuebid. All raises of the suit are limited in scope (two level = 6–9, three level = four of the agreed suit and preemptive, four level =

five of the agreed suit and preemptive). New-suit bids are not forcing, but constructive. All notrump responses are limited (1NT = 8–10, 2NT = 11–12 and 3NT = some hand where you think you can take nine tricks no matter what partner has).

Now we have covered everything except where advancer has a good hand (13+ points) and has no idea of what partner might have for his overcall. With this hand you (the advancer) cuebid the opponent’s suit, asking partner to describe his hand in terms of strength and distribution. The weakest response partner can make is to rebid his own suit at a minimum level. (If you raise on this sequence, you show extra values — better than “a good hand” — and an excellent fit.)

Odds are that partner will bid another suit. Now if you cuebid and raise your partner’s suit, that shows limit raise values (or better). If you cuebid and bid game, it should be at least an opening hand with a good fit.

If you cuebid and bid a suit of your own, it should show 13 or more points and is highly encouraging for partner to take another call.

After partner’s double

When your partner makes a take-out double, you have no forcing bids except a cuebid. With a minimum hand (0–8), you should make a non-jump bid in a new suit. With 9–11, you should jump the bidding in a new suit.

With 12 or more, bid a game. This sounds like a plan, but sometimes you have only four-card suits and are not even sure if the game should be in notrump or a suit.

This is where you have the



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wonderful cuebid. This shows 12 or more points and some uncertainty as to the denomination of the final contract. It should be game-forcing and allow you and partner to talk to each other through several levels of bidding.

Suppose you hold
♠K Q 5 4 ♥A J 6 ♦K 8 5 ♣7 4 3.

The bidding is 1♣ on your left, double by partner and pass on your right. This is the perfect hand for a cuebid, 2♣. Partner will start bidding suits up the line, as will you. If you find a 4–4 spade fit, it is game there. If you do not have an eight-card fit, maybe partner can bid notrump with a club stopper. You have lots of time and space to explore for the best game.

If we changed the hand slightly and made it
♠K Q 8 7 5 ♥A J 6 ♦K 8 5 ♣7 4,
you would just bid 4♠ after your partner’s takeout double. When you know where you are going, you do not need to ask.

When it comes to cuebids, keep your ears open and use your cue tips. □

Notes from ACBL Accredited Teachers