

## Tools of the Trade (3) - Fourth Suit Forcing

A couple of weeks ago, we looked at the Checkback convention. This was particularly useful for hands like this one. Your partner opens 1♦, you respond 1♠ and partner bids 1NT.

♠ A J 7 6 2  
♥ 6 4 2  
♦ A 3  
♣ Q J 2

You have 12 HCP. If partner has 13 or 14 there is enough for game. But which game? Spades or no trumps?

If partner has three spades, you would prefer to be in spades. Otherwise, no trumps would be better.

The solution to the dilemma was to use the Checkback convention. A bid of 2♣ asks partner for more information.

Let's change the auction. Your partner opens 1♦, you respond 1♠ and partner bids 2♣.

♠ A J 7 6 2  
♥ 6 4 2  
♦ T 3  
♣ Q J 2

We have the same hand and the same quandary. Spades or no trumps? Game or not?

Checkback is not available so what do we do?

The solution is to use the **fourth suit forcing** convention. Bid 2♥. This does not promise (or deny) length in hearts. It is an artificial bid, asking partner for more information. Being an artificial bid, it is forcing and should be alerted by partner.

### *Forcing for One Round or Game Forcing*

There are two schools of thought on fourth suit forcing (FSF). One method is that FSF is forcing for just one round. The other is that FSF is forcing to game. Disciples of both schools are adamant that their way is the one and only way! The "forcing to game" method has the advantage that the partnership can bid slowly to find their best fit and maybe investigate slam options. The "one round" method has the advantage that it applies to many more hands.

In this document, I will assume the one round method. If playing fourth suit forcing, you will need to discuss with your partner which method you are using.

### *Requirements for Fourth Suit Forcing*

Game invitational values are required. If opener has rebid at the one level, you need at least eleven HCP. If opener has rebid at the two level thereby showing fifteen HCP, you need only eight HCP.

There is no need to use FSF if there is no natural normal bid available. For example:

- If you can support one of opener's suits
- If you can rebid a six card suit
- If you have a stopper in the fourth suit and can bid no trumps

In other words, if there is an obvious, natural bid, then make it.

## When Fourth Suit Forcing does not Apply

FSF does not apply if:

- You are a passed hand
- The opponents interfere either with a double or a bid
- Opener has reversed
- You are still at the one level as in the auction: 1♣ – 1♦ – 1♥ – 1♠. The 1♠ bid is not fourth suit forcing. If you wish to use fourth suit forcing after 1♥, bid 2♠.

## Responding to Fourth Suit Forcing

FSF is a request for more information. In order of priority, you should:

- Support partner's major with at least three cards in that suit.
- Rebid your own suit to show extra length
- Bid no trumps with a stopper in the fourth suit

As with reverses, there are weak hands and strong hands. Again, as with reverses, a strong hand is a hand with enough points for game - remembering that partner has shown game invitational values. A weak hand is everything else.

Just like reverses, a strong hand makes a jump bid while a weak hand makes a simple raise or rebid of your suit.

## Examples

Some examples.

In the first three, West has a weak hand. By bidding at the two level, opener has already shown 15 HCP. This means responder needs only 8 HCP for a game invitational bid. Therefore, West needs 17 HCP to be sure of game.

<p>♠ Q 4 3 ♥ 5 ♦ K Q J 8 2 ♣ A K 7 3</p>	<p>West opens 1♦, East responds with 1♠ and West rebids 2♣. East bids 2♥, fourth suit forcing.</p> <p>With three card support, West bids 2♠. East has 13 fit points opposite partner's 15 and bids 4♠.</p>	<p>♠ A J 7 6 2 ♥ 6 4 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ Q J 2</p>
<p>♠ Q 3 ♥ 5 ♦ K Q J 8 6 2 ♣ A K 7 3</p>	<p>The same auction to 2♥.</p> <p>With extra length, West bids 3♦. East has 12 fit points and knows has 15 HCP and some shortage. East bids 5♦.</p>	<p>♠ A J 7 6 2 ♥ 6 4 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ Q J 2</p>
<p>♠ 3 ♥ A J 5 ♦ K T 8 6 2 ♣ A K 7 3</p>	<p>The same auction to 2♥.</p> <p>With a stopper in hearts, West bids 2NT and East takes it to 3NT.</p>	<p>♠ A J 7 6 2 ♥ 6 4 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ Q J 2</p>

In the next two, West has a strong hand. Since partner has promised a minimum of 11 HCP, West needs 14 HCP to be sure of game.

♠ A T 6 3  
♥ A 7 5  
♦ A K T 8 2  
♣ 3

West opens 1♦, East responds with 1♥ and West rebids 1♠. West bids 2♣, fourth suit forcing.

With three card support and values for game, West bids 3♥. East duly bids the game.

♠ K Q 2  
♥ K Q J 4 2  
♦ 7 3  
♣ 7 4 2

♠ A T 6 3  
♥ 5  
♦ A J T 8 2  
♣ A J 3

The same auction to 2♣.

With a club stopper and values for game, West bids 3NT.

♠ K Q 2  
♥ K Q J 4 2  
♦ 7 3  
♣ 7 4 2

Finally, a couple of examples where fourth suit forcing is inappropriate.

♠ A J T 3  
♥ A 7 5  
♦ A J T 8 2  
♣ 3

West opens 1♦, East responds with 1♥ and West rebids 1♠.

No need for fourth suit forcing. East bids 3♠ and West takes it to game.

♠ K Q 7 2  
♥ K 8 4 2  
♦ Q 7 3  
♣ 4 2

♠ K J T 3  
♥ A 7 5  
♦ A T 8 6 2  
♣ 3

West opens 1♦, East responds with 1♥ and West rebids 1♠.

Again, no need for fourth suit forcing. East bids 2NT and West passes.

♠ Q 7 2  
♥ K J 4 2  
♦ 7 3  
♣ K Q 4 2

## Deal 1

	North	
	♠ K T 7 6 ♥ A T 2 ♦ Q 3 ♣ K T 3 2	
West		East
♠ A 3 ♥ J 6 4 ♦ J 9 8 2 ♣ Q J 8 7		♠ J 9 5 4 ♥ 9 7 ♦ A K 7 6 ♣ 9 5 4
	South	
	♠ Q 8 2 ♥ K Q 8 5 3 ♦ T 5 4 ♣ A 6	

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♦ <sup>(1)</sup>
Pass	2♥ <sup>(2)</sup>	Pass	Pass <sup>(3)</sup>
Pass			

1. Fourth suit forcing showing game invitational values but undecided between hearts and no trumps.
2. Minimum hand with three hearts
3. Not enough for game

As long as a diamond is ruffed before drawing trumps, there should be nine or even ten tricks. A no trump contract would probably provide one trick less.

## Deal 2

	North	
	♠ J 9 8 6 ♥ 9 8 7 6 ♦ K J 7 ♣ K 7	
West		East
♠ A Q 4 ♥ K Q 5 4 3 ♦ Q 3 ♣ 5 4 2		♠ K 5 3 2 ♥ J T ♦ A 8 5 2 ♣ A J 3
	South	
	♠ T 7 ♥ A 2 ♦ T 9 6 4 ♣ Q T 9 8 6	

West	North	East	South
		1♦	Pass
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♣ <sup>(1)</sup>	Pass	2NT <sup>(2)</sup>	Pass
3NT <sup>(3)</sup>	Pass	Pass	Pass

1. Fourth suit forcing. Enough for game but hearts or no trumps?
2. Only two hearts but a decent club stopper
3. 13 points is enough for game even with partner's minimum

A club lead puts the contract in jeopardy. If north is able to lead another club, the contract will go down. Declarer has to hope that South has the ace of hearts. When that proves the case, there should be four hearts, three spades, a club and a diamond. There will be an extra trick if South leads another club after winning the ace of hearts.

## Deal 3

	North	
	♠ A 5 ♥ K J 8 4 2 ♦ K 2 ♣ T 8 6 5	
West		East
♠ T 9 8 7 ♥ 9 ♦ J T 9 7 ♣ A Q 7 4		♠ 6 4 2 ♥ T 7 6 3 ♦ 8 5 ♣ K J 4 3
	South	
	♠ K Q J 3 ♥ A Q 5 ♦ A Q 6 4 3 ♣ 2	

West	North	East	South
			1♦
Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣ <sup>(1)</sup>	Pass	3♥ <sup>(2)</sup>
Pass	4♥ <sup>(3)</sup>	Pass	4NT <sup>(4)</sup>
Pass	5♦ <sup>(5)</sup>	Pass	6♥ <sup>(6)</sup>
Pass	Pass	Pass	

1. Fourth suit forcing.
2. Game forcing hand with three hearts
3. Not a lot extra. Settle for game.
4. Partner has 11 HCP plus at least one shortage point. I have 18 HCP plus three for the singleton. Use Blackwood to look for slam.
5. One ace
6. Just one ace missing.

There should be no trouble wrapping up twelve tricks. If clubs are not led, there may be a thirteenth trick with South's fifth diamond.

## Deal 4

	North	
	♠ J 7 5 4 ♥ J 9 8 ♦ A T 6 ♣ K 7 5	
West		East
♠ A 6 ♥ A T 7 5 4 2 ♦ 3 ♣ A Q J 6		♠ K Q T 3 2 ♥ K 6 ♦ K J 5 4 ♣ 3 2
	South	
	♠ 9 8 ♥ T 3 ♦ Q 9 8 7 2 ♣ T 9 8 4	

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♣ <sup>(1)</sup>	Pass	2♦ <sup>(2)</sup>	Pass
2♥ <sup>(3)</sup>	Pass	4♥ <sup>(4)</sup>	All Pass

1. Show the second suit rather than repeating hearts
2. Fourth suit forcing.
3. Extra length. West has now shown six hearts and four clubs.
4. 13 fit points is enough for game.

Declarer should easily make ten tricks, losing a club, a diamond and a heart.