

Inverting Good-Bad 2NT Meanings with Spade One-Suiters

I have recently learned Good-Bad 2NT, and have already discovered a situation where I want to play inverted Good-Bad 2NT. Let me first describe how Good-Bad 2NT works, and then explain the situation that I am talking about.

There are several situations where 2NT is used artificially in competitive auctions, following the lebensohl principle. Note that over the 2NT bid, the responder bids 3♣, unless he can't stand a possible pass of 3♣ by his partner. The primary situation is when the opening 1-of-a-suit-bidder rebids 2NT after his RHO has competed at the 2-level. That is, an opening bid of 1-of-a-suit, possible interference by LHO, possible action by partner, and RHO usually bids 2♦ or 2♥ or 2♠. On these sequences a bid of 2NT shows a hand that just wants to compete for the hand, while bidding freely at the 3-level shows a hand that is competing constructively, perhaps hoping to make a game.

There are several other situations where Good-Bad 2NT can also be effectively employed. One is after partner makes either a takeout double or overcall and the next hand competes at the 2-level -- then the 4th player wants to clarify if he is merely competing for the contract or if he is competing constructively, perhaps hoping to make a game. A third basic scenario is after partner makes a support double and the responder wants to compete weakly or constructively in a suit at the 3-level. There are some other auctions that people play as good-bad that to my thinking are less valuable and clear-cut.

Finally there are auctions where people invert Good-Bad when they either jump to 2NT or jump in a suit at the 3-level, in order to differentiate hands that are more preemptive in nature as opposed to hands that are more constructive in nature. On those inverted Good-Bad sequences, the preemptive hands are bid directly at the 3-level in order to gain maximum preemptive effect, and the more constructive hands bid 2NT first. Thus the meaning of bidding the suit and 2NT are inverted. For example, if you open 1♦, partner responds 1♥, and RHO bids 1♠, you want to compete to 3♦ preemptively with ♦KQJxxxx and a minimum opening bid, and you use Good-Bad 2NT with a more constructive hand that would have bid 3♦ without the overcall.

If all this is gibberish to my readers, then I recommend that they read "Better Bidding by Bergen, volume 2" where he discusses the Good-Bad 2NT.

On January 6 this year I was playing with Joe Godefrin in the Knockout teams in the Orlando regional when I held the following hand VUL vs. NV: ♠KQJ973 ♥53 ♦74 ♣AQ7. I opened the bidding with 1♠ and the auction went: 1) 1♠-2♥-P-2♠. You have a sound opening bid but partner passed. Would you take a second action?

Any sane standard bidder would double to show good spade values, or pass as a second choice. This was IMPs and at this vulnerability it is too exuberant to bid. However, I saw that a bid of 3♠ could have great preemptive effect. First of all, the 2♠ bid does not 100% guarantee a heart fit, and could be based on strength. If that is the case, then a 3♠ bid takes away a crucial level of bidding for the opponents so they can't explore accurately for possible contracts in NT,

or a minor suit, or even slam. Second of all, even if the 2♠ bid is bid with a heart fit, then by bidding 3♠ you take away the help-suit & other game tries from the opponents, and on the rare day that they do make slam, you make it much harder for them to accurately explore for that contact.

I do not, at this vulnerability, recommend that anyone bid 3♠. Even though you only need a couple of spades and the club jack from partner to "only" go down 500 points vulnerable which is not a disaster at IMPs, partner has the right to expect better values from you to bid freely at the 3-level, especially at IMPs. At matchpoints one can be more aggressive competing, because going for a large penalty is only one bad board, and if the bid is effective in producing a good matchpoint score more frequently than it produces a bad matchpoint score, then it is plausible. But at this vulnerability it is lunacy to bid 3♠ even at matchpoints.

But suppose the vulnerability was different, and you wanted to compete to 3♠ using the Good-Bad principle. Here, the 2NT bid to compete weakly does not have the desired effect of preempting the opponents out of the 3-level. Therefore, I recommend using the inverted Good-Bad 2NT with spade 1-suiters. The requirements are that the opening bidder has a 1-suiter in spades that wants to compete to 3♠. Partner will immediately recognize that a jump to 3♠ is weakly competitive, and at the time that you bid 2NT, partner will assume that it is standard Good-Bad. But, after partner's response, if the 2NT bidder now bids 3♠, that converts the meaning of 2NT from regular Good-Bad to Inverted Good-Bad. The auction could be auction #1 at the one at my table, or any other auction where you have a competitive hand with spades, such as: 2) 1♠-X-P-2♥; ?, or 3) 1♠-P-P-2♠; ?. On any of these auctions, bidding 3♠ preemptively is much stronger competitively than using standard Good-Bad, and I recommend adding them to your arsenal of inverted Good-Bad 2NT.

Playing inverted Good-Bad 2NT with competitive spade 1-suiters, almost makes hand #1 good enough to compete at unfavorable vulnerability. But I would only recommend it at equal vulnerability or better. Then you can take advantage of the havoc that your taking bidding space from the opponents will reap.