Odds and Ends #2 continued - more balancing

There is another situation when you will find yourself in pass-out seat yet it is not the basic balancing position. That is you are in the pass-out position after the opponents have stopped at a low level contract; typically in 1NT or at the 2 level.

Many believe, that when playing match points, you should never let the opponents play in a suit contract at or below 2♥ since invariably you will get a bad result. That would include letting them play in a 1NT contract but most players make an exception preferring to defend 1NT if the opponents are vulnerable.

After 1Any-P-1N-P

This usually occurs after an opponent opens with one of a minor but it can occur after a major opener if the opponents do not play 1NT forcing. If no one is vulnerable you know the points are evenly divided so if you can find a 4-4 fit you should be better off playing at the two-level. It is unlikely you will have a 5-card suit higher than opener's suit but you may have a lower one. It is also more likely responder will have that suit. Regardless, especially if you are not vulnerable you can afford to go down one rather than let them make 1NT.

A special convention is worth mentioning here in context since it is not significant enough to discuss separately. When you are faced with a dead NT (that is after both opponents have bid and they are in 1NT and you are in the pass out seat) you are likely to want to double for penalty if you have values and did not compete earlier because your values are in opener's suit. You also want to be able to have a bid for takeout and to be able to overcall. This is solved by agreeing that a X of a dead NT is for penalty and requests the lead of opener's suit. That is the auction goes 1♣-P-1NT-P//P-X you should have something like Axx, QJTx, xx, AQTx. With this agreement 2♣ is for takeout with tolerance for clubs regardless of opener's suit; i.e. 1♦-P-1N-P//P-2♣ (Advancer can pass)!!! Other new suit bids, while somewhat unlikely since you would have probably overcalled the opening minor at the first opportunity, are all to play.

After 1Any-P-2level raise-P//P

Here we go again. “They have a fit so we have a fit” (we hope). Even if the “Any” is spades you want to consider balancing if Not Vul; partly because they are likely to take the push. If the opponents have settled on 2 of a minor you really want to
balance since you have about half the points and probably have a major fit of some kind. Bid a 4-card suit or make a TOX. For example KJxx, AJxx, xxx, xx over clubs consider a TOX but bid 2♥ over 2♦ rather than a TOX; partner should realize you do not have a 5-card major.

Pre-balancing; a new concept

A new idea suggested by Larry Cohen is known as pre-balancing. While it would seem it could apply whenever responders bid is not forcing (for example if responder is a passed hand or responds 1NT), it is presented as only applying after 1Any-P- raise-. As presented it encourages you to intrude directly over responder with a hand you would balance with you were on the other side of the table after opener passes responder’s bid. This means you will be making aggressive overcalls in this seat and it requires that your partner does not get excited and over bid. You may miss some games but you will more often gain on competitive auctions. Mike Lawrence recommends in this situation you bid at the two level on almost any hand with a decent 5-card suit unless you have good reason not to. Alternatively if you have a better hand you should bid on almost any 5-card suit. This is especially true if you are short in a higher suit and do not want partner to balance with that suit. He says be aggressive in this fourth seat when responder has limited his hand with a non-forcing bid. The danger is opener has not limited his hand.

A good example from Lawrence is ♠43, ♥AJT87, ♦KJ42, ♣32. After 1♣-P-2♣, bid 2♥ if not Vul. You really do not want to leave it to partner since he may not have a hand to balance with or he may bid 2♠. With ♠x, ♥AKxxx, ♦Axxx, ♣xxx he would pre-balance with 2♥ at any Vul. Clearly these aggressive bids could lead to exciting auctions.

Next

The next subject to be covered will be how to intrude over preempts. Really this is an oxymoron because in fact opener with his preempt is intruding on our bidding space. Now we are the pair that is trying to find game while opener is looking for the sacrifice or ability to interfere with our auction. It is difficult to continue but it does need discussion.