The Vanderbilt System

The Vanderbilt System of Contract Bridge was invented by Mr. Harold S. Vanderbilt who is known to many as the "Father of Contract." He is in a large measure responsible for the system of scoring at Contract Bridge now in universal use.

The basic feature of the Vanderbilt System is an artificial opening bid of one club, which is made irrespective of the club holding and thus neither denies nor affirms a biddable club suit. In order to make this artificial bid the player is required to hold 3 quick-tricks plus, or better, unless the hand conforms with requirements for an original notrump.

An example of an original one club bid is as follows:

A K 97 ♥ 963 ♦ A K 74 ♣ A Q 2

or

A 97 ♥ A 984 ♦ A K Q J 75 ♣ 7

In measuring values under the Vanderbilt System the following quick-trick table is used:

A or K of same suit, or 2 K = 1 quick trick
A K of same suit = 2 quick tricks

High-Card-Trick Table

Quick trick given above and
K x or Q x of same, or 2 Q x, or Q x and J x of different suits = ½ high-card-trick.
K 10 of same, K x and Q x of different suits = 1 high-card-trick.

Minimum original biddable requirements for:

- Four cards—one of a major, A Q 9 x, K J 10 x; one diamond, Q J x x; two clubs, A K J 9.
- Five cards—Q 10 x x x and shaded J x x x.
- Six cards or longer—none.

A Q, A J 10 or K Q 10 of same suit = 1½ high-card-tricks.

An unguarded King; or any Queen not included in one of above combinations; or a Knave with A K, A Q, A J, K x or 10 x of same suit; or 2 J x equals a + value.

A total of but two-plus high-card-tricks can be counted in the same suit, i.e., A K J equals 2+ quick-tricks, or 2+ high-card-tricks.

Two plus values do not equal ½ high-card-trick.

In the Vanderbilt System there are three kinds of original bids:

1. Offensive.
2. Partly defensive.
3. Psychic, as distinguished from legitimate.

Game is the ultimate goal of all offensive original bids. While it sometimes pays to open the bidding, after partner has passed, in the hope of obtaining merely a partial score, it never pays to continue to bid (if unopposed by the enemy) except in the hope of reaching a biddable game contract.

The strength requirements for offensive original bids never vary.

Original One-Bids and Two-Club Bids

One of a suit (other than clubs) or two clubs may be bid with:

Not less than either:

1. A four-card suit and 2½+ high-card-tricks,
   or
2. A five-card suit and 2½ high-card-tricks.

Less than either:

1. Three quick-tricks plus, or
2. Original notrump requirements.

Bidding Two-Suit Hands

When both biddable suits are of equal length, bid the ranking suit first.

When both biddable suits are of unequal length, bid the longer first. Exceptions: (a) Bid a very strong five-card major suit before a six-card minor;
(b) when not strong enough to open with one club, bid a four-card major in preference to two clubs with a five-card club suit.

Original Two-Bids

Bid two notrump with (a hand must meet all four requirements):

- A minimum of 4 (if vulnerable) probable tricks;
- An actual (including K x) or potential (Q x or J 9 x) stopper in all four suits.
- A no-trump hand pattern; and
- Irrespective of whether a hand conforms to three quick-tricks plus club-bid requirements.

The important hand pattern factors are:

- Distribution; and
- High-card allocation favoring no-trump: 4-3-3-3 and 4-4-3-2.

Sometimes high-card allocation outweighs distributional considerations.

One club and no-trump are the original well-above-average strength-showing bids of the Club Convention.

Shaded Bids

Shade all bids when necessary; a player should exercise an intelligent latitude when confronted with a hand or a situation requiring an exceptional bid.

(1) a minimum of 4½+ to 5 high-card-tricks.
(2) a minimum of 6 (7 if vulnerable) probable tricks;
(3) actual stoppers (including K x and Q J x, but not Q x x) in all suits; and
(4) a no trump hand pattern.
A good general hand pattern rule—only bid two no trump in hands containing a probable double stopper in three suits.

An original two-bid in a suit (except two clubs) requires a six or seven-card suit and fair strength in it. When vulnerable, 6+ to 7 probable tricks are required.

Two-bids in a suit show a one-suit hand, deny material strength in side suits, express a desire to play the hand only in the bid suit and are usually defensive and shut-out. Two-bids in a suit should be varied. They should be assisted with caution.

**Original Three-Bids**

Bid three or more no trump originally only when partner cannot have two quick-tricks, and you have a no trump hand pattern. Conversely, a Jump three or higher no trump bid after a negative response to a one-club bid denies at least two of the eight quick-tricks. The minimum requirements for this second-round three no trump bid are:

(1) 4½ plus to 5 high-card-tricks;
(2) 8 or 9 probable tricks;
(3) actual stoppers (including K x) in all suits; and
(4) a no trump hand pattern.

**Original Game Suit-Bids**

Requisites: 8 to 9 reasonably certain tricks in a major, 9 to 10 in a minor, if vulnerable. Such bids are pre-emptive (partner should not assist or overbid except with quick-tricks in at least three suits, including 2 or 3 aces), partly defensive and shut-out.

**Responses to Club Bid After Intervening Bid or Double**

After an intervening one-bid or Double, the partner of the club bidder has five courses open to him:

(a) make a game-forcing double or redouble with 2 or more quick-tricks;
(b) overbid with from 1 to 2 high-card-tricks (a one no trump overbid after an intervening one-bid shows 1½ to 2 high-card-tricks, including a stop in the adverse suit, and is semi-forcing);
(c) pass with from 0 to 1½ high-card-tricks;
(d) make a game-forcing two no trump bid, or
(e) make a one-jump once-forcing overbid in a suit (a distributional force).

An intervening two or higher bid by Second Hand after a one-club bid breaks the chain of the Club Convention. In such a case a Double of either the club bidder or his partner means business, and an overbid, unless a Jump, is not an absolute Force.

**Bids to Avoid**

Never assist, overbid or rebid in the hope of obtaining a greater partial score. This is never justified. The bidding should be closed by passing, when it is evident that a game cannot be bid. The pass, Mr. Vanderbilt says, is one of the best calls in Contract.

*This is No. 3 in a series of 6, including the Culbertson system, the Sims system, the Vanderbilt system, Slam Bidding, Laws of Pivot Bridge, and Conventional Signals used in Contract Bridge.*
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