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CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

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2 . 1 Introduction

Terms and concepts which are fundamental to bridge bidding will generally be used in their commonly accepted sense, as defined for instance in 'Morehead on Bidding' or in the ACBL 'Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge'. Some concepts, however, have no universally accepted definition and may even be entirely new to many readers; definitions of these are therefore given below. Due to the innovative nature of this book a precise understanding of all COBRA terms is necessary for understanding its description of the system.

2 . 2 Definitions

2.2.1 Suit. Honour strength. Primary/secondary/high honour

By suit is meant either of two things depending on the context, namely:
- Spades, hearts, diamonds or clubs.
- The collection of all cards in a hand, belonging to a particular suit in the sense given above.

The *honour strength* (HCP) of a hand is the sum of the high-card points held in each of the four suits, calculated according to the 'Milton Work' count:

TABLE 1

Milton Work count

Ace	A	4	HCP
King	K	3	"
Queen	Q	2	"
Jack	J	1	"
Ten	T[1]	0	"

Aces and kings are called *primary honours*, queens and jacks *secondary honours*. Aces, kings and queens are called *high honours*.

2.2.2 Playing strength. Playing points. Distributional strength

Each hand is characterized by a number, called its *playing strength* or its number of *playing points* (PP). It is a measure of the probable trick-winning potential of the hand and is the sum of the honour strength and the *distributional strength* or *distributional point count* (DPC). The DPC includes all kinds of points added to (or subtracted from) the HCP in order to give the current playing strength of the hand. It is initially evaluated as a function only of the 13 cards held in a hand and is then called *basic DPC*. As the auction progresses, however, the DPC

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[1] Using the symbol T for the Ten means going against the world of bridge literature. We believe, however, that it has many advantages to use one-character symbols for all card values, and that readers of this book will find little difficulty in accepting this practice.

varies as a function of the information obtained from the bidding. This is further explained in chapter 'Hand Evaluation'.

2.2.3   Honour guards

A king/queen/jack/ten is *guarded* if it is accompanied by 1/2/3/4 card(s) in the same suit. A queen/jack/ten is also guarded by 1/2/3 accompanying card(s) if one of them is at least two ranks higher than the guarded honour and any remaining cards are of lower rank than the guarded honour. An honour below an ace which is not guarded is *unguarded*. Table 2 below shows the minimum requirement for various honours to be guarded.

TABLE 2

Honour guards

King	**K**x
Queen	**Q**xx or A**Q**
Jack	**J**xxx or K**J**x
Ten	**T**xxxx or Q**T**xx

2.2.4   Natural/Artificial bids. Suggesting/Mentioning a denomination

A bid is *natural* if it implies a suggestion that the hand should be played in the named denomination, otherwise the bid is *artificial*. The denomination named in a natural bid becomes *mentioned* and the last mentioned denomination (if any and unique) becomes the *suggested denomination*. A particular denomination is *bid* if it has been suggested during the auction, or if it has been mentioned indirectly[4].

2.2.5   Forcing bids. Mutually forcing situation. Game force

A (round-)*forcing bid* is a bid which obliges partner to bid if his RHO passes. A forcing bid never *promises* anything about the hand except adequate strength. Expressions containing the words 'shows' or 'suggests' used about forcing bids are therefore to be understood only to mean that whatever is shown or suggested is what the forcing bidder expects partner to assume, but may well be entirely untrue about the hand.

A bidding sequence, which obliges a partnership to reach a certain contract level, establishes a *mutually forcing situation* for that level.

A mutually forcing situation for game is called *game force*. In a mutually forcing situation any call is forcing except 'Dbl'. The mutually forcing situation is cancelled by any bid at, or higher than, the requested level.

2.2.6   Free bid

A *free bid* is any bid by a player after his RHO makes a call other than 'Pass'.

2.2.7   Suit solidity

A suit 's' of 4+ cards is *solid* in a particular hand if it is at least as good as indicated in table 3 below.

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[4] A suit may become mentioned indirectly by a take-out double of a bid in another suit or by an unusual NT-call.

A non-solid suit is *semi-solid* if it would become solid were its smallest card to be replaced by the highest missing honour. A *long* solid (semi-solid) suit is a suit of 6+ cards which would remain solid (semi- solid) even were its smallest card to be removed.

TABLE 3

Suit solidity

L('s')	Minimum for solidity of 's'
5 -	AKQJ.
6	AKQTxx
7	AKQxxxx
8	AKJxxxxx
9	AKxxxxxxx
10	AQxxxxxxxx
11+	Axxxxxxxxxx..

2.2.8 Honour tricks. Defensive potential

The *number of honour tricks* (HT) held in a particular suit 's' depend on the top honours held in s according to table 4 below. 1/2 HT in a suit is also called a *potential honour trick*.

TABLE 4

Honour tricks

Holding in 's'	HT('s')
AK or AQJ	2
AQ or KQJ or AJT	1 1/2
A or KQ or KJT	1
Kx or QJx	1/2

The *defensive potential* of a hand with respect to a suit 's' is the number of tricks the hand can be expected to win with the suit s as trumps. In a balanced hand with no established fits the defensive potential with respect to its shortest suit equals the number of HTs. After a suit fit has been established, at most 1 HT in that suit is counted towards the defensive potential of the hand.

2.2.9 Biddable suits. Quality of suits

A suit is *biddable*[5] if it is 4-card and contains 3+ honours or 4+ HCP, or if it is at least 5-card; and *rebiddable* (*twice rebiddable*) if it would remain biddable even were the smallest (two smallest) card(s) to be removed from the suit.

The *quality* of a suit 's' in a hand is based on the following properties of s in that hand, taken in this order:
• Length;
• High-card strength;

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[5] The term 'biddable' does not imply that only biddable suits can be bid in the COBRA system. It is merely a technical term used especially in the definitions of certain opening bids and responses.

• Rank.

Of two suits s1 and s2, s1 is thus *better* than s2 if s1 is longer than s2, or if s1 and s2 are equally long but s1 has more high-card strength, or, finally, if s1 and s2 are equal in both these respects but s1 is of higher rank than s2. Of two suits s1 and s2, s1 is *much better* than s2 if and only if s1 would remain on at least the same level of biddability as s2 even were the two smallest cards to be removed from s1.

Of two suits s1 and s2, s1 is *weaker* than s2 if s1 is shorter than s2 or if s1 and s2 are equally long but s1 has less high-card strength than s2.

A *strong* (twice (re-))biddable suit is a (twice (re-))biddable suit with 4+ HCP which would remain at the same level of biddability even were the highest honour in the suit replaced by a small card. A *very good suit* is the same as a solid suit or a long semi-solid suit.

2.2.10   Stoppers

A suit is *solidly stopped* if it contains 1+ HT, and *potentially stopped* if it contains at least 1/2 HT. A suit which is not potentially stopped is *unstopped*. *Double stoppers* with regard to RHO are held in a suit 's' if L(s)+HCP(s) is at least 8, and with regard to LHO if the suit is headed by at least AK, AJT or KQJ. *Partial stoppers* in a suit are held if the suit is Qx or Jxx or better.

2.2.11   Skewness. Balance. NT-type

A hand is *skew* if it contains a singleton or void, and *skew with respect to 's'* if it has at most one card in the suit 's'.

A non-skew hand is *balanced* if it contains at most one doubleton and *semi-balanced* if it is distributed 5-4-2-2. A hand is *unbalanced* if it is skew or distributed 6-3-2-2 or 7-2-2-2.

A balanced hand is of *NT-type* if at most one 3-card suit is unstopped, any doubleton suit contains at least a queen and both major suits are at most 4-card.

2.2.12   Support. Fit. Agreed trump suit

A hand holds *support* for partner's suit 's' if it has at least a doubleton in 's' and, from the information available, it can be deduced that the JPP(s) is *adequate*, i.e. either 8+ cards, or 7 cards and a majority of the honours[6] in 's'. *Basic support* is any holding which constitutes support for a biddable suit, i.e. JTx or better. If the hand holds support for the suit even with the smallest card in that suit removed it is said to hold *good support*. Biddable strength in the suit is considered *very good support*.

A *fit* in a particular suit 's' becomes *established* in a hand when it becomes evident to the player that the JPP(s) is adequate, and *confirmed* when this is clear to both partners.

The first confirmed fit defines the *agreed trump suit*, but if a fit becomes confirmed for more than one suit, then a major suit fit overrides a fit in a minor suit in defining the agreed trump suit[7].

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[6] I.e. 6+ HCP; or 5 HCP and 3+ honours.

[7] By no means is a partnership obliged to end up in the agreed trump suit as their final contract. It is often tactically advantageous to be able to establish a temporary trump suit agreement, especially in Blackwood situations, before returning to the intended trump suit.

2.2.13 Raise. Preference bid. Rebid. Take-out bid

A natural bid in a denomination mentioned by partner is a *raise* if it is either a free bid or if it is made at a level above the lowest possible level a contract in that denomination could terminate the auction (irrespective of whether partner's bid was forcing or not). Otherwise it is a *preference bid*.

 A *rebid* is a natural bid by a player in a denomination previously mentioned by that player, but which is neither a raise nor a preference bid. A *take-out bid* is a natural bid which is not a raise, preference bid or rebid.

2.2.14 One-, two- and three-suited hands

A skew hand is *one-suited* if it contains a twice rebiddable suit and lacks basic support for any other suit, or if it contains a 7-card suit but no other biddable suit; *two-suited* if it contains 9+ cards in two suits, both of which are biddable, and lacks basic support for the other two suits; and *three-suited* if it is neither one-suited nor two-suited.

2.2.15 Offensive potential. Trick potential. Losers

The *offensive potential of a hand with respect to a suit 's'*, OP(s), is equal to the number of HTs outside 's' plus the *trick potential* of 's'. The trick potential of a suit 's' depends on L(s) and the solidity of 's'. If L(s) is 4+, table 5 below is used.

 The trick potential of a suit of 3- cards equals the number of guarded high honours in the suit. One half is added to the OP(s) for any non-solid suit 's' of at least 4 cards which is headed by AQ or AKJ. If 's' is at least 6-card then 1 is added to the OP(s) for each card beyond three in the longest suit besides 's'. The maximum of OP(♣), OP(♦), OP(♥) and OP(♠) is called the *offensive potential* (OP) of the hand.

 The number of *losers* in a suit 's' is equal to L(s) minus the trick potential of 's', rounded down to an integer.

TABLE 5

Trick potential for a suit of 4+ cards

If 's' is…	Trick potential of 's'
Solid	L(s)
Semi-solid	L(s)-1
Other	L(s)-2

2.2.16 Principal length

A hand has its *principal length* in the longest suit. If there is more than one longest suit the principal length is assigned to the highest ranking longest suit at the highest level of biddability but with least HTs. Thus, while no suit will be longer than the principal length, there may possibly be one which is otherwise better. The intuitive idea is that the principal length is assigned to the suit which initially appears to be the most desirable as trumps.

2.2.17 Limiting bids. Limiting range

A bid is a *limiting bid* if, by making it, a player limits his hand to within a range (called the *limiting range* of the bid) of 3- points (PP or HCP according to circumstances). In general,

raises, rebids and natural NT-bids are limiting bids, but other bids may also have a limiting function depending on the circumstances.

2.2.18   Semi-preemptive bids. Rule of 8 to 12

A *semi-preemptive bid* in a suit 's' is a bid which fully communicates the expected value of a combination of hands, in the sense that the player who makes that bid expects the scoring value of the contract to be no worse than the par value of the deal, given normal distributions of high cards and trumps. Such a bid is made in order to
• warn partner from going any further;
• describe a hand with an OP(s) which exceeds the OP with respect to any other suit than s;
• obstruct communications between opponents.

A semi-preemptive raise of a suit 's' obeys the *rule of 8 to 12*, showing a minimum JPP(s) equal to the number of tricks contracted for (valid for any contract from 8 to 12 tricks inclusive).

2.2.19   Offensive/Defensive orientation

The OP of a hand is always higher than or equal to its defensive potential. If the difference is 5+ the hand is *offensively oriented*, whereas if the difference is less than 5 the orientation of the hand will depend on the current bidding situation.

2.2.20   The DELTA-value

The *DELTA-value of a hand with respect to a certain suit* 's', is the difference between the number of cards held in the trump suit (defined by the current bidding situation) and the number of cards held in the suit 's'. The suit 's' might be
• the opponent's suit when considering an overcall;
• partner's suit when considering a penalty double of an overcall;
• the shortest suit when adjusting the playing strength of a hand after a fit has been established;
• the shortest suit when responding to a (semi-)preemptive opening bid or overcall.

2.2.21   Vernes' law. The Vernes number. Security limit

Vernes' law[8] states that under fairly general conditions the number of tricks NS can make playing a hand in their best trump suit s1 plus the number of tricks EW can make playing in their best trump suit s2 usually[9] equals s1(NS) + s2(EW), which is called the Vernes number[10] of the deal. The following useful relationship exists between DELTA and the Vernes number: if North has a DELTA(s1,s2)=d1 and South a DELTA(s1,s2)=d2 then[11]

$$s1(NS)+s2(EW)=d1+d2+13$$

This can obviously be used to calculate the Vernes number when s1 is the best trump suit for NS and s2 the best trump suit for EW, whenever the above DELTA-values can be deduced

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[8] J-R.Vernes modestly uses the name "law of the total number of tricks". Since "Vernes' law" is shorter it is here suggested as a tribute to its discoverer. C.f. Vernes: Bridge Moderne de la Defence.

[9] Exceptions occur, especially when either or both sides have fits on more than one suit. Such exceptions have not been taken into consideration in the COBRA system.

[10] Also referred to as 'TNT' in the literature, an abbreviation for 'Total Number of Tricks'.

[11] E.g. if North has 3 spades more than hearts and South 2 spades more than hearts, then ♣(NS) + ♣(EW) = 3+2+13 or 18.

from the bidding. COBRA provides conventions which are designed to show DELTA in situations when it is likely to be needed.

The highest contract in a suit 's' which, for its fulfilment, requires a partnership P to win at least s(P) tricks, is called P's *security limit with respect to 's'* and simply P's *security limit*[12] if 's' is the partnership's best trump suit.

Vernes' law has several important consequences, such as:
• The rule of 8 to 12 defined in section 2.2.18;
• *Vernes' rule*: In a competitive situation[13], where the opponents have confirmed a fit in some suit s1, a player, in whose hand a fit has been established in some other suit s2, should compete by continuing to bid s2 rather than by doubling a contract in s1 until his side has reached its security limit, and then double or pass according to whether the other side is above their security limit or not.

2.2.22 Premature raise. Delayed raise

A *premature raise* is a raise up to or below the security limit in a competitive situation, made immediately over RHO's (non-forcing) Pass.

A delayed raise is a raise made by a player who could have made that raise in an earlier round of bidding but elected to make one or more forcing bids prior to the raise. Such a raise shows a limiting range starting at 3 PP above the minimum required for making the same raise at any earlier time.

2.2.23 Book for the defence

Book for the defence is the maximum number of tricks the defenders can win before a particular adverse contract goes down.

2.2.24 Attacking opening lead

An attacking opening lead is a lead from a 4-card suit with a leadable sequence (c.f. Ewen: Opening Leads), or from a 5-card suit.

2.2.25 Favourable/unfavourable vulnerability

Favourable vulnerability = only opponents vulnerable.
Unfavourable vulnerability = vulnerable, opponents not.

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[12] Thus, if NS have, say, 8 spades together and this is their largest JPP of any suit, then their security limit is 2 spades.

[13] A competitive situation becomes established if EW and NS reasonably can expect both sides to have a JPS of 20+ PP.