

Is It Forcing?

Partnerships struggle with many different aspects of bidding. For some, it is an issue of what convention is being played. For others, it is the length of a suit shown at different points in the auction. Perhaps the most unappreciated characteristic of a call is whether or not it is forcing.

This is a fundamental concept that, while there is some literature on, is difficult to understand. What is forcing (and how forcing a bid is) depends on the overarching system framework. 2/1, for instance, has different forcing bids than Standard American. To add to this burden, there are many different flavors/interpretations of Standard American out there.

The following discussion will perhaps provide some clarity on situations that are forcing and nonforcing in a Standard American context. I outline below my suggested treatments in addition to possible variations. Ultimately, this is something that a partnership must agree upon explicitly beforehand.

The Novel Idea of New Suits are Forcing

Once upon a time, back when bridge was many variations of whist, there were no forcing bids. Players simply made estimates of the total tricks they had with their best suit as trumps. As time progressed, of course, every player with an ounce of self-respect quickly realized that this process was not very efficient. It also did not facilitate a great level of competition in terms of competing “for the bid”.

The most significant shift in bidding probably occurred after Vanderbilt tweaked elements of keeping score. Due to the presence of certain bonuses for bidding and making certain contracts, it became imperative for pairs to cooperatively find out whether bidding and making these “games” or “slams” was possible. Bidding transformed into a type of communication that required rules and guidelines rather than a rough amount of head scratching.

Out of this need for communication, the concepts of the bidding system and hand evaluation emerged. In a bidding system, each player could evaluate their hand and describe it with a specific bid. This would tell their partner approximately what their hand was worth and what shape it was. When a complete “picture” of the hand was needed, it could be achieved through a series of bids by each player.

The trouble, of course, is that if one person makes a bid to show 5♠ and an opening hand, and his partner makes a bid that shows 5♥ and an opening hand, there’s no rule that specifies that opener has to bid again. Logically, opener should bid something else in order to get to game. The trouble is that game may be possible, but it’s not very clear if it’s in the cards or not...

Why Forcing?

It’s unclear who precisely started the concept of “forcing bids”, but its usefulness is obvious. Without fear of partner passing, each player can describe more attributes of his hand to help his partner evaluate the partnership’s total assets. This is equivalent to knowing that a friend won’t drive home midway through a conversation. Forcing bids keep the conversation going.

Of course, not every bid can be forcing – this would needlessly drive up the bidding to 7N (doubled) on every hand. Neither partner would shut up! Clearly, some bids must allow partner to pass, while others must prohibit partner from passing. The question, of course, is when.

Changes in Level as Forcing

A good question to ask in order to answer the big picture question, “when is my bid forcing”, is “when do I not want partner to pass my bid?”

Here are a couple of plausible situations where this makes sense:

- When the partnership has values for game, but has not yet bid game
- When the partnership has values for slam, but has not yet bid slam
- When the partnership is not in their best fit

These all seem logical enough. Clearly, game must be bid in order to reap the bonus, so stopping below game makes no sense. The same argument goes for when the partnership has a slam. In addition, when the partnership is not in their best fit (meaning that the call in question is not the strain of the partnership’s best fit), it would be illogical to pass and play what is likely a 3-2, 4-1, or 0-1 trump fit.

Caution must be taken in applying the last situation, however. For example, if North opens 1♠ (11-19 HCP, 5+♠), should it be forcing? Clearly not, since South may or may not find that ♠s are his side’s best fit. South should be allowed to pass with the knowledge that his side does not have enough values for game and ♠s are his side’s best trump suit. North gave a description, and South is to evaluate based on that description.

It’s worth pointing out that South cannot always bid 1N or 2♠ without repercussions. If he could, there may be some merit to playing 1♠ as forcing. However, the level of the bid in question has an effect on the merit of “forcing v nonforcing”. Higher level bids will tend to be non-forcing simply because if they were forcing, partner would have to make a response at a high level (it becomes more likely to go down because more tricks are required). Blackwood and control cuebidding auctions (slam seeking) are examples of when this kind of forcing bidding is safe, in part due to the anticipation of replies and also because of the surplus of HCP.

After considering when we don’t want partner to pass, we should also consider when we do want him to pass:

- When we bid the right contract
- (More specifically) when we make a competitive bid “to play”

Once again, “duh” comes to mind. It’s important to keep this in mind though during an auction like so:

N	E	S	W
1♠	P	2N*	P
3N	P	?	

*4+♠, game forcing

The reason 3N is ambiguous as to whether or not it is forcing is that, while it is a bid of game, it's unclear whether N/S have their "best fit" in ♠s or NT. Some hands will play better in NT despite the 8-card ♠ fit. Other hands will do well in 4♠ because of a ruffing value in one of the hands.

Many players play 3N as a forcing slam try simply because the majority of hands with a 5-4 major fit will play better in ♠s, not 3N. Thus, 3N is not considered a "right contract".

In the same line of reason, if North bids a new suit, it should be forcing.

N	E	S	W
1♠	P	2N*	P
3♣ (4+♣)			

*4+♠, game forcing

The 9-card ♠ fit will likely play better in the few times N/S also have a 9 card ♣ fit. So, 3♣ cannot be a "right contract". 3♣ is also below game – another obvious reason why it must be forcing.

Based on this discussion so far, we can make the following rules:

- Any bid that shows the partnership has values for game is forcing
- Any bid that is in a new suit after a fit is found is forcing

These rules are obvious, but important (they will still apply later in competitive auctions). Notice the question "forcing to what?" isn't addressed explicitly. Implicitly, it appears that:

- Any bid that shows the partnership has values for game is forcing. Other bids afterwards are forcing, excluding bids of playable game contracts.
- Any bid that is in a new suit after a fit is found is forcing to the lowest available level of the "fit" suit

The definitions presented will suffice, but will be refined later on.

When It's Unclear

The scenarios described above are very elementary. The trouble begins when the values for game and the strain played in are uncertain. What calls are forcing? How forcing are they? There must exist a balance of forcing and nonforcing bids for these situations, as discussed above. It's clear why every bid cannot be forcing. The reason every bid cannot be nonforcing is because there are not enough available calls to show hands that are game forcing, invitational, and "groping" for partials. To illustrate this dilemma after a 1♠ opening:

- 1N ???
- 2♣ ???
- 2♦ ???
- 2♥ ???
- 2♠ 3+♠ 5-10 HCP

2N 4+♠ FG
3♣ 6+♣ FG
3♦ 6+♦ FG
3♥ 6+♥ FG
3♠ 4♠ INV

The question marks emphasize that the two-level bids (and 1N) cannot carry both “to play” hands and “invitational” hands. Opener could pass a non-forcing 2/1 with 14 HCP, and if responder has 10, the partnership missed a decent game. The “2/1”s cannot have any sort of dual HCP range without being forcing. Responder cannot show all possible hands without opener bidding again, giving responder the chance to make another descriptive bid.

The other thing worth pointing out is that one can't simply say “After 1♠, 2♣ is nonforcing, 3♣ is invitational, and 4♣ is game forcing”. This kind of bidding takes up so much space that many excellent contracts would be missed. Here again, the level of the bid has an effect on subsequent bidding. After 4♣, 3N can no longer be played. N/S could use 4N “to play”, but now they have to make 10 tricks as opposed to 9. There are too many hands where the limit is only 9 tricks (and thus, too many zeros on the scoresheet playing this way).

Obviously, some combination of bids being forcing in the beginning and nonforcing later is necessary to successful bidding. Standard American accomplishes this by allowing responder to rebid his own suit or his partner's suit after a 2/1 to offer a place to play, while any bid of a new suit at any time is forcing. Rebids in NT are a grey area – many suggest they are forcing, while others say “to play!”.

2/1 GF players make all the 2/1 responses game forcing. The 1N response is forcing, which allows responder to have a second bid to distinguish between “invitational” and “crappy” hands.

Both SAYC and 2/1 take advantage of a “non-forcing, but wide range’ rebid by opener after a 1/1 auction. For example,

1♥ - 1♠
2♣

Here, 2♣ is technically non-forcing. Responder would pass with a bad minimum and some tolerance for ♣s. In practice, many refer to this bid as “forcing”, since responder should keep the auction alive in case opener has a 16 + HCP hand (in this case, they have enough values for game). Keep in mind that opener can have up to 21 HCP if there is no great rebid available after a 2♣ opening.

The reason why this kind of bidding is awkward is that responder will bid after 2♣ with hands that don't always have enough values for game opposite opener's hand. In particular, responder may have a 10-point hand that doesn't fit with opener's. Sometimes this will produce game opposite 15 HCP, and other times it will not. When responder has to “guess” with hands like this, opener has to start “guessing” whether to go on with 15-17 point hands (does partner have 6 or 10 HCP?).

Fortunately, there is a partial solution. Opener has the option to bid a level higher than he has to. By “jumping” in the bidding, opener should indicate extra values. So,

1♥ - 1♠
3♣

Can be defined roughly as “like a 2♣ rebid, but stronger”. As per the previous discussion, defining “stronger” leads to the inherent flaw that it seems impossible to describe all hand types. If 3♣ is game forcing, the invitational hands get stuck in the 2♣ rebid. If 3♣ is invitational, 2♣ is now either minimum or game forcing. There’s no great way to describe every hand accurately in terms of shape and HCP.

The SAYC Solution

Since there exists no way to describe every hand exactly, the majority of bridge players content themselves with having methods to force to game when it’s clear to do so. Invitational hands can be expressed by later nonforcing bids after the “wide ranged, highly encouraging” initial rebid. To illustrate,

1♥ - 1♠
2♣ - 2♥
3♣

In this auction, 2♣ is “highly encouraging”, meaning that responder should find a bid with almost every hand except for the most abysmal. When responder says 2♥, showing 2♥ and less than invitational values, opener bids 3♣. This confirms invitational values and 5-5 distribution in ♥s and ♣s.

Should 3♣ be forcing in this auction? Clearly, no. Game is not obviously possible to both partners. 3♣ is also a playable strain. This is because responder will preference to 2♥ on a hand where he knows that there are two seven card fits available to him. One such hand is:

♠ KJxx
♥ xx
♦ Kxxx
♣ xxx

The same logic would apply to opener’s second rebids of 2♠ and 3♥ as well (as those are suits mentioned previously). These calls are invitational and nonforcing.

Opener may also rebid 2N or 3♦. Are these calls forcing or nonforcing?

2N should be nonforcing. This is because notrump is a playable strain when no 8-card major fit is expressed in the auction. In addition, there is no indication of an unstopped suit on both sides in the auction above. With the same hand type and game forcing values, opener should content himself with 3N. The hands for 2N and 3N respectively resemble

♠ Ax	Ax
♥ AQJxx	AQJxx
♦ Kx	AJ
♣ QJTxx	KJxx

3♦ is a little trickier to define. Opener can only have as many as 3♦ in the bidding. Responder could have as many as six diamonds on this auction (e.g. ♠KJxx ♥x ♦QTxxxx ♣xx). In this scenario, diamonds would clearly be the preferred strain to play in. The reason many people believe it's forcing is the adage that "a new suit is forcing" is always true. This example serves as a caution to applying such rules of thumb blindly. Careful consideration of possible hands always yields the correct answer.

So, what is opener to do with a hand like:

♠ x
♥ KQJxx
♦ AKx
♣ KQxx

This hand should jump to 3N, which rates to be a very makeable contract. Perhaps this sacrifices precise slam bidding, but it still describes the hand accurately.

One might wonder what opener's jumps would mean in this auction. Clearly, any bid other than game and the calls described must be forcing. Consider:

1♥ - 1♠
2♣ - 2♥
3♠

Opener, with similar shape and invitational values, could have bid 2♠. The jump must indicate a hand beyond minimum and invitational values – game forcing values. This jump, which ensures getting to game, also gives the partnership room to cuebid towards a slam if it exists.

The following rules can be derived from the examples above:

- When responder makes a call suggesting a contract after opener's rebid, any further bid by opener made at the minimum level indicates extra (invitational) values and is nonforcing.
- When opener bids a suit at a level beyond the minimum, it is forcing to game.

When reviewing these rules, it's worth wondering if the same thinking applies if opener makes a contract suggestion. Let's examine one such auction:

1♥ - 1♠
2♥

In this auction, opener is limited to less than invitational values with 6♥s. Responder is unlimited, and may have any number of hands with 4+♠. If we applied the rules above, a scheme like the following would be the result:

Responder's Rebids:

2♠ 5+♠ invitational NF

2N Invitational NF

3♣ Invitational NF (opener may have a 1633 hand opposite responder's 5125 hand)

3♦ Invitational NF (same reasoning)
3♥ Invitational NF
3♠ 5+♠ FG
3N Signoff
4♣ GF
4♦ GF

When responder has a hands such as ♠KQxx ♥x ♦xxxx ♣AKxx, he has to either bid 3N with ♦s unstopped, or 4♣ (which misses 3N when it makes). There is a similar issue with hands containing a doubleton ♥. Often the quality of opener's ♥ suit dictates whether the hand belongs in 4♥ or 3N. There is no bid in this structure (other than faking 3♠ on these hands) that allows opener to place the contract in 3N while creating a game force. Many crappy partials will be played when an alternative system would let the pair play in 2♠ or even 3♣/♦ when it's right to do so. With all of these clear bidding issues, one simply cannot slap these principles in every bidding situation.

In addition, this situation parallels the earlier auction in that not every partscore and game can be bid with complete accuracy. Due to the significant bonus associated with bidding makeable games, it seems imperative to make this the priority in the bidding structure. The trick, of course, is to facilitate invitational and game forcing hands with shared bids. This is accomplished by bids that are “forcing one round”, which imply invitational or better values.

So, for completeness,

1♥ - 1♠
2♥ - 3♣

Is invitational or better with at least 4♣. Responder may have 5xx4 or 4xx5 distribution. Same thing for 3♦. In contrast, 2N, 3♥ and 3♠ are simply invitational (which abides by previous rules). In the event that responder has slam interest, the wisest thing to do is pick a descriptive forcing bid followed by another forcing bid or a raise in the preferred trump suit. To illustrate such an auction,

1♥ - 1♠
2♥ - 3♣
3♥ - 4♦/♥

Both bids should imply slam interest, considering that opener made a minimum rebid and responder took the time to bid ♣s before bidding ♥s.

Notice that there is a special “conventional” situation in which opener makes an “encouraging” nonforcing rebid and responder bids the 4th suit:

1♥ - 1♠
2♣ - 2♦

In an auction like above where three suits have been bid, the 4th suit is an artificial game forcing bid. This is a historically functional definition, which helps responder with balanced hands lacking a stopper in the 4th suit, in addition to other specific invitational/game forcing hands.

Consequently, while the hand rarely occurs in real life, bidding 3♦ on this auction would be 5-5 invitational.

In short, the approach described above is used because responder's range of hand types is much larger than opener. We can recap this with the following rule:

- After opener makes a nonforcing rebid, a new suit by responder is natural and implies invitational or better values. This call forces opener to make a bid on the next round.
- The bid of the fourth suit is game forcing, artificial
- After opener makes a nonforcing rebid, a raise or jump in a previously bid suit is nonforcing. Jumps in suits previously bid are also invitational. Jumps in the fourth suit are invitational 5-5.

After a 2/1

In 2/1 GF methods, there is little trouble determining how forcing opener and responder's bids are. The 2/1 sets a game force, so each bid below game is forcing (to game). This is not the case in SAYC, where the 2/1 covers invitational or better hands. Determining what is forcing and what is not can be done with the same principles discussed for the 1/1 auctions.

Opener has several rebid options available. These may include

- Bidding a new suit at the two level
 - o This is clearly forcing, as there is no defined fit or values between the partnership.
 - o If the suit is higher ranking than the first (as in the case of 1H..2S, 1D..2M), it is forcing to game.
- Rebidding his original suit
 - At the two level, it is nonforcing (but see below as to why this causes problems).
 - At the three level, it is game forcing. This must show better than minimum with the two-level rebid available. Opposite an invitational or better hand, there will be enough values for game.
- Bidding 2NT
 - This is often the best contract. 2N immediately suggests minimum values and no fit or side suit worth mentioning. 2N is passable.
- Bidding a new suit at the three level
 - o This is a special situation that is often abused by novice players. Mentioning a new suit at the three level shows game forcing values, but it also indicates a hand significantly better than a minimum (17+ is a good benchmark). It cannot simply be "another suit" because the level of contract will get needlessly high without any assurance of a fit. In general, it is wise to stay at as low a level as possible when there is a chance of a misfit, regardless of strength. So, by corollary, bidding at such a high level must indicate extra values.

Notice that, while this is not literally every possible rebid option, these are the most commonly used and misunderstood permutations. Intuitively, it should be obvious that the last bid in an auction like

1♥ - 2♣
3♠ - ?

is 100% forcing. What it indicates in terms of distribution is best left to partnership agreement, but responder should not consider passing a viable option here.

Responder must now make a rebid, the same themes in play. Bidding a new suit is game forcing. Making a preference to opener's suit is nonforcing unless it is a jump. 2N is invitational and nonforcing, and a rebid of his own suit is nonforcing.

Most people have been told that 3♣ in this kind of auction

1♠ - 2♦
2♠ - 3♣ is forcing one round, not necessarily game forcing. The trouble is there's little merit to this with 2♠ nonforcing. While it is true that, sometimes, responder has a hand with the minors and would prefer a minor suit, it will be better practice to play in 2♠ on a 6-1 (and maybe 5-1) fit when the evidence of any fit is marginal. Suppose responder has

♠x ♥xx ♦AQTxxx ♣KJxx

Here, a 3♦ rebid is adequate. Yes, the theoretical club fit cannot be found and played at the three level. However, it keeps the partnership out of trouble on misfitting hands. If responder cannot contain himself, then he can try his own six card suit. This small partscore loss leads to constructive bidding with a hand like

♠x ♦xx ♦AKJTxx ♣KQJx

This hand (and those slightly better) may produce a slam opposite a hand with weaker spades and good fillers elsewhere. It is essential to have room to communicate fit and controls before game is reached. This isn't possible if 3♣ is passable.

Opener now has a second rebid. At this point, the only situations where the partnership is not in a game force include

1♠ - 2♦
2♥ - 3♦

1♥ - 2♣
2♦ - 2♥

1♠ - 2♦
2♠ - 2N

Opener cannot make another bid in these situations without it being game forcing. Consider that responder has made a limited, invitational bid that suggests the best strain (either his own suit, a preference for opener's suit, or 2N).

Competitive Principles Regarding Forcing v Nonforcing

Despite all the great rules for auctions where the opponents do not bid, they often interfere. This complicates matters because it will often be right to compete for the best partscore, as the points are often more evenly divided. However, it is still necessary to bid game contracts when they exist, particularly when they are positional or an opponent bids simply to throw in a monkey wrench.

Directly After an Overcall

Bidding a new suit is forcing unless it is a jump (then it is preemptive and nonforcing) bids of NT are nonforcing. Doubles are takeout, and will not be passed without exceptional preference to defend the doubled overcall.

This is not the case in the pass-out seat. For example,

1♠ - 2♦ - P - P
?

Here, double is takeout (protecting), after which responder may pass with a penalty-oriented hand. New suits suggest extra values but are non-forcing. Cuebidding the opponent's suit is game forcing with unspecified shape.

This applies even after a balancing overcall. The only difference is that partner will always take out the double, as there's no hand worth sitting for a penalty that couldn't bid earlier.

It is worth mentioning that after a preemptive overcall, most of responder's bids are new suits at the three level. These must be game forcing considering how little room to maneuver for partscore there is, in addition to the idea that if one opponent has a poor hand, it is a little more urgent to bid games properly. If there's a call available at the two level, it remains forcing, but not game forcing.

Directly After a Takeout Double

Bidding over an opponent's immediate takeout double is separated from an overcall due to some special considerations. Take for instance

1♦ - X - 2♣

Two players have shown opening values. Game for opener's side is unlikely, so it makes sense that the 2/1 should be natural and NONFORCING! If responder happens to have a great hand, he starts with a XX (showing 10+ and defensive value or some GF hand).

If a 1/1 response is available (here, 1M), it remains forcing and natural. It is still possible (albeit less so) that a 4-4 major suit fit is playable.

Had the auction gone

1♦ - P - P - X

2♣

2♣ is nonforcing and competitive in nature (jumps would be invitational). Rare, strong hands can start via XX.

Also,

1♦ - P - P - X

P - P - 2♣

Is clearly nonforcing. Responder did not have enough to make an initial response, AND the alternative (pass) leaves opener to play 1♦X. There is no reason to expect game, so bidding is geared towards the best suit at the cheapest level possible.

After Three People Bid

The type of auction in question is when one side has opened and responded, and the fourth person makes a bid after the response. One example would be

1♠ - P - 1N - 2♥

3♣

Responder is limited, but RHO's overcall limits the calls available to opener. Opener may hold either of the following hands:

♠AKJxx ♥x ♦xx ♣KJTxx

♠KQJxx ♥_ ♦Kxx ♣AQJxx

Opener would like to compete with the first hand and steer towards a game with the second hand. If 3♣ is forcing, he cannot compete, and vice versa.

Without conventional assistance, 3♣ here should be forcing, almost like a game forcing jump shift had RHO not bid. This is true regardless of responder's bid.

After Four People Bid

This is where auctions begin to get messy. Take for instance

1♠ - 2♣ - 2♥ - 3♣

3♦

Should 3♦ be forcing, or should it be a competitive 5-5 hand? How about

1♦ - 1♥ - 1♠ - 1N

2♣

Is 2♣ passable or forcing? What about

1♦ - 1♥ - 1♠ - 1N
P - P - 3♣

Is this forcing, or invitational? How about if opener bid 3♣?

It is necessary in auctions where everyone is bidding to be able to compete effectively for the partscore. Doing so requires the ability to show suits – this will usually be done at the minimal level in order to minimize the trick-taking commitment when at all possible. Since the values are relatively balanced between both sides, it is appropriate to not leap about when it is unclear what suit should be played in.

Another important consideration, of course, is that there will still be games to be bid on these auctions. This is more likely when responder shows a 10+ point hand via a cuebid limit raise or a 2/1 in competition. In these auctions, the opening side has half the point OR MORE. It is particularly useful in auctions where the cheapest way to bid a new suit is at the three level to define these bids as game forcing. By corollary, when the HCP sum between the partnership is uncertain, the lowest available calls should be natural, competitive and nonforcing, provided the bidder can have the second suit without excess of HCP (e.g. a reverse).

Based on this line of reasoning, the following rules can be adopted

- After partner makes a 2/1 in competition and RHO bids, opener's bid of a new suit is game forcing. Weaker hands will pass and wait for partner to reopen.
- After partner makes any other call in competition and RHO bids, the cheapest available bid of a new suit is nonforcing and natural. Jumps are invitational and nonforcing.

Forcing Passes (or 4 or more people bid)

Here it is best to state the rule followed by explanation.

- When the opening side has shown values for game, passing an opponent's bid is forcing and indicates some desire to bid onwards rather than penalize the opponents
- When the opening side is in a forcing auction and the opponents intervene (particularly with a preemptive bid), a pass is forcing, indicating the lack of a better bid with the knowledge that either an alternative contract should be reached or the opponent's contract should be doubled

Suppose after

1♥ - 1♠ - 2♠ - 4♠

Opener and responder have at least invitational or better values between them. Advancer's raise in ♠s may be purely preemptive or based on solid playing strength. Whichever is the case, it is best for opener's side to either double 4♠ or bid 5♥ in the long run. Passing out to 4♠ is no longer feasible, so the first pass must force the other player to say something other than pass.

One advanced corollary that stems from this idea is that making a forcing pass and then pulling partner's call invites a slam. It may also indicate two places to play when the strength of the hand is well defined. For example,

2♣ 2♥ X 4♥
P P X P
4♠

Shows a strong hand with spades and a minor suit. Opener must have a huge hand, and would have opted to bid 4♠ directly with a one suited hand.

END

Notes

1M – 1N; 2!C 2cd

Normal Stayman w/ smolen after 2N overcall

Normal Puppet

Don't sac after lead directing double

Xs in forcing auctions are penalty

Sandwich v x is strengths (10hcp threshold)

Bidding after invites is forcing (e.g. misfitting auctions leading to 4 level)

1m-(3m) natural

1x-1y; 1N (X) T/O

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1. As described, declarer can envision an endplay here to succeed. The club layout here is semi-typical for such a ploy. The more classic situation is:

KTx
AJx

Taking away the KT can still work. The key is that LHO is on lead AND must play his honor under declarer's A, either by leading it or holding Hx and being forced to play it (the situation that exists on this hand).

The hand is more interesting from the defensive perspective. Consider West's decision at T2 after T1: K523 (UDCA). The auction provides East's exact distribution (22245) and (slightly more suspect) point count. West suspects that partner has 3-5 points without a desire for an immediate switch. If this is the ♠A, the contract always makes (note, irrespective of the bidding, with Ax, East would overtake and continue spades. Thus, declarer loses 2 spades and a club). No luck here.

If encouragement is based on a doubleton spade, declarer will lose 2 spades, one club, and (possibly) another trick. If partner has the ♦K (or ♥K), there is no trouble. If partner has the ♣Q,