

BIDDING 19 FOURTH SUIT FORCING

There are hands where responder knows there is enough for game (or slam) but doesn't know *which* game or slam. More information is needed about opener's hand and opener must be forced to continue bidding to game or slam.

This is where fourth suit forcing comes in. As the name suggests, it is the bid of the remaining fourth suit after the other 3 have been bid. It does not promise anything in the fourth suit (and hence must be alerted) but asks opener to describe their hand more fully. It can be played as only forcing for one round, but I think it is much better to play it as forcing to game. It makes slam exploration much easier if partner knows they must keep bidding to at least game.

S 54	S QJ6
H A	H QJ1082
D KJ10843	D AQ9
C Q872	C K6
1D	1H
2C	?

These were the West-East hands during a club duplicate. I would open the West hand 1D on the Rule of 20 – you have 10 HCPs plus 10 cards in 2 of your suits making 20. East responds 1H and then has a problem after West's 2C rebid. East knows that with his/her 15 HCPs opposite an opening hand that there is enough for game. But which game? If West has 3 hearts, we want to play it in 4H. But if West doesn't have 3 hearts, we want to play in 3NT.

There is no adequate bid for East in basic standard. 2H would show 6+ hearts and a weak (6-9(10)) hand. 3H would also show 6+ hearts and an invitational ((10)11-12) hand. So, the right bid is 2S fourth suit forcing. This tells partner that we are going to game and asks them to describe their hand further. West will bid 3D: this denies 3 hearts or a spade stopper for 3NT. East can now bid 3NT with a clear conscience about the 5 card heart suit.

When partner bids fourth suit forcing at you, you should respond in this order of priority:

1. 3 card support for partner's major
2. A stopper for NTs in the 4th suit
3. Extra length in your own major
4. Extra length in your minor or your second suit
5. 4 card support for the 4th suit (rare)
6. Lacking 1-5, the most natural and least misleading bid. Never feign holdings 1 and 2.

Let's change the hands slightly:

S KJ5	S 64
H A	H QJ1082
D KJ1084	D AQ9
C Q872	C KJ6
1D	1H
2C	?

East has a bigger problem with this hand – as well as not knowing if partner has 3 hearts, East has no spade stop for 3NT. 2S fourth suit forcing solves the problem as West will respond 2NT showing the spade stop and East can happily bid 3NT.

Let's change the hands again:

S 98	S 64
H A	H QJ1082
D KJ1084	D AQ9
C KQ872	C AJ6
1D	1H
2C	?

In response to 2S fourth suit forcing, West will reply 3C, denying 3 hearts or a spade stop. With good support for West's diamonds and clubs and knowing 3NT and 4H do not appear to be viable games, East can try 5D.

One exceptional sequence: 1C 1D 1H 1S is NOT fourth suit forcing. The spade bid is natural and forces for one round. If you want to use fourth suit forcing in this situation, you should bid 1C 1D 1H 2S.

Dealer: N
 Vul: Nil

	♠ Q1072 ♥ QJ ♦ KQ942 ♣ Q10	
♠ J96 ♥ A108 ♦ 3 ♣ KJ9765	♠ AK8 ♥ K97654 ♦ A5 ♣ A2	♠ 543 ♥ 32 ♦ J10876 ♣ 843

N	E	S	W
1D (1)	P	1H	P
1S	P	?	

(1) Very borderline hand – HQJ and CQ10 are poor values and there are no aces. Pass is acceptable with this hand.

This hand occurred in a club match. South bid 3H and was passed.

THE JUMP REPEAT OF A SUIT BY RESPONDER IS AN INVITE HAND (11-12) IN BASIC BIDDING. IT IS NOT FORCING.

South wants to force to game and should use 4th suit forcing:

N	E	S	W
1D	P	1H	P
1S	P	2C (1)	P
2D (2)	P	2H (3)	P
4H (4)	P	P	P

- (1) Fourth suit forcing to game
- (2) Denies 3 hearts or a club stopper for no trumps
- (3) Knowing partner doesn't have 3 hearts, repeating hearts now shows 6
- (4) Has 2 hearts for partner

Slam is difficult to find on this hand and a little lucky – it's not easy to find out that North's second heart is the jack and there isn't a second heart loser in addition to the HA. The opening leader also has the CK and can't attack the club weakness without giving a trick away