

BIDDING OVER THE OPPONENTS' PREEMPTS

Here's a familiar scene.....you are sitting at the bridge table minding your own business when your RHO begins the auction with a preemptive bid. Right away you (and your partner) are at a disadvantage. You have been robbed of valuable bidding space in which you would have been able to investigate for a good place to play this hand and/or the ability to communicate regarding suits and hand strength, etc. to assist you if you were going to defend. Since good bidding has been hindered considerably you must now rely upon good judgment and good luck. You will have to decide whether to be overly aggressive or somewhat passive and your only real guideline other than good hand strength is that it's generally considered best to be aggressive when you hold shortness in the opponent's suit.

Just as over opening one level bids a double of an opening preemptive bid below the game level is a takeout double. The requirements are similar but the higher the preemptive bid the better the hand needed to make the takeout double. The same is true of overcalls. And with both doubles and overcalls more is required in the direct position than in the balancing position.

Even though a double of an opening preemptive bid below game is intended for takeout, it is a cooperative double. Responder has the option of passing with any hand with which he would prefer to defend. However, passing because one has nothing and doesn't know what to do is not permitted!

Balancing plays an important part in your strategy for bidding over an opponent's preemptive bid just as it does at lower levels. While bids in the direct position generally show sound values (particularly if vulnerable) the same bids in the balancing position can often be made on values borrowed from partner.

Most of your opponents play weak two-bids--an opening bid of 2♦, 2♥, and 2♠ that shows a hand with a good six card suit (usually) but with less than opening strength.....somewhere around 5-10 HCP (high card points). The requirements to overcall or double a weak two-bid are about the same as the requirements to overcall or double a one level bid, but with slightly greater HCP strength. Therefore, in the direct position, a double shows a sound opening bid with shortness in the suit opened by the opponent while a simple overcall shows the suit bid with at least the values for a good opening bid. (A jump overcall shows a very

strong hand... not a preemptive hand!) In the balancing chair, you may double and overcall with somewhat weaker hands, particularly if short in the weak-two suit. In either case before doubling a major suit preempt, look at your holding in the other major suit; you need a better hand with only three cards in that suit than you do with four card support as that is the suit that your partner will first think about bidding if at all possible.

As responder to the takeout double of a preemptive bid it certainly seems right to bid with distributional hands but some thought should be given to passing with balanced hands that contain a few values. If you chose to bid make your call at the level at which you wish to play as the doubler should not bid again unless he has a very powerful hand.

In the direct position notrump overcalls of weak two-bids show sound opening notrump bids with at least one stopper in the weak-two suit. In the balancing position they show at least a minimum notrump opening with a stopper. Some examples:

(1) ♠ AJ987
♥ 72
♦ AJ98
♣ Q2

Bid 2♠ over
opponent's 2♥
in direct or
balancing pos.

(2) ♠ KQ10
♥ A65
♦ AJ8
♣ K1072

Bid 2NT over
opponent's 2♦,
2♥ or 2♠ in direct
or balancing pos.

(3) ♠ KJ72
♥ AQ9
♦ 76
♣ Q1098

Double over opp.'s
2♦ in direct if NV
but pass if Vul. or
opening bid was 2♥/2♠.
In bal., double over
2♦/2♥, pass over 2♠.

The principles for bidding over weak two-bids also apply to bidding over three level and higher (non-game) preemptive bids. Double if you want partner to pick a suit but overcall if you wish to tell partner that you have a good suit. It is important to remember that at these levels both actions show good hands and that the higher the level the more cooperative the double becomes.

In the balancing position it is permissible to bid with shaded values when the opponents have stopped below game. Their failure to bid more tends to indicate

that partner has some values, but had no clearcut action in the direct position. However, after preemptive bids at the game level, the requirements to bid in the balancing position then are about the same as in the direct position. More examples:

(4) Opp. opens 3♥
 ♠ AQ1085
 ♥ 62
 ♦ KQ4
 ♣ 876

Pass in direct,
 bid 3♠ in bal.
 bid 4♥

(5) Opp. opens 3♦/3♥
 ♠ AQJ1042
 ♥ 4
 ♦ 54
 ♣ A1042

Bid 3♠ in direct,
 bid 4♠ in bal.

(6) Opp. opens 3♠
 ♠ 65
 ♥ AQJ1083
 ♦ KJ2
 ♣ 109

Pass in direct with unfav. vul.
 bid 4♥ with fav. vul.,
 regardless in balancing position.

There is no particular HCP requirement for overcalling a three level preempt with 3NT; it may be a huge balanced hand or it may be somewhat less but with a source of tricks. Or at MPs it may well depend upon how big a gambler you are. There are hands when it just feels right. Again position at the table as well as available tricks will affect your decision.

A 4NT overcall of an opening 4♥ or 4♠ bid is for takeout...it's not intended as Blackwood or the Unusual NT. A 4NT overcall of 4♥ is generally takeout for the minor suits as one could double for takeout with all three unbid suits. A 4NT overcall of 4♠ is takeout for either two or three suits...thus partner should take extra care when responding by bidding the lowest suit in which he can play. Many play that a double of 4♠ is mostly for penalties as 4NT was available for takeout. More examples:

(7) Opp. opens 3♥/3♠
 ♠ K64
 ♥ AJ10
 ♦ KJ76
 ♣ K106

Pass in direct,
 bid 3NT in bal.

(8) Opp. opens 3♥/3♠
 ♠ K8
 ♥ AJ9
 ♦ KJ
 ♣ AKJ764

Bid 3NT in
 either pos.

(9) Opp. opens. 4♥
 ♠ 5
 ♥ 4
 ♦ KQJ109
 ♣ AQJ987

Bid 4NT in
 either pos.

There are a few conventional methods of competing. Playing Fishbein an immediate double of a preemptive bid is penalty while the next higher suit is for takeout. (That might be worthwhile....considering some of the preempts I've seen lately). Cheaper or Lower Minor uses the cheaper still available minor suit or 4C for takeout and double for penalty. The Smith convention uses 4C over any preempt at the three level for takeout and double for penalty.

Over a weak two- bid in a major a jump to the four level in a minor suit is Leaping Michaels and shows at least 5-5 in the other major and the minor suit bid. Similarly a jump cuebid of 4D over a weak two-diamond bid would show at least 5-5 in the majors and 4S over a weak two-spade bid and 4H over a weak two-heart bid show good hands with both minors.

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