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(91) Dealing with Preempts: Vs. 3-Level and 4-Level Preempts

Date: April 2014 © AiB
Level: Intermediate
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General

When the opponents open at the 3-level or 4-level they put a lot of pressure on us to make difficult decisions without much room to maneuver or describe our hand. This Preempt will force us to either double or overcall at a very high level – we will not have many of the options that are available to us at lower levels. Let's take a look at each of these options and see how we need to adjust our thinking and bidding because of the lack of space and options available to us.

Overcalls

When we overcall vs. a 3-level or 4-level Preempt we face more danger than when the opponents open at the 1-level.

- First, we are at a higher level and
- Second, the opponent that is behind us might have a good hand and is armed with a penalty Double (as opposed to a Negative Double if our RHO had opened at the 1-level.)

Thus, when we make an overcall at a high level we want to have a good hand and a good suit.

If we have both a good suit and a good hand, we should be able to "survive" (not get killed) if partner has a doubleton in our suit and about 6-7 HCP. We usually want to have a 6+card suit with good texture and a hand with good playing strength – a simple opening hand is not enough. This means that we will not be able to Overcall at a high level on many hands we would opened with if we had been the opening bidder – keep that in mind.

Doubles

As we are under more and more pressure to act at high-levels and as we are able to Overcall on fewer and fewer hands we will need to Double (our other strength showing action) more often in order to get into the auction.

Example
Versus a 3♥ preempt with
♠Kxxxx
♥x
♦AQ10x
♣AJx
We will Double instead of overcalling ♠. If the opponents had opened 1♥ we would have overcalled 1♠.

A Takeout Double become more flexible and will have to contain more hand types as the auctions get higher.

Example
Versus a 4♥ preempt with
♠AQxx
♥xx
♦AQ
♣K109xx
We will be forced to make a Takeout Double (and hope that partner does not bid 5♦ or if they do that they have a decent 5-card suit.) If the opponent had opened 1♥ we would have started with a 2♣ overcall.

Jump Overcalls vs. a Preempt
We do not Preempt a Preempt! Thus, we will define a jump overcall vs. a preempt to show a good long suit and a good hand.

Example
(3♥) 4♠
This shows a very good 6- to 8- card ♠ suit and some HCP – generally about 8.5 to 9 tricks. We have a good chance of making 4♠ if partner has one useful card. An example hand on which to bid 4♠:
♠AQJ10xxx
♥x
♦AKx
♣Kx
These are hands that are almost good enough (or in some cases are good enough) to Double and bid ♠ if RHO hand opened 1♥. But partner is much more likely to pass our Double at higher levels, so we don't want to Double with these very shapely offensive hands. By taking these hands out of the list of ones that make a Takeout Double we also make it so that Double contains more Defensive hands and increase our chance of scoring well when partner passes our Double – converting it to penalty.

Conclusion

Acting over high-level (destructive) interference from our opponents is difficult. It requires judgment, table feel, and experience to be successful in these auctions. You will notice that we have avoided putting HCP requirements on acting over interference at each level – vs. 2-Level, 3-Level, 4-Level, etc.. This is because HCP are important, but general playing strength (shape) is even more important when we are thinking about offense. Many of these auctions will have multiple very shapely hands at the table and times when both sides can make a lot of tricks declaring. Thus, dealing with this interference is a balance of risk and reward – should we come in or not? In these auctions we will frequently be faced with difficult choices and we will be forced to do our best to describe our hand and allow us to land on our feet. These auctions will be a challenge and we will occasionally go for -1100 when we are unlucky or judge wrong. But with practice and judgment, we expect to do it less often than the other players!