

Let's bid a few hands and see how easy bridge really is!



Defence to Three-Level Pre-empt's 1

In the last issue I dealt with pre-empting at the three-level, so it seems only fair to explain how to deal with these annoying bids. In this issue we shall be looking at the possible actions that one player can take after an opponent's pre-empt. Then, in the next issue of BRIDGE, we shall consider how best to respond to a partner who has made a call over a pre-emptive opening.

The first thing to say is that you will not always get it right: every expert in the world of bridge has done the wrong thing over a pre-empt and has had to pay the price. For the most part, pre-empt's make you guess; what is important is that your guess be an educated one, so that most of the time you do the right thing.

Let's start by looking at two prospective pre-empting hands to remind us of what a pre-empt shows:

Hand A

♠ K Q J 10 9 6 4
♥ 5 3
♦ 6 2
♣ 7 4

This is an excellent pre-empt. because the hand has *no defensive values*.

Hand B

♠ J 10 9 6 5 3 2
♥ K 6 4
♦ K Q
♣ 3

Pass – *too much* in the way of *defensive values* for a pre-empt!

As I said in the last issue of BRIDGE, the aim of a pre-empt is to *disrupt* and *describe*. A pre-emptive bid describes a *weak hand with a long suit and very little defence*. What does this mean?

It means that, when they pre-empt, the opponents are telling you they cannot take many tricks against *your* contract! So be aggressive – try very hard to get into the auction.

Hand A above may be able to make six tricks in spades but it is most unlikely to take a single defensive trick in any other suit contract, as one of the opponents is likely to hold a singleton or void spade.

Hand B will take quite a few defensive tricks but that is precisely the reason why you should not open it with a pre-emptive bid!

What's our defensive system?

1. Double is for take-out.
2. Overcalls are natural.
3. A 3NT overcall says: "I want to play in 3NT!"
4. A bid of the opponent's suit shows a strong two-suiter.

Layout 1

♠ K Q 7 4		♠ A J 8 5 3
♥ 10 9 7 6		♥ A J 4
♦ A K 8 4 2		♦ 7
♣ Void		♣ 9 8 4 2

N E
W S

Auction (i)

West	East
1♦	1♠
3♠	4♣
End	

Layout 2

♠ K Q 7 6		♠ A 9 4 3 2
♥ Q 9 7 4		♥ K 2
♦ A J 10 3		♦ K 8 7
♣ 3		♣ J 6 5

N E
W S

Auction (ii)

West	East
1♥	1♠
3♠	4♣
End	

Notice the lack of clubs and how you make game on fewer values because of the shortage. In auction (i) West might have jumped straight to game or made a 4♣ splinter bid but, however you bid it, you reach a comfortable game contract on just 22 points. In auction (ii) once again proper evaluation of his shortage allows West to reach an excellent game with just 23 points.

As I am sure you have guessed, rather than being able to bid the hands slowly and have an accurate auction, I am afraid you will not have it so easy because South throws a spanner in the works by opening 3♣. So, let's look again; the vulnerability is Love All:

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BETTER BIDDING continued from page 9

Layout 1 (repeated)

♠ K Q 7 4		♠ A J 8 5 3
♥ 10 9 7 6		♥ A J 4
♦ A K 8 4 2		♦ 7
♣ Void		♣ 9 8 4 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

Auction 1

West	North	East	South
Dbl	Pass	4♠	3♣ End

Layout 2 (repeated)

♠ K Q 7 6		♠ A 9 4 3 2
♥ Q 9 7 4		♥ K 2
♦ A J 10 3		♦ K 8 7
♣ 3		♣ J 6 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

Auction 2

West	North	East	South
Dbl	Pass	4♠	3♣ End

Both auctions take the same course; the West hand must make a take-out double and East, with good shape in layout 1 and extra values in layout 2, jumps to 4♠.

Notice the strength of the West hands and the need for them to take positive action. The main reason for their ability to act is their shortage in clubs and thus the belief that they are almost guaranteed to have a fit in one of their suits. Because of this, they can add points for their distribution (or count losers). So, rather than just having 12 points, these two hands are much stronger than that. In layout 1 the West hand can add 4 or 5 points for his void, taking his hand to 16-17 points – plenty of strength to enter the auction! Even the West in layout 2

can count 15 points (adding 3 for his singleton).

How can you be so bold? Well, look at the respective final contracts on layouts 1 and 2, and you can see how valuable the shortage in clubs is.

What do you need for a double?

As usual for a take-out double, the most important aspect is to have shortage in the opponent's bid suit, so that you have support for each of the unbid suits. Also, you should have opening values: your hand should be worth 15 points including shortage. And finally, it is also very important to be aggressive!

I like to add on 3 points for a singleton and 5 points for a void, so that I can afford to come in on some relatively weak hands.

Bidding in the last seat

Layout 3 below is a typical one where East-West can bid quite easily and comfortably to game so long as the opponents don't take up bidding space:

Layout 3

♠ Q 4 2		♠ A J 7 6
♥ A J 5 3		♥ K Q 8 2
♦ Q 8 7 6 5		♦ A 4
♣ 4		♣ J 6 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

Auction 3

West	East
3♥	1♥
End	4♥

And on Layout 4 the auction would finish in a simple 1NT contract:

Layout 4

♠ Q 9 4 2		♠ 7 6 5
♥ Q J 4 3		♥ A K 2
♦ A 7 5 3		♦ 6 4 2
♣ 4		♣ A Q 10 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

Auction 4

West	East
End	1NT

Once again, however, the auctions will change somewhat if the opponents make a pre-emptive bid. This time it is North who opens 3♣.

It is important to remember there is likely to be only one person who is very short in the bid suit and thus the onus is on that player to try hard to make a call. If the player with the stronger hand holds a more balanced distribution, he will not be able to bid; both Easts in layouts 3 and 4 would not be able to call over North's 3♣ opening. In layout 3 East does have a strong hand but, if he doubles, the most likely response would be 3♦; then what would he do? It is very dangerous to start an auction inaccurately at the four-level! In layout 4 East would like to double for penalties, but his partner will not pass! You cannot change your system mid-deal just to suit your hand. So the bidding would start:

West	North	East	South
?	3♣	Pass	Pass

And it would be up to the two Wests to decide what to do.

Learning how to bid in the last seat when your opponents have bid weakly is very important. There are two main factors to bear in mind: (a) where are all the points? and (b) if you are short in the opponent's suit, then your partner is unlikely to be short too, and will therefore find it difficult to call with as many as 16 or 17 points.

Basically the chances are that your partner has a reasonable hand and it is for this reason that when you are last to bid (i.e. when your pass would end the bidding) after a weak auction, you should "borrow" a king from your partner's hand and then see if you are worth a bid. Yes, I mean it: you are trying to help your partner enter the auction by bidding for him and hence the need to borrow 3 points.

Let's evaluate the two West hands in layouts 3 and 4:

West 3	9 points + 3 for his singleton + 3 for last bidder = 15
West 4	9 points + 3 for his singleton + 3 for last bidder = 15

Both hands reach 15 points and with their excellent shape both Wests should certainly make a double.

The complete auctions would be:

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BETTER BIDDING continued from page 11

Layout 3 (repeated)

♠ Q 4 2		♠ A J 7 6
♥ A J 5 3		♥ K Q 8 2
♦ Q 8 7 6 5		♦ A 4
♣ 4		♣ J 6 3

N
W S E

West	North	East	South
	3♣	Pass	Pass
Dbl	Pass	4♣ ¹	Pass
4♥	End		

¹Pick a major

Layout 4 (repeated)

♠ Q 9 4 2		♠ 7 6 5
♥ Q J 4 3		♥ A K 2
♦ A 7 5 3		♦ 6 4 2
♣ 4		♣ A Q 10 5

N
W S E

West	North	East	South
	3♣	Pass	Pass
Dbl	End		

The auction for layout 4 is a very important one, for it demonstrates the flexibility of your system.

Since you are playing a take-out double, you probably assumed that you could never penalise your opponents, but with aggressive doubling from the player who is short in the opponent's suit you can often achieve the best of both worlds. On layout 4 West's double is asking his partner to bid his best suit, but East is confident that 3♣ doubled will gain the best result for his side, so he passes. East will take at least three trump tricks to go with three outside tricks; two off is worth 300 points – a lot better than a paltry 1NT contract!

Helping partner penalise the oppo-

nents is a very good reason for trying extra hard to make a bid when last to call; another thing to bear in mind is that you do not necessarily have to make the contract you have reached to obtain a good score.

Consider the following deal:

Dealer: North. Love All.

♠ 4 2		♠ Q J 7 6
♥ A Q J 10 8 5 3		♥ K 9 7
♦ 5 4		♦ 10 9 7
♣ J 6		♣ K Q 2

N
W S E

♠ K 10 8 5		♠ A 9 3
♥ 6		♥ 4 2
♦ Q J 3 2		♦ A K 8 6
♣ A 8 5 4		♣ 10 9 7 3

West	North	East	South
	3♥	Pass	Pass
Dbl	Pass	3♠	End

If West chooses to pass over 3♥, then North-South will score +140, making nine easy trick: six hearts, the ace and king of diamonds, and the ace of spades. However, we are made of sterner stuff and we make a take-out double: borrowing a king from our partner and taking our singleton into account we have plenty of strength (16 points). East responds 3♠ and that finishes the auction.

Unfortunately, South leads the ace and king of diamonds, and can then give his partner a diamond ruff; add to these tricks the ace of hearts and ace of spades, and the result is that 3♠ goes one off. However, that costs just 50 points so

although your contract failed you made a handsome profit: you are 90 points better off than conceding -140.

Overcalls

Once again, the emphasis is on aggression. It is important to bear in mind that your opponent has been bold enough to bid at the three-level with fewer than 10 points, so you should not be too worried about making aggressive overcalls.

Generally when you are thinking of making a call over a pre-empt you should assume that your partner has about 8 points; bearing this in mind you should then contemplate your bid.

What do you need for an overcall?

At the three level, an opening hand with a six-card suit fits the bill; at the four level it is more difficult to judge, but remember to try to keep aggression in mind: once again, even if you go down you might get a reasonable score.

For example:

Layout 5

♠ J 5 4		♠ A 3
♥ A Q J 6 5 4		♥ K 9 2
♦ 7		♦ 8 6 5
♣ A 9 4		♣ K Q 10 7 5

N
W S E

The two hands in layout 5 should be able to bid to game quite comfortably, but South opens 3♦ giving West a problem; with an opening hand and a good six-card suit, he makes a simple 3♥ overcall. Now East, with good heart support and an opening hand of his own, can raise to game.

On Layout 6 your unhelpful opponent, South, opens 3♠:

Layout 6

♠ 7		♠ J 8 4
♥ A K 10 9 5 4		♥ J 2
♦ A K 4 3		♦ 9 6 5
♣ 7 2		♣ A K J 4 3

N
W S E

West is put under severe pressure by South's opening bid; he has to make a decision now and all by himself. He needs a fair amount of help to make game, but two red-suit queens would be enough – yes, that would be 4 perfect points, but considering you are allowed to hope for 8 points in partner's hand it is not unreasonable to go for game.

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Remember that even if 4♥ goes down you might get a better score than letting 3♠ make – if you keep this in mind you might find more courage for four-level overcalls.

The 3NT Overcall

If you think that bidding at the four level by yourself is risky, then overcalling with 3NT is ten times more so – the problem being that if you get it wrong, you tend to go a long way off!

Given that you are allowed to allot your partner about 8 points when deciding whether to bid over a three-level pre-empt, you should be considering a 3NT overcall with 17 or more points and a stopper in the opponent's suit.

You would love to have more than one stopper, but the dealer might not be that kind and so you will often have to risk a 3NT overcall with just one stopper.

Here is a simple example:

Layout 7

♠ A 4 2		♠ 7 6
♥ K Q 3		♥ A 10 4
♦ Q 8		♦ A 9 5 4 2
♣ K Q J 9 4		♣ 10 6 3

N E
W S

South opens 3♠ and West, who has a very good hand, has a problem. If asked to pick the most likely game contract looking at the West hand, which one would you choose?

Only the player who has the stop can bid 3NT, so it is no good hoping that your partner will bid it for you. If you make

a take-out double, your partner is likely to respond 4♦ leaving you high and dry.

Yes, 3NT has its risks! North will lead a spade and although you can hold up your ace, if South holds the ace of clubs along with his long spade suit, you will finish three off. However, you would be unlucky if this did happen; more likely, you will win the second spade and find North with the ace of clubs. Left without a spade he will have to allow you back in to take your nine tricks.

Pre-emptive opening bids make you guess and all you can do is try to get to the most likely contract – you have to accept that things will occasionally go wrong.

Strong two-suiters

If you want to show a very strong two-suiter, then you bid the opponent's suit:

Hand C

♠ A K 9 6 5
 ♥ A K 8 6 4
 ♦ A 2
 ♣ 3

This hand is ideally suited to a bid of the opponent's suit; over a 3♦ opening bid you would call 4♦, aiming for a game contract in either major.

Watch this space!

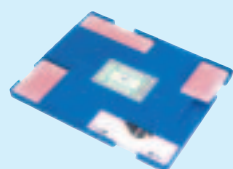
In the next issue we shall consider how to respond to the defensive bidding discussed in this article. ■



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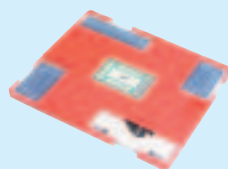
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