

October 3, 2009 ...Article 20... After the Opponents Open.

The current series is discussing bidding **After the Opponents Open**. We have previously defined our terms¹ and established a foundation for Intruding and Advancing with the TOX² and one level overcalls. We have also briefly discussed the popular LAW of Total Tricks³ for estimating the level to which to compete. While broadly accepted and used, the LAW is not a law and we discussed a better approach presented by Mike Lawrence and Anders Wirgren in their book, "I Fought the LAW". Now we will finish off this year's columns with a discussion of 2 level overcalls of 1 level suit openers. There are many other aspects of bidding after the opponents open and if there is interest we may pick up again next summer emphasizing special situations and conventions.

Two Level Overcalls of One of a Suit

When you must raise the level to overcall opener's suit you need a better suit and a better hand than when you can overcall at the one level. Bidding at the two level is more dangerous and is more apt to lead to a doubled contract. Specifically you should have opening values with a good 5 card suit and at least 2 QT⁴s although with a good 6-card suit the hand may be a little weaker; more like a good weak 2 bid. No more 4-card suits, and no more really weak hands or suits. However longer suits with defensive tricks can be overcalled at the two level with weaker hands; e.g. I would overcall a 1♠ opener with 2♥ holding xxx, AT9xxxx, Ax, x. Next year we may discuss weak (preemptive) jump overcalls which indicate a long suit without defense.

Advancing the Two Level Overcall of One of a Suit

When advancing a two level overcall you know partner has values, but you have fewer options because of the level. Your primary bid will be a raise of some kind; introducing a new suit or bidding NT seldom occurs. Since a NT bid will be at the 2 level it requires at least 10 HCP and stoppers. Introducing a new suit means you really have something to say and it seldom occurs except when responder passes. As when advancing a 1 level Overcall a new suit is non-forcing constructive and generally denies 3-card support for partner's suit.

So let's look at raises. We are crowded because we no longer have a raise to the two level. In general a simple raise will be competitive and a QB will be encouraging with a LROB⁵ but can no longer be reserved for balanced raises. A raise to the 4

¹ The opponent who opens the auction is the Opener and his partner is the Responder. The first of your pair to bid is the Intruder and his partner is the Advancer.

² TOX = Take out double...

³ The LAW of total tricks is sometimes abbreviated LOTT and was first published in English in 1969.

⁴ QTs = Quick Tricks... e.g. A or KQ,

⁵ LROB Limit Raise or Better.

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level will be to play or preemptive or both. As after a 1 level overcall Advancer's raises will depend on the action of Responder.

In the order of strength, Responders actions are: pass, raise, negative double, 2NT, and two of a new suit. We will discuss them in this order and how they affect Advancers bids options.

After a pass by responder, a simple raise is encouraging and the QB is forcing and strongly encouraging as a raise. We have no way to show a distributional LR versus a balanced limit raise and will QB with either. A jump raise, either in a major or a minor, is to play and tends to be preemptive with distribution.

While we have not discussed a Responsive Double it is necessary to at least introduce the basic responsive double here. While there are other agreements possible to extend the Responsive Double, the basic case is after the opponents open, Intruder overcalls or makes a TOX, and responder raises. In these cases it is highly unlikely you will ever want to make a penalty double so the double is RESPONSIVE. It shows you have real values to bid but do not have a convenient bid. Typically you will either have a fit for Intruder and a major to bid, or a limit raise for Intruder. You do have values so partner may pass in the rare case he holds good trump over opener.

Now back to raises of the two level Overcall. After a raise by Responder you will raise partner with any excuse especially with a high honor in partner's suit. You may be interested in the lead, or simply trying to push the opponents. It is ironic that you will bid with hands you may have passed after a one level overcall and raise here, after a 2 level overcall and a raise by Responder. You no longer have a QB available as a limit raise since you will be past 3 of your suit but you do have a responsive double assuming you have agreed to play the double as responsive.

What if responder makes a negative double? Again Advancer is eager to bid with a raise. You do not want to leave the opponents an unobstructed auction. It is not risk free, but you really want to crowd the opponents' auction. Intruder knows you cannot have much. You can redouble with good values and no fit but this will occur very seldom (in fact I personally use transfers over negative doubles and use the XX to transfer into the next suit... A subject for another day).

Finally when responder bids a new suit or 2NT it is clear this is the opponents' hand. In either case the only bids you will have are preempts or maybe lead direction in partners suit. You should only bid based on distribution (with a low

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short suit total). Your safest course is to never bid in this situation... so be careful!
The opponents know what they have in terms of strength and fits.

I hope you have enjoyed and gotten something out of these columns. Have a nice winter and do not hesitate to comment or question by sending email to Bobs.Bridge@att.net.