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This Week in Bridge

(233) Jump Overcalls at the 2-Level

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Level: 1

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General

When the opponents open the bidding with 1♣, 1♦, or 1♥ then we can make simple overcalls at the 1-level. Instead of making a simple overcall at the 1-level, we also have the option of jumping to the 2-level in a new suit to show a long suit and less than opening values. This jump overcall is a preemptive bid that is effective because it describes most of our hand to partner and takes away the opponents' valuable bidding space all in one call.

When the opponents have opened the bidding in front of us and we have minimum values (5-10 HCP), the hand is more likely to belong to the opponents than to us. We may try to communicate with partner to win the auction, but more often our goal is to make life difficult on the opponents in their bidding. Jump overcalls are effective tools for preempting the bidding and attacking the opponents. Let's see how to use these tools.

2-Level Jump Overcalls

A jump overcall at the 2-level is one of the following bidding sequences:

1♣	2♦ or 2♥ or 2♠
1♦	2♥ or 2♠
1♥	2♠

These jumps bids show a hand similar to a 2-level preemptive opening bid. This is approximately 5-10 HCP and a decent 6-card suit. But just as preempts can vary dramatically based on a lot of factors (position, vulnerability, suit quality, shape of hand, tactical choices), so can these 2-level preemptive jump overcalls.

Deciding to make a 2-level preemptive jump overcall has some factors in common with making 2-level preemptive opening bids and some factors in common with simple overcalls. We generally like to have either a good suit or some other redeeming factor to our hand when entering the auction at this level.



Example 1

♠ KQT843
♥ 5
♦ K43
♣ 987

After a 1♣ opening bid on our right (at any vulnerability) we should bid 2♠ with this hand. By jumping to 2♠ we take away much of the opponents' bidding space and give them less room to communicate and make an educated decision.

Example 2

♠ 5
♥ J86432
♦ A43
♣ 987

After a 1♣ opening bid on our right we should not bid 2♥ with this hand. Though we have 5 HCP and a 6-card ♥ suit, in most situations there is too much risk in jumping into the bidding. It is better to pass with this hand.

To Make a Jump Overcall or a Simple Overcall

With the hand in the first example we have the option of making either a simple overcall of 1♠ or a jump overcall of 2♠. There are many times when this is the case. As a general rule (few things in bridge are always true, but this is a guideline) it is better to make jump overcall than a simple overcall with these types of hands.

Let's compare these two bidding options.

1-Level Simple Overcall

5+card suit with wide ranging quality
7-18 HCP

2-Level Jump Overcall

Decent 6-card suit
5-10 HCP (usually)

We can see that the 2-level jump overcall is a much better description of our hand. It shows more specific HCP values and more information about both the length and strength of our suit. Generally speaking, we like to make bids that are more narrowly defined (like opening 1NT) and a 2-level jump overcall is much more specific than a simple 1-level overcall.

Now this 2-level action does have more risk involved because we are bidding to a higher level, but it also has more reward. The reward is taking away the opponents' bidding space and making their life more difficult. We choose to make the bid as often as we can afford.



Borderline Decisions and Tactical Actions

We often face difficult decisions when we hold borderline hands. Our decision on whether to make a preemptive jump overcall is a mix of considerations that we make for a simple overcall and a 2-level preemptive opening bid.

Some of the factors we consider when faced with a difficult bidding decision:

- *Suit Quality* – not just the top honors of the suit, but the body cards.
- *Suit Length* – 5-card, 6-card, or even a 7-card suits are possible.
- *Shape of Hand* – 6332 is the worst shape, 6331 or 6-4 hands have better playing strength.
- *Location of Honors* – A preemptive bid is generally an offensively-oriented hand, not a defensively-oriented one. Thus, we want to have most of our honors located in our long suits; specifically honors in the opponent's suit are generally a negative.
- *Vulnerability* – The 4 types of vulnerability also affect how much we are willing to stretch to enter the auction.
- *Position* – When we are in the second seat, our partner is not a passed hand and there is still a chance that our side has most of the strength. But when partner is a passed hand and the opponents are opening in the 2nd or 3rd seat, then if we have 5-10 HCP we know that the hand belongs to the opponents. In this case we may make more tactical bidding decisions and we may make a weak jump overcall on more wide-ranging values and distributions.
- *Which Suit We Hold* – Just like with simple overcalls and preemptive opening bids, which suit we hold is also a part of our decision making process. The ♠ suit is more destructive than the ♥ suit which is more destructive than the ♦ suit. Thus, as part of our risk vs. reward calculation we are willing to take risk with the ♠ suit and less with the ♦ suit.

Example 3

♠ KQT93

♥ 5

♦ 872

♣ 8432

At favorable vulnerability, if our partner passes and our RHO opens the bidding with 1♣, then with only 5 HCP we know the opponents are likely to make a game (or even a slam). Normally with this hand we would pass, but in this situation, a tactical bid of 2♠ might make the opponents' life more difficult and poses little risk of giving us a bad board.



Conclusion

A jump overcall at the 2-level has many of the effects of a 2-level preemptive opening bid and it takes away the opponents' bidding space. Specifically, this bid puts pressure on Responder to start their bidding a level higher than they were expecting. When you make a 2-level jump overcall, you are taking a bit more risk than when you open the bidding at the 2-level because one of the opponents has already announced they have an opening hand, but you are also more likely to be taking away the opponents' bidding space than to be preempting partner. The balance between risk and reward in these auctions is a bit of an art and is something that time and experience (getting a few disastrous results) will help you learn to judge. Add these bids to your repertoire and use them to attack the opponents!