



# Adventures in Bridge

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## *This Week in Bridge*

### **(412) Higher Level Preemptive Openings**

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Level: 3 of 10 (1 of 6)

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#### **General**

When we are dealt a hand with a very long suit and not many HCP then we often want to attack the opponents by using a preemptive opening bid. With a good 6-card suit we usually preempt at the 2-level. But with a longer suit, we can preempt even higher – at the 3-level, 4-level, or even the 5-level. When we make a judgement call about a higher-level preempt, we use many of the same factors as we did when we developed our judgment for 2-level preemptive openings. Let's look at these situations in more detail.

#### **Judgement - Factors to Consider**

We use higher-level preempts with similar goals as our 2-level preempts. We mostly use these bids to attack the opponents' bidding space and force them to make difficult decisions, which hopefully they get wrong. These 3+level preempts are primarily a destructive bidding tool.

#### **Vulnerability and Position**

When determining our level of aggression, we need to take into consideration both the vulnerability (ours and the opponents' – 4 types) as well as the position that we are sitting in. This is like the considerations we make when we are thinking of making a 2-level preempt.

#### **Opponents – Whom Are You Playing Against?**

Another thing to consider in deciding about a preempt is whom we are playing against. When we are playing against players that we are weaker than, then it pays to "mix things up." In this case, we should try to put more pressure on them and take more risk by making "frisky" preempts. If we are up against players who are weaker than us, then we can monitor our risk and be more conservative.

#### **Scoring – IMPs vs Matchpoints**

Remember when we play a team game (IMP scoring) we can lose the entire match in one hand if we go down some huge number like -1700. We need to be a bit more careful about preempting at high levels at IMPs vs. Matchpoints. Also, when we preempt at a high level, we are at more of a risk of getting doubled. Higher-level doubles, even ones intended as takeout, are more likely to be converted to penalty.



## Tactics -- Opening 4-Major or 5-minor

When it comes to making a preemptive opening, we must be careful not to open with too many HCP (or playing strength) because we may miss a game when partner has a decent hand and passes. But if we open the bidding with 4-Major or 5-minor we cannot miss a game. So, we can make these preemptive openings a little heavier than we would below game. The only risk of preempting heavy is that we miss a slam if we catch partner with a great hand. For example, opening the bidding 4-Major with a 7-8 card Major suit and 11-12 HCP is reasonable from time to time. Sometimes when we open at the game level in the 3<sup>rd</sup> seat, we may preempt even heavier. When partner is a passed hand, we can open at the game level with very little chance of missing a slam, even with up to 14-15 HCP.

## Suit – “What Does a Good Preempt Suit Look Like?”

A good suit is defined in a similar way as it was when we were considering preempting at the 2-level. We want to think about the way our suit is likely to play opposite shortness. For a 6-card suit this means having a good core to the suit, J-T-9. For an even longer suit, the Ace and King become more important.

### *Example 1*

AK97653

A suit like this will have very few losers, even when partner only has a singleton in our suit.

Those Aces and Kings are more important in long suits; if partner has a void, then additionally having the Queen and Jack becomes more important.

## Hand – “Preempt More or Less?”

When we are deciding what to preempt, we want to consider the quality of our suit but we also want to consider the overall quality of our hand. Some factors to consider:

- HCP,
- Location of our honors,
- Suit Quality and spot cards,
- Shape of our hand.

The overall shape of our hand is one of the things that is not considered enough by many bridge players. We all know that 4333 hands are a horrible shape for declaring. But most of us don't consider that 5332, 6322, and 7222 hands are also “horribly balanced hands”. These hands do not take as many tricks as their cousins. Compare the following:

- 6332 vs. 6331 vs. 6421
- 7222 vs. 7321 vs. 7420

*Note: These distributions are not suit specific (6332 does not have to be 3-card ♥.)*



The shapelier hands in this list will often take at least one trick more than the more balanced ones. When we are dealt a *good suit* with one of these shapelier distributions, we should consider “preempting one level more.” That is,

- Open a 3-level preempt with 6-4 hands,
- Open a 4-level preempt with 7-4 hands,
- Open a 5-level preempt with 8-4 hands.

In addition to this, when we have 7222 shape we should often “preempt one less.” 7222 is one of the worst shapes in all of bridge (almost everyone overbids with these hands.) It is often right to open at the 2-level, not at the 3-level, with this distribution.

### **The ♣ Suit**

Since we do not have a 2-level preempt available in ♣, a 3♣ opening bid has to me a much more flexible preempt. We may make this opening bid with a 6-card or 7-card suit quite often. We also may choose to open 3♣ with an 8-card suit because we are attempting to not go past 3NT (Gambling 3NT opening bid is another example of a preempt trying to keep the auction from going past 3NT).

### **Conclusion**

When we have a hand with not enough HCP to open the bidding at the 1-level, but even more distribution than we would use to preempt at the 2-level, then we open at the 3-level or higher. These high-level preemptive openings do a tremendous amount of damage to the opponents by taking away most of their valuable bidding space. Work on developing your judgement on how to use them and attack the opponents!