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It's the thing to do

Sometimes the opponents butt in to your fancy auction, usually for lead-directional purposes or perhaps to sacrifice. When they stick in their bid or double, it can throw a monkey-wrench into your plan, and you may also be faced with having to diagnose a problem with little or no bidding space to do it. A very cool thing to do, however, is to take advantage of something the opponents are trying to do to you. Let's look at a couple of interference situations and how to combat them successfully.

As you know, the Jacoby 2NT response to a one-of-a-major opening shows an opening bid and four-card support. When opener bids a new suit at the three level, it shows a singleton. (Nowadays, most experts play a much more complicated version of Jacoby, usually showing ranges at the three level, and then having the responder next ask for opener's shape.) It's great when your side gets to do that, but what happens when those pesky opponents stick in a three-level overcall? That can screw you up. Instead of throwing your hands in the air and shaking your head, get prepared!

Here's the proposal: The first order of business is to figure out if your side has the opponent's suit stopped with

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a first- or second-round control (an ace, king, singleton or void). Because you are already committed to game, the only question becomes whether or not you might have a slam. If neither partner can control their suit, no slam is biddable. Therefore, opener passes with all hands that have no control of the enemy suit. That is the place to start. Any other bid by opener, including a jump to four of the agreed major, shows some control in their suit. If opener passes, responder signs off in game if he, too, has no control of the enemy suit.

A double by opener specifically shows a singleton in the enemy suit. If opener does have first- or second-round control of the enemy suit, he can cuebid a new suit, which would show a control in the new suit and a control in the enemy suit. If opener passes with no control, responder's new suit bids would also show a control in the suit bid and a control in the enemy suit.

Voila! Although you don't get to use your usual fancy system (Jacoby 2NT, in this case), you turn the tables on the opponents by using a different one.

An example hand:

♠ A Q 10 7 3 2 ♥ Q 2 ♦ K 7 ♣ Q 8 2.

You open 1♠. Your partner bids Jacoby 2NT. Right-hand opponent interferes with 3♦. You now bid 4♠. Very informative: Partner will know you have either first- or second-round control of diamonds with an honor, as you would have doubled with a singleton. Partner also knows you are denying any other outside controls, as you would have cuebid a new suit. If

the opponent overcalled in hearts not diamonds, you would pass, showing no first- or second-round control of hearts, and go from there.

Here's one other similar thing to do for those of you who use the suit over your agreed suit for Roman Key Card Blackwood. (For example, in a game-forcing auction where clubs have been agreed, some experienced pairs use 4♦ as RKCB instead of 4NT. This treatment is variously called "minorwood," "kickback," "one-over," to name a few.) When an opponent doubles your RKCB bid (4♠ with hearts agreed, 4♥ with diamonds agreed or 4♦ with clubs agreed), if you answer with your normal response you are also showing a first- or second-round control of that suit. If you pass, it simply says you have no control of the suit used as key card. Responder signs off in game if he, too, has no control of that suit. A redouble by responder, however, says, "I have control of that suit, please go ahead and make your normal key card response."

Try using these agreements in your best partnership. It's the thing to do! □

"Dear Billy" is back! Beginning in the September issue, Billy Miller returns to his journalistic roots as "Dear Billy," his original column with its popular question-and-answer format, replacing "The Coolest Gizmos and Gadgets." The column will be geared to players of all levels, with a special emphasis on intermediate players.

Get those questions ready! Miller may be contacted at dearbilly@aol.com.