

Learning Points – Start with an Overcall Bid a Slam

March 7, 2008

by Mike Purcell; edited by Steve Moese

E Deals

♠ -

←Mike

Both Vul

♥ QJ43

♦ AK972

♣ AQJ10

March 6, 2008 Thursday Evening Open Pairs Ms. Pat Newman,
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| | | |
|------------|--------|---------|
| ♠ 10986532 | N | ♠ AKJ7 |
| ♥ 762 | W 26 E | ♥ 85 |
| ♦ 106 | S | ♦ J3 |
| ♣ 9 | | ♣ K7532 |

Disciplined overcalls and cue bidding agreements can reach slam even when opponents open and respond.

The Bidding

Everything that happened on this hand depended on the left side of our convention card – competitive bidding agreements, and cue bidding agreements. The auction would have been the same regardless of constructive bidding methods (Standard, 2/1, Precision, Acol, etc.)

Steve →

♠ Q4

♥ AK109

♦ Q854

♣ 864

DealMasterPro:

EW: 4♠N

3♠S 6♦ 6♥

NS: 2♠

| East | South | West | North |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| 1♣ | 1♥ | 1♠ | 2♠ |
| Pass | 3♥ | Pass | 4♣ |
| Pass | 4♥ | Pass | 4♠ |
| Pass | 5♣ | Pass | 6♥ |

West leads ♣9

East: 1♣, Standard opening bid with 12 HCP.

Steve: With 11 HCP and strong hearts, an overcall seems right. The good thing is partner expects a 1 level overcall in a major might be 4 cards. If 4, he expects a sound suit (HHxx or better), especially on a minimum hand (8-12 HCP).

West: With 7 spades and 0 HCP, a weak jump preempt to 2♠ or 3♠ is perfect here to quickly communicate that spades is the right place and game is not viable while closing off bidding room to opponents. If you do not play weak jump preempts, as implied in this auction, then 1♠ will have to do.

Mike: Wow, I have a great hand for partner. We have 9, worst case 8 hearts and my hand is only missing ♥AK and ♣K. If partner has 2 of these cards with either the ♦Q or some ♦xx we stand to make 6♥. Even with ♦xxx, partner might be able to dump a diamond on my clubs, ruff a diamond and still setup the suit. I will cue 2♠ and see what Steve says.

East: What does 2♠ mean? (I wanted to raise my partner's spades, but not to the 3 level.)

Steve: Partner has two cue bids available on this auction. We play the higher strain is stronger. 2♠ is a game force, while 2♣ would be an invitation. My 3♥ bid is easy – I have a minimum range and length overcall. Importantly I deny the ability to cue bid an ace between 2♠ and 3♥.

Mike: 3♥ minimum bid by Steve is not surprising, in fact it is encouraging because chances Steve has a solid suit to ♥AK are better now. I will bid 4♣ to see if I can induce Steve to bid 5♣ with the ♣K.

Steve: Partner really likes his hand. I don't see any Kings to cue bid. So 4♥ it is.

Mike: 4♥ is just not good enough. Steve really should have ♥AK, but there is a small chance he has just the ♥A and the ♠A. Perhaps I am being paranoid, but I will bid 4♠ and see if I can get Steve to bid 4NT or show me something else that is useful.

Steve: Running out of bids here, but if partner's hand is this good perhaps cueing my ♦Q will help. I can do that now because my 4♥ bid denied any kings. With worse hearts I bid 5♥.

Mike: OK, 5♦ is better than a 5♥ bid, looks like Steve has ♦xx or ♦Q. I will trust that Steve has ♥AK of hearts as promised in this auction and I will bid 6♥.

The Play

Our cue bidding agreements worked really well here, and both our inferences were spot on. Bravo Partner!

The ♣ lead is likely a singleton. West had bid 1♠. Besides East has to have the ♣K for an opening bid. Win the lead with the ♣A and draw trumps in 3 rounds. Then lead ♣s, promoting the long ♣ for a needed spade discard.

A ♠ lead by West is no better – Declarer ruffs 2 spades on the board then overtakes the dummy's 2nd ♠ to draw trump. The ♣ finesse loses, but the final ♥ in declarer's hand is the sentinel stopping any EW tricks in their tracks.

Post Mortem

In this auction, opponents did not weak jump shift, but what if they did? Given North's hand, they can still cue bid spades to the 3 or 4 level. For reasons stated either, North still has good recourse to bid 6♥ without additional information from South as there are just too many combinations that make 6♥ if partner has a good suit (♥AKxx or better).

It is much harder to reach 6♥ if South does not get in the bidding. If South passes because they do not have 5♥ then North can takeout double 1♠, 2♠ or 3♠ by West. However, if South makes a simple ♥ bid, North will be tempted to leave it there.

More aggressive North players can bid 4NT for a keycard auction after South bids ♥. This is risky but in this case will allow you to reach the right contract.

If the auction goes 1♣-P-3♠-X-4♠, South players that bid 5♥ freely will get North to correct to 6♥. For the rare 1♣-P-3♠-X-5♠ auction, it will be awful tough to reach slam.

From the East-West perspective, a 6♠ sacrifice is also tempting. 8 tricks are available for down 4 or 1100 versus 1430 for 6H. Knowing to do this depending on East knowing West has no values and lots of ♠. One more reason to play weak jump preempts.