

Learning Points – When a Weak Jump Overcall is a Strong Action

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Saturday Afternoon October 25, 2008. Grand National Pairs Flight B Qualifiers.

S Deals

♠ 1063

Both Vul

♥ QJ76

♦ 976

Mike

♣ 984

Steve

♠ A9874

N

♠ J52

♥ A8

W 7 E

♥ 3

♦ K54

S

♦ AQ10832

♣ K72

♣ AQ10

♠ KQ

Deep Finesse:

♥ K109542

EW: 6♦, 5♠,

♦ J

5N, 4♣

♣ J653

NS: 1♥

South	West	North	East
2♥	2♠	Pass	3♥ ¹
Pass	3N ²	Pass	4♣ ³
Pass	4♥ ⁴	Pass	4N
Pass	5♥ ⁵	Pass	5♠
	Passed Out		

North leads ♥Q

1 = Cue bid game invite or better

2 = I have a stopper in Hearts.

3 = 1st round control

4 = 1st round control

5 = 2 Key cards, no ♠Q

Here's a great example how taking just one level of bidding away make it harder to find the optimum contract. East West should have reached slam in ♦ but South got in the way just enough.

The Bidding

We enjoy getting in the way of opponents almost as much as we hate when opponents get in our way and succeed. South's opening bid is a standard if chunky weak two. West is faced with taking action immediately. North's pass is typical but many would raise sharply to 3 or 4♥ stuffing the auction. Even though the Law of Total Tricks suggests bidding to the level of our trump holding (this case 4 hearts). Note that the 3433 shape counterbalances the value of 4 good hearts. The lack of ruffing values and lack of winners outside trumps make North's a very poor hand. At best a raise to 3 could be a worthwhile nuisance, but a raise to 4 courts a bad result. We agree with North's pass.

East now sees great potential. The bidding so far suggests no wasted values. Partner usually has a good suit for the overcall, and if partner has the two missing minor suit Kings then slam is a possibility. While diamonds are a possible strain, spades are work more at match points.

We believe in supporting with support – immediate support is good since the opponents have already taken away one level of bidding. East's support cue bid suggests at least 3 card support and an invitational hand. One bidding agreement we use is that the overcaller will bid 3NT on hands holding a stopper where 3-card support might make 3 NT a better strain choice. East's cuebid followed naturally, confirming slam interest and 1st round control in clubs. West's heart cue bid confirmed the Ace. RKC showed we were missing 2 key cards. While a finesse for the trump Queen might seem attractive, in pairs we want a 60% chance of success at slam before we bid it. East decided that discretion was more attractive than lunacy.

The Play

The combined 27 HCP hands matched very well. Ruffing a heart in dummy was necessary to avoid any losers in that suit. Missing the ♠KQ10 meant that 11 tricks were the most we'd make. Plus 650 for 4♣ making 5 was worth 4 match points out of 8 (50%).

Post Mortem

Let's set aside any interest in making a takeout double with West's hand - the 5th ♠ is too valuable to hide in that way even in the rare case that this makes bidding a game or better in partner's strain easier. East will have a hard time reading West for 5♠ after a takeout double. If West doubles then rebids ♠, that shows a hand a full Ace stronger. All considered, the overcall is best.

As it turns out, an overly cautious East guaranteed a plus score, but could have done better with a different response to partner's overcall. Holding a 6-card minor suit opposite an overcall and an opening hand is sufficient reason to bid naturally.

South	West	North	East
2♥	2♠	Pass	3♦
Pass	3♥ ¹	Pass	3♠ ²
Pass	3N ³	Pass	4♣ ⁴
Pass	4♦	Pass	4N
Pass	5♥ ⁵	Pass	6♦

Passed Out

South leads ♠K

1 = Cue bid support invites game

2 = 3 card spade support.

3 = Bad spades

4 = 1st round control – interest in Diamonds

5 = 2 Key cards and ♦Q

Partner cannot pass the 3♦ call (Note: we assume that if you cue bid to show support, then new suit bids at the 3 level are forcing. If your cue bid shows undefined game interest, then a new suit response at the 3 level can be non-forcing. We play the former approach).

West can then make a support cue bid, and East can show 3 card spade support at the 3 level. 3NT by West should imply weak spades – why else avoid the known 8 card major fit? 4♣ shows interest in diamonds, and 4♦ suggests a diamond piece. The rest is RKC – this time for ♦. Now West makes 6♦ as long as the ♠J stays put on the first 2 spade tricks!

Notice that if North raises ♥ even one level, the bidding becomes much tougher for East/West. This subtle interference will make exploring for slam extremely difficult. East's most likely choices at that point are 4♠ and 4♦.

4♠ shuts out exploration of diamonds. 4♦ might induce partner

to bid 5♦ as the only likely game at that point. Does West then know enough to bid 6♦? That's a tough call.

South	West	North	East
2♥	2♠	3♥	??

If you get in the way routinely, please don't come to our table.....