

Learning Points – Turn a 1-Level Vulnerable Overcall into Gold

by Steve Moese (Mike Purcell ed.)

January 26, 2010

Defense LEVEL: Intermediate

North Deals
EW Vul
MPs

♠ A3
♥ AK105
♦ A
♣ K98762

♠ KQ9876
♥ 87
♦ 965
♣ 105

N
W 25 E
S

♠ J
♥ J9642
♦ KQ72
♣ QJ3

♠ 10542
♥ Q3
♦ J10843
♣ A4

NS: 4N, 5♣

Tuesday Evening January 26, 2010, Cincinnati Bridge Association
Bridge Center, 2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513)
631-8070 .

Many overcall a strong ♣ at the drop of a hat. The intent is to wreck communication and stop opponents from exploring close games. Here a vulnerable 1-level overcall leads to an unexpected result.

The Bidding

Playing Precision, North's hand is too big for all the other opening bids, so North must open a strong forcing, artificial 1♣. East could not resist temptation to show a 5 card ♥ suit and interfere, even if only at the 1-level. South doubles to show 5-7 HCP any shape, not necessarily enough for game, but not broke. This is not a penalty double, but a range-finding double. West passes intending to compete later. North decides with favorable vulnerability, 23- 25 HCP between the hands and substantial values in ♥s, trying for 8 defensive tricks might yield a good result. North's pass converts South's double to penalty. East ponders whether to redouble, but fears a ♠ rescue which might be much worse (imagine a 4-1 fit...).

North East South West
1♣¹ 1♥ Dbl² Pass

All Pass

South leads ♦J

1=16+ HCP Any shape (Precision)

2=5-7 HCP any shape

The Play

South's lead is standard. In with the singleton ♦A, North returns the ♣2 at trick 2, looking for an entry to partner's hand and sending a signal to lead back a ♦ (the ♣2 is a LOW card asking partner to return the lower ranking suit). Partner wins the ♣A and leads back the ♦3 suggesting a ♣ return by North! North ruffs with the ♥5 and cashes the ♣K to which all follow. Partner's signal means he must have a ♥ bigger than dummy's ♥87, so North continues with the ♣9 (suit preference for ♠s). Ruffing with the ♥Q, South returns one more ♦, and North can cash out. ♦A, ♣AK, 2♦ ruffs, ♥AKQ count to 8 tricks. Down 2 doubled means +500 for North/South and 8 of 8 Match Points.

NS Pair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
MPs	6.5	6.5	5	0	1.5		4	1.5	3			8
Score	460	460	400	-100	-50		150	-50	130			500

Post Mortem

Vulnerability impacts choices. Here North had disproportionate HCP in ♥s. Knowing NS owned 23-25 HCP made penalizing a vulnerable EW attractive. NS should be able to engineer 7-8 tricks on strength alone. If North/South were vulnerable, the decision is more difficult. We might risk a game bonus.

The vulnerable overcall is not light on HCP but the suit is terribly weak. With less than an opening bid, try to have 2 of 3 top honors in your overcall suit. With weaker suits, promise an opening hand equivalent. You might avoid disasters.

Learning Points

1. Even low level overcalls can yield opportunities for defense if you are alert to the possibilities.
2. Use suit preference signals when you suspect either partner is ruffing. Stay alert!
3. When partner ruffs with a high honor, don't expect the next ruff to beat dummy's holding in trumps.
4. Vulnerable overcalls are not free at the 1-level. Have what you say.

Key Words: Suit Preference, vulnerable overcall, converting a range-finding double to penalty, rescue redouble.