

Learning Points – To Overcall or Not, That’s the Question

by Steve Moese (Mike Purcell ed.)

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Declarer Play LEVEL: Intermediate

West Deals
None Vul
MPs

♠ Q9762 Steve
♥ 3
♦ AQ98
♣ KQ7

Tuesday Evening STaC, April 27, 2010, Cincinnati Bridge Association Bridge Center, 2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513) 631-8070 . My partner is Ms. Barbara Levinson.



The Bidding

You’ve drawn the cards from the board and you’re sorting the hand. You find a nice 1♠ opener that your RHO interrupts with an opening bid of 1♥. What do you choose to do? Certainly this hand is worth an opening bid or an overcall.



Should you overcall 1♠? This is the longest suit, and it would be good for partner to know we own some length in the master suit. We are entering a competitive auction. However this suit is very weak – nothing we want partner leading toward.

West North East South
1♥ ???

What else can shape our decision? The 1543 pattern is appealing – North can support all 3 of the

remaining suits. North’s ♠s would play better if partner has 4 or more ♠s with us... A takeout double seems like a reasonable compromise. Lo and behold, two passes follow and the final pass offered with a note of chagrin.

West North East South
1♥ Double All Pass (!!)

The Play

West Deals
None Vul
MPs
1♥^xW

♠ Q9762 Steve
♥ 3
♦ AQ98
♣ KQ7

What to lead? The natural attacking lead of the ♣K seems best. There’s no assurance partner can offer a useful honor in ♠s. Leading a trump in this auction is wrong – partner has length – so a defense to cause declarer to shorten trumps is preferable. A ♦ lead gives up on the ♦AQ tenace prematurely. North leads the ♣K.



Declarer ducks the ♣A and partner signals the ♣10 – we play upside down signals. This is a negative signal for ♠s. Partner does not have the ♠J...North must switch to avoid giving declarer 2 ♣ tricks.



What to switch to? The choice rests in ♥s and ♠s. North chose the ♥3 to get off the possible end play. South won the ♥A, cashed the ♠A and led the ♦7. West ducked, North won the ♦Q and led a highish ♠9 back. South ruffed and returned another ♦. North wins the ♦A and leads the ♠2 for South’s 3rd ruff. A ♣ from South now makes the ♣Q as an eventual winner. The ♠Q scored the 2nd undertrick.

1♥ by West down 2 doubled for +500 was a top board.

NS Pair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
MPs	2	3	4	1	6	6	6			0	8
Score	90	110	180	-100	200	200	200			-300	500

Post Mortem

Note this result would not be possible once North makes a 1♠ overcall. The best North South can do is land in 2♥ – not a likely result after West’s opening bid. 4 of the 9 tables had a similar auction. Sometimes the surprises are good ones.

West Deals
Both Vul
MPs
1♥^xW-2

♠ Q9762
♥ 3
♦ AQ98
♣ KQ7

Steve

♠ KJ10	N	♠ 8543
♥ KQ1054	W 20 E	♥ J
♦ K2	S	♦ 10543
♣ J54		♣ A982

♠ A
♥ A98762
♦ J76
♣ 1063

NS: 2♦, 2♥, 1N

Barbara

Learning Points

1. An overcall on a thin suit might work. If you have a better description of your hand, use it! Remember partner will lead your overcall suit. Do you really want that to happen?
2. Suits like Qxxxx, or Jxxxx often need 4 trumps (or 3 very good ones) from partner to be playable.
3. If you have 5431 shape, consider a takeout double (they bid the 1) unless your 5 card suit is a strong major.
4. When 5431 with both majors, a double is a good way to get partner to choose one.
5. Attacking leads against doubled low level contracts are a must.
6. A trump lead helps only when you eliminate ruffs for declarer. Here partner has known length, dummy must be short in trumps and your trump singleton suggests a forcing defense.
7. Avoid leading from major tenaces when making the opening lead except in circumstances where nothing else makes sense.
8. Signals are critical to avoid losing tricks you should not lose. Use them, read them, and act on them!

Key Words: Overcall or Take-out Double, Defensive Carding Signals