

♠♥♦♣ Learning Points – Competitive Bidding Situations

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Bidding Level: Basic

Tuesday Night Lecture Series

Background

- Competitive bidding is considered the most difficult kind of auction among the experts.
- About 50% of all hands involve competitive bidding. We define 2 competitive bidding situations: a) We open the bidding and they intrude, or b) They open the bidding and we intrude. *They are NOT the same.*
- We compete to get a better result – so scoring matters – MPs are different than IMPs. In pairs the score is based on the number of pairs we beat or tie. Predicting the field is very difficult. In IMPs, the score is based on a payoff table that influences what odds we need for risky actions.
- Getting the best score means choosing the best strain and level for our side accurately. **Finding our best fit is paramount.** In addition we want to obstruct information exchange between our opponents. All is fair in war and Bridge – leave Love out of it...
- Competitive bidding has 3 objectives. If you are not meeting at least 1 of them, do not bid. (Notice that telling partner about our HCP is NOT an objective).

Learning plan:

- Hand Evaluation: HCP & shape → tricks
- Estimate tricks available for both sides.
- Estimate our tricks.
- Competitive bidding challenge: What's 10 HCP worth?
- The 2 Competitive Auctions.**
- Best Competitive bidding practices.
- Key Bidding tools.

We improve our chances at a higher score by using competitive bidding to:

- Find our fit (strain and level)
- Interfere with opponents' constructive bidding – remove bidding space.
- Suggest a defense

Obstruction

When we bid with no opposition, we have the benefit of all our bidding system, language and conventions. When opponents intrude with a simple overcall (not to be confused with a preempt, a two-suit bid, a takeout double or a NT overcall) several things happen:

- They announce honor cards, and typically a 5 or longer card suit in search of a fit.
- We have fewer HCP available now, and they are located by the overcall.
- They have taken away bidding space, some of our natural bidding grammar, and some of our needed tools or conventions.

These impacts force us to adopt counter-measures. The simple overcall creates obstruction. Done well an overcall fulfills all 3 of the objectives. *Obstruction* - the opponents have taken away what's easy. We have to find another way. Let's look at the impact **simple overcalls** have on our auctions. Partner opens and it's your turn to respond:

1♣-1♦ 1♦-1♥ 1♥-1♠	These overcalls take away little bidding space. This small intrusion has major impacts. We can make a simple raise to show 6-10 HCP and a modest fit (minimum 4 cards for a minor, 3 cards for a major). We can no longer make a 1 over 1 bid on a good 4-card suit nor use the forcing 1NT or a standard 1NT for any 6-10 HCP. (<i>1N will show 8-10 with ♠s stopped positionally</i>). This bid also takes away the 2/1 game force bid and our Jacoby 2N forcing Raise. It makes inviting game with 4♣s, 4♦s, or 3♥s somewhat complicated. The overcall raises doubts about playing NT unless we have the suit stopped. Should we defend? Should we double?
1♣-1♥ 1♦-1♠	Now we have a gap strain (♦ in the 1 st and ♥ in the 2 nd). This strain might be ours. How can we know? The same problems above remain.
1♣-1♠	Now there are 2 gap strains. While we are still able to bid a constructive 1NT with a ♠ stopper, we cannot bid a new suit unless we have length and strength to be at the 2 level. What do we do with 8-10 HCP, no 5 card suit and no ♠ stopper?
1♦-2♣ 1♥-2♣ 1♥-2♦ 1♠-2♣ 1♠-2♦ 1♠-2♥	We have to bid 1 st at the 2 level. This means we need 10+HCP and a good 5-card suit to be safe (why later). This means the intruder has taken away our ability to show non-fitting weak and constructive hands (5-7 and 7-9 HCP). We can't show a stopper in their suit unless we hold 11 HCP. That's a lot of bidding information we now pack into a pass.
1♣-3♠ 1♦-3♠ 1♣-3♥ 1♦-3♥	The opponents' preempts have caused severe disruption. How can I respond if I have 10-12 HCP and 4 cards in the other major? What if I have 12-15 HCP and no stopper for their suit? What if I have a very strong suit of my own and only 10 HCP? What does a bid of a new suit at the 4 level mean? What does supporting partner's minor at the 3 level mean? How do I tell partner I have only 8 HCP but a good fit for the minor? How can we double them for penalties? What if I have a really strong hand – what do I do?

Common solutions: Negative Doubles; Freebids; Support Cue Bids; Western Cue Bids; Preemptive Raises; Weak Jump Shifts in Competition; Jump Cuebid Splinter, Balancing, Forcing Pass

What the Intruder thinks:

RHO opens 1♠ - at least 12 HCP perhaps up to 21 and 5+ ♠s usually with one or 2 of ♠AKorQ, but not necessarily.

1) Am I strong enough to compete constructively? If so, do I have a suit worth mentioning now? Does the vulnerability suggest I stay quiet? 2) Do I have a great suit or a good lead for partner to guide our defense?

♠K32 ♥J10982 ♦K43 ♣Q7	This collection of 9 HCP fits the 6-16 HCP range for overcalls most people put on their convention card. This is NOT an overcall. Your suit cannot stand a lead from partner, the ♣Q is not working without a lot of help from partner, and the ♠K is a wasted card – HCP in their suit are a negative sign. When you overcall with 6-10 HCP you should have 2 of the top 3 honors in that suit or extreme length. If partner has 2 honors in your suit, s/he will expect you to have an opening hand (11+ HCP).
♠832 ♥KQ1092 ♦KJ4 ♣73	While the shape and the HCP are the same, this hand is a pushy weak overcall. Bid 2♥s The ♥s block out 2 suits & direct a lead. ♣ shortness is a plus. All your points are working. Passing would be conservative in today's game, but not unusual. Beware: 3 small ♠s is a negative. If partner holds 3♠s they have a 7 card ♠ fit and likely 3 defensive winners against any contract you bid.
♠832 ♥73 ♦KJ4 ♣ KQ1092	Bidding ♣s is less appealing for strength and suit length reasons. Where are the ♥s? If partner has them you have no support. If they have them, you haven't really obstructed. Pass! and balance later. If you play in a minor, you'll want 6 cards or an opening hand.
♠3 ♥KQ102 ♦KJ84 ♣9732	Pass and wait to balance. You have time to find a 4-4 fit at the 2 or 3 level.
♠3 ♥KQ102 ♦KQ84 ♣9732	Takeout double – 10 Working Points and 1=4=4=4 perfect shape is a minimum.
♠83 ♥KQJ92 ♦KQ4 ♣AK2	You have a biddable suit in a strong hand – too strong for a simple overcall. Double first then rebid ♥s. Don't overcall 1N – you have no ♠ stopper and a beautiful ♥ suit.
♠KQ2 ♥J10982 ♦KJ3 ♣K7	You have 13 HCP, no biddable suit, and 5 HCP in their suit. PASS! Perhaps partner will balance with a double and you can bid 2♠ to see if ♥s are in your future. Besides you can balance later.
♠ KQJ92 ♥83 ♦KQ4 ♣AK2	You have a nice hand but their suit. Where do you think they are going? Where do you think you are going? PASS! A later double by you is PENALTY. You have made a trap pass and hope to penalize their NT or ♠ contract.

What the Advancer thinks The auction is 1♠-2♥-Pass:

“Partner has 6-16 HCP and 5♥s. S/he doesn't have a weak Jump Shift. RHO's pass is weakness or penalty.

Partner might be weak. At least 18 HCP are shown. RHO and I have at most 22. What does my hand suggest:

♠K32 ♥J10982 ♦K43 ♣Q7	My 9 HCP are really worth only 6. The value of the ♠K is doubtful. My 5 ♥s mean a 10+-card trump fit. I should raise partner but how high? Since RHO has NOT supported ♠s, a simple raise to 2 is enough. You can bid more later. If RHO had supported ♠s, you have a classic preempt to the 4 level.
♠8 ♥ J10982 ♦KQ4 ♣A973	This hand could make game if partner has an opening hand. How do I invite? Play that a simple cuebid is invitational. Partner will rebid ♥s simply with a minimum or bid a side feature or NT w/a ♠ stopper with a 12-16 HCP hand.
♠83 ♥3 ♦KQJ4 ♣AKQ1092	I've got a powerful hand but no support for partner. How do I force partner to bid? Cuebid. Partner will play you for support at 1 st but you will show your ♣s .
♠3 ♥KQ102 ♦KJ84 ♣9732	I have a constructive raise and shortness in their suit. A simple raise might do for now, but be prepared to compete later.
♠83 ♥3 ♦974 ♣ Q1098732	Can I get us to my 7-card suit safely? Yes if you pass 1 st .
♠ KQJ92 ♥83 ♦K64 ♣782	I have their suit. PASS. Length or strength in their suit is bad for our side. Wait for partner to reopen with a double.
♠K32 ♥J10 ♦K43 ♣KQ987	12 HCP. Barely enough for 2N but right on shapewith intermediates. Bid 2N. Remember you do not want to bid NT liberally because partner might be 6-9 HCP.

Common solutions: Negative Redoubles; Constructive Non forcing new suits at 1 level, Support Cue Bid; Western Cue Bids; Preemptive Raises; Weak Jump Shifts in Competition; Jump Cuebid Splinter, Balancing, Forcing Pass

The experience of the Intruder and the Advancer should convince us that the competitive bidding situation and objectives demand different bidding solutions from the simple approaches we use in constructive bidding. *The two different competitive situations demand two different sets of bidding tools and agreements.*

References:

- 1) Matchpoints by Kit Woolsey
- 2) Competitive Bidding in the 21st Century by Marshall Miles
- 3) The Complete Book on Overcalls in Contract Bridge by Mike Lawrence
- 4) The Complete Book on Takeout Doubles by Mike Lawrence
- 5) Double! New Meaning for an Old Bid by Mike Lawrence
- 6) Demon Defense and Demon Doubling: Defend With Skill And Double For Keeps by August Boehm;
- 7) Preempts from A to Z by Ron Andersen and Sabine Zenkel
- 8) Modern Losing Trick Count Bidding to Win at Bridge by Ron Klinger
- 9) To Bid or Not to Bid the Law of Total Tricks by Larry Cohen
- 10) I Fought the Law of Total Tricks by Mike Lawrence and Anders Wirgren
- 11) Hand Evaluation Points Schmoints Guaranteed to Make You a Better Bidder by Marty Bergen
- 12) "Inside Out Evaluation" by Jeff Rubens