

### SIMPLE OVERCALL

One Level \_\_\_ to \_\_\_ HCP (Usually)  
Often 4 cards  very light style   
**Responses**  
New Suit Forcing  NFConst  NF  
Jump Raise: Forcing  Inv. Weak

### Learning Points – Simple Overcalls Made Simple

May 3, 2008

*Saturday Discussion – Cincinnati Flying Pig Regional* - Steve Moese (thanks to Mike Purcell and my partners who teach me this game). If you enjoy this discussion, please visit <http://www.cincybridge.com> and look for On Line Learning Points<sup>©</sup>  
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#### Observations:

1. Most bridge hands are **part scores**. Both pairs bid in most auctions. Competitive bidding is difficult.
2. We pay much more attention to **constructive bidding**. Constructive bidding (we open) and competitive bidding (**they open** or overcall) have different objectives and bidding agreements. Talk with Partner.
3. Make choices that fit well together. No ambiguity/no gaps in communication.

Look at the ACBL convention card. About 50% of the space is for constructive bidding (right side). Some 33% of the space is for competitive bidding and about 17% is about defensive carding. This seems to match our tendency as bridge players – we focus much attention and effort on constructive bidding conventions, agreements, and treatments, less on competitive bidding and even less on defense.

Experience at the table says we have it backwards! Defensive carding is the most impactful part of the game that when done well provides maximum gain. Just like in major sports – good defense wins championships. Likewise, competitive bidding is an area where we often lay out a few tools and never penetrate beyond first actions. Since competitive situations occur frequently (most hands are partials and most have both sides bidding) spending more time on this part of our game makes sense.

When opponents open the bidding we have three **objectives**:

1. **Compete**. Identify our side's strain and get to our highest safe level before opponent's can communicate. *When they open, we have 28 HCP or less to work with. Game for our side is unlikely. Slams even more rare (but they can happen with distribution).*
2. **Suggest a lead**. (*important negative inferences*)
3. **Obstruct the auction** – force opponents out of comfortable constructive bids and into uncomfortable competitive bids (e.g. negative doubles, cue bids, free bids, NT bids and raises in competition).

**DO NOT overcall just to show points or an opening hand. Be consistent. Pass then balance.**

**How strong should the overcall be?** *The 2001 Bridge World Standard (BWS) Survey (details on line at <http://www.bridgeworld.com>) offers insight into expert and subscriber thinking.*

It takes at least 5 HCP to offer a suitable lead option (KQ10) at the one level (priority 2). Overcalling on a bare Ace is risky. If partner leads to **Axxxx xxx xxx xx** you risk setting up opponent's tricks when partner does not fit you. Constructive calls at level 1 promote sound decisions consistent with our objectives.

Consider 8 HCP in 2<sup>nd</sup> seat (opposite a partner who has not yet bid), but as little as 6 in 4<sup>th</sup> seat (opposite a passed partner). When partner passes you have a good estimate of the LOWER LIMIT of opponent's strength (29 minus your HCP). When partner has not yet bid the relative strength of the 2 sides is unclear.

At the 2 level 10 HCP and a good suit (5 card major or 6 card minor) can be enough NV. 11-12 HCP if V.

If you hold 17 HCP+ then 11 HCP or less remain for responder and partner (advancer). **Shortness** in partner's hand along with **Working HCPs** can make or break a game decision. 5 HCP + a singleton can mean game. Make a takeout double with all hands too big for a simple overcall. Simple Overcall Range: 8-16/17 HCP opposite silent partner, (5-7 possible opposite passed partner). Strength over preempts: 2 level 12-16; 3-level 14-16; 4 Level 16+ or 4-5 losers.

The 2001 Bridge World Standard (BWS) Poll (details on line at <http://www.bridgeworld.com>) offers insight into expert and reader opinion on these points. Let's look at the range for lower limit and for upper limit for overcalls:

(1) ♠A Q x x x ♥x x x ♦Y x x x ♣x  
The value of card Y that makes hand (1) closest to a minimum one-spade overcall of one club with neither side vulnerable is...

	Experts	Readers
Ace	0	5
King	29	35
Queen	32	36
Jack	24	21
x	15	3

(2) ♠A x x x ♥A x x x ♦Y x x x ♣x  
The value of card Y that makes hand (2) closest to a minimum takeout double of one club with neither side vulnerable is...

	Experts	Readers
Ace	2	10
King	20	46
Queen	60	39
Jack	15	4
x	3	1

The minimum requirement for a two-level overcall . . .

	Experts	Readers
Should...	69	52
Should not...	31	48

be raised one degree from that used for other initial constructive defensive actions within the spectrum of possible requirements for such an overcall.

In general, the BWS requirements for initial constructive defensive actions (takeout doubles and overcalls) should best be described within the spectrum of possible requirements for that action as...

	Experts	Readers
sound	8	2
conservative	3	8
moderate	41	55
light	23	24
wispy	1	2
Vary	24	9

(3) ♠A K Q 10 x ♥A K x ♦Y x x x ♣x  
The value of card Y that makes hand (3) closest to a hand slightly too strong for a one-spade overcall of one club with neither side vulnerable is...

	Experts	Readers
Ace	9	4
King	23	22
Queen	34	30
Jack	14	16
x	20	28

The minimum requirement for a takeout double or overcall should be affected by the vulnerability...

	Experts	Readers
Not at all	0	1
Slightly	44	47
Moderately	42	44
Substantially	14	8

Most experts want 8 or 9 working HCP when making a spade overcall at the one level, and have an upper limit of 16 or 17 HCP for the simple overcall. Experts approach 2 level overcalls more conservatively than one level overcalls (69/31% say light/moderate becomes moderate/conservative).

**Where should the HCP be in my hand?** With less than opening strength (5-11 HCP), the majority of the points are in the suit, especially when overcalling at the 2 level. The overcall suit should be HHxxx or better when weak (H=A, K, or Q). **INFERENCE:** If partner overcalls and you have HH in partner's suit, then partner has an opening hand (12-16 HCP).

Discount strength in opponent's suit. The more points you hold in their suit the more points they hold in your suit, or the fewer points your partner will hold in the remaining two suits. Either is unfavorable for our side! We need strength in our suit and the remaining two suits to compete safely.

**What about suit length?** Think 5 card suit. 1 level overcall → 5 card suit typical. 2 level overcall → good 5 card major or a 6 card minor. Michaels Cue Bids and Unusual NT overcalls can show (0-10 or 17+ HCP). With 11-16 HCP 2-suited hands overcall and (freely) bid your second lower ranking suit. When opponents open 1 minor and you hold spades and the other minor, simply bid spades and rebid the minor later if appropriate. Don't fret not having a 2-suit bid when you hold spades.

Overcalling with a 4 card major at the 1 level works well if disciplined and agreed w/partner:

1. The suit is **HHxx** or better and there are no other competitive bids appropriate for your hand (takeout double, Overcall in a longer minor, NT overcall).
2. Opening strength opposite a silent partner (a 4 card 3<sup>rd</sup> hand overcall can be weak).
3. No good support for the other major.
4. Unbalanced hand

Extremely rare at the 2 level; Never 3-level and above. Never overcall with a 4 card minor. Be sure to check "Often 4 cards" on the convention card if you intend to use this at least once a session.

**What about shape?** Discount 4333 hands always. They are never right for suit overcalls and need extra strength to qualify for takeout doubles. Don't think about overcalling with 4423 hands either unless partner agrees explicitly. 5332 hands aren't much better. Short suits (0/1) help us compete.

**Responding to partner's overcall (Advancing)** – The opening bidder's partner is the responder, and the overcaller's partner is the advancer. The basic idea is to announce a fit early, keep bidding low on strong hands and preempt aggressively when fitting or having a long self-sustaining suit.

- Support with support. Simple raise defined (Preempt or constr.). Jumps preempt
- Simple new suit or NT advances imply no fit. Define new suit F/NFConstr/NF.
- Show strength at low levels. Think Cue Bids (*See Below*)
- Don't bid on junk (many 0-7 HCP hands) – Pass then bid later with weak misfits and length.
- Consider the Snapdragon Double – 10+ HCP and the 4<sup>th</sup> suit – implies no fit for overcaller. The 4<sup>th</sup> suit is weak and to play.
- 1NT = 9-11, 2NT = 12-14, 3NT = 18-19  
Cue then NT = 15-17 Cue then jump NT (if possible) = 20-21

**Limit Raise Cue Bid** (– Agrees strain (3+ Cards) & inv game. Semi/Balanced hand denies shortness.

1. Overcaller's cheapest rebid declines invitation (6-11 HCP). A reraise by advancer invites - overcaller accepts with 9-11 HCP. Overcaller's cue bid = max with 1<sup>st</sup> round control (GF).
2. A new suit by overcaller is natural and accepts game. Cue bidding ensues.
3. A new suit by advancer is forcing one round. Subsequent cue by advancer is GF (Western).
4. A 2<sup>nd</sup> cue bid by advancer is a game force and shows 1<sup>st</sup> round control.
5. A jump new suit under game is a splinter.

New Suit NF Constructive (forcing one round) or New Suit forcing by advancer. **DIFFICULTY:** *Risky for advancer to show a strong hand in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> suit with no fit for overcaller's suit (Opener might pass!). Advancer might have such a big hand without a fit for partner that the only right first action is a cue bid.*

**Inquiry Cue Bid** – 10 HCP + and forces one round. Not descriptive. No agreement to strain.

1. Opener's rebid is negative. Opener's new suit or NT shows top half (12-16 HCP). Overcaller's cue bid = max with 1<sup>st</sup> round control.
  2. Advancer's subsequent new suit forces (Jump forces game)
- Advancer's new suit not forcing. **DIFFICULTY:** Hard to show constructive new suit (8-9 HCP) with no fit.

**Jump Cue Bid** (Pick Only One):

1. Constructive raise – enable a simple raise to be preemptive.
2. Limit Raise
3. Splinter (defined/undefined, Limit/GF)

**RHO deals and bids 1D**  
**what do you bid with:**

AKxx KQxxx xxx x  
AKxx KQxxx x xxx  
xxxx KQxxx x xxx  
xxxx KQxxx xxx x  
AKxx xx KQx xxxx  
AKxx xx xx Qxxxx  
Qxxx xx xx AKxxx  
AKxx x xxxx KQxx

**How do you advance 1D-1H-P-?**

AKxx KQxxx xxx x  
AKxx KQxxx x xxx  
xxxx KQxxx x xxx  
xxxx KQxxx xxx x  
AKxx xxx KQx xxx  
AKxx Qxx xx Kxxx  
AKxx xx xx Qxxxx  
Qxxx xx xx AKxxx  
AKxx x xxxx KQxx

**As overcaller after 1D-1H-P-2D\*-P**  
**what do you rebid with**

AKxx KQxxx xxx x  
AKxx KQxxx x xxx  
xxxx KQxxx x xxx  
xxxx KQxxx xxx x  
xxx KQxxx xx xxx  
xxx KQxxx KQx xx  
Kxx KQxxx KQx xx  
xx KQxxx x KQxxx  
\* Limit Raise Cue

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One Level 6 to 16 HCP (Usually)  
Often 4 cards  very light style

**Responses**

New Suit Forcing  NFConst  **NF X**  
Jump Raise: Forcing  Inv.  **Weak X**  
**Q Only Force; Jump Q Constr Raise**

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**Q LR+; Jump Q Splinter**