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This Week in Bridge

(382) Raising Partner's Balancing Overcall

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Levels: 5 of 10 (2 of 6)

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General

When RHO opens the bidding and the auction passes around partner, they will “balance” back into the auction to keep the opponents from winning the contract at a low level. When partner balances back into the bidding they generally “borrow” about 3 HCP from our hand. We need to take this into account when we are judging how to raise partner when they have balanced back into the bidding.

Partner's Balancing 1-Level Simple Overcall

When partner balances with a 1-level overcall then we need to take a moment to visualize their hand.

Example 1

1♣ P P 1♠

Let's try to picture partner's hand.

- If partner has a 5-card suit:
 - They have about 9 to a bad 15 HCP. If partner had fewer than 9 HCP then they would pass the hand out. If partner had a good 15+ points, then they would add 3 points to their hand from balancing and they would double and bid their suit.
- If partner has a 6+card suit:
 - They have about 9 to 12 HCP. If partner has fewer HCP they will likely pass the hand out and with more they can use an Intermediate Jump Overcall – showing about 13-16 HCP and a decent 6-card suit in the passout seat.

This is valuable information to know about partner's hand. If they have a 6+card suit, then they have a very narrow HCP range. And even if they have only a 5-card suit, their HCP range is relatively narrow (compared to other 1-level overcalls).



Why We Raise Partner

Taking this information into account, we can raise partner for a variety of different reasons.

- Raise to the 2-Level -- 6 to a bad 10 points with a 3+card fit.
 - This raise will only get us to game if partner is at the top of their range, has extreme shape, or “just the right cards”.
- Raise to the 3-Level – 0-6 points with 4+card fit (Weak)
 - This is a Law of Total Tricks (LOTT) bid and is a blocking raise, making life more difficult on the opponents.
- Cuebid of the Opponent’s Suit – Good 10 to 14 points with 3+card fit (Limit Raise+)
 - This is a strong action with a fit. We can have a limit raise or even about 12-14 points with a hand that did not have the right shape for bidding after RHO opened the bidding.
- Jump to Game – 5+card support (preemptive) or occasionally a good hand hoping to make.
 - We can jump to game with preemptive hands or some excellent hands that think they have a good chance of making game (no chance of missing slam)

Example 1

♠ K97

♥ Q2

♦ KJ85

♣ Q532

1♣ P P 1♠

2♣ —

Even though we have 11 HCP and a fit for partner, we should just make a simple raise. Partner is balancing back into the auction and we should not drive to the 3-level just because we have some extra HCP.

Conclusion

When it comes to bidding, we like it when partner makes a narrowly defined bid. Generally speaking, overcalls (and especially those at the 1-level) are some of the most broadly-valued bids in all of bridge. But balancing seat overcalls are more narrowly defined than other overcalls and this allows us to be a bit more of a decision maker. The first thing that you need to do is make certain to not “punish” partner for coming into the bidding. Second, you want to try for game when you have the right hand, but more commonly you want to judge how best to compete in the bidding. Make sure you use all the information that is available to you to judge how to bid in these auctions.