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This Week in Bridge

(413) Responding to 2-Level Preempts

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Level: 7 of 10 (3 of 6)

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General

In the modern game, when partner opens the bidding with a 2-level preempt, they can have variable hand and suit quality based on factors like vulnerability, position, and the opponents. When partner preempts the bidding and we have a good hand, we expect the auction to be difficult for our side. Partner's preempt has eaten up our valuable bidding space – instead of the opponents' bidding space. We will need to have good agreements with partner and exercise some good judgment to get to the right final contract. Here we will discuss our goals for the auction, agreements with partner, and how to make good decisions in these auctions.

What Does Responder Need to Bid?

Responder can bid opposite a 2-level preempt bid for one of two reasons:

- To extend the preempt, or
- To make a constructive bid and explore game or slam.

As Responder, we extend the preempt with a fit and apply the LOTT (Law of Total Tricks.)

When we make a constructive bid, we are interested in at least game. We have about 15+ points worth of playing strength (depending on vulnerability). If Responder does not have this, they simply do not have interest in constructive bidding and are only using the LOTT to extend the preempt.

With a good hand (aimed at constructive bidding) we have choices:

- Bid a new suit,
- Bid 2NT,
- Just bid game.

If we have a good hand and a fit for preemptor's suit, then we use 2NT to explore for game (more on this later). If we have a good hand and do not have a fit (or we are looking for a better fit) then we bid a new suit. Let's look at how to explore for our best fit.



Finding Fits – Bidding a New Suit

Our first goal in any bidding sequence is to find a fit (or a better fit – e.g., we have a fit in a minor, but might also have a Major suit fit.) When partner preempts, we will usually play in their suit, because they do not have much length in the other suits.

2-Level Preemptive Openings show:

- 6-card suits (we expect decent or better suit, especially vulnerable)
- No outside 4-card Major (usually)
- Not too many values outside – that gives us too much defense.

Before we bid a new suit of our own it is useful to think about partner's possible holdings in our suit.

- Hxx (Honor third) Best Holding (4-card very rarely possible)
- xxx or Hx (Honor doubleton) Good Holding
- xx or less Common Holding

If we bid a new suit, we expect partner to raise with a good or great fit (Hx or xxx or better.) That means that if we bid a new suit as Responder, it needs to be good enough to play as trump opposite Hx. Thus, a bid of a new suit should be a 6-card suit or a good 5-card suit (good enough that it can play well opposite Hx).

Example 1

2♦ 2♠

—

Good 5+card ♠ suit. Forcing for 1-Round (1F)

Now let's look at how Opener rebids in these auctions: With a minimum they try to sign off and with a maximum they do something forward-going.

- 2NT Rare. Scattered values, Maximum
- 3♣ ♣ cards, Maximum
- 3♦ Minimum
- 3♥ ♥ cards, Maximum
- 3♠ Minimum with ♠Hx or ♠xxx
- 3NT Maximum with excellent ♦ (Rare)
- 4♣ *Splinter*, ♠Hxx, 0-1♣, Maximum
- 4♥ *Splinter*, ♠Hxx, 0-1♥, Maximum
- 4♠ Maximum with ♠Hx or ♠xxx

These rebids are generally natural. it just takes some thinking about what partner is trying to show us.

- Min vs. Max
- Fit vs. Non-Fit
- Location of Values



With a Fit for Preemptor - Support

Before we discuss how to explore game opposite a preemptive Opener, we want to make sure Responder does a good job properly evaluating their hand. With a fit, Responder can re-evaluate in terms of support points:

- HCP,
- Length points,
- Support points (ruffing values).

If we have a good 15+ points, re-evaluated, we should explore game in most situations (though we may need slightly more or less based on the position and vulnerability of partner's preempt). As you can imagine it is much more common to have 15+ points in support of partner than having 15+ HCP with little to no fit.

When we have support, we usually use 2NT to ask Opener for more information about their hand. In standard bidding, 2NT asks for a "Feature" – an Ace or King. In the modern style, Opener bids a new suit with a good hand AND a side Ace or King (showing their Ace or King.) This approach is called Optional Feature. Opener rebids their suit with no feature OR with any bad hand, even with a feature.

Example 2

2♠ 2NT
—?

♠ KQT763
♥ 7
♦ K843
♣ 52

With a good preempt, Opener shows their feature by bidding 3♦. Showing a feature also shows a good hand.

♠ QT9763
♥ 7
♦ K843
♣ 52

With the second hand, we do not want to encourage partner – so we do not show a feature and just bid 3♠.



2NT Ogust

An improvement over “Feature Ask 2NT” is an artificial rebid structure called *Ogust*. Playing Ogust, the preemptor describes their hand using two key pieces of information – quality of suit and quality of overall hand. Let’s see how it works:

2X 2NT

___?

- 3♣* “Bad-Bad” - Bad Suit and a Bad Hand
- 3♦* “Good-Bad” – Good Suit and a Bad Hand
- 3♥* “Bad – Good” – Bad Suit and a Good Hand
- 3♠* “Good-Good” – Good Suit and a Good Hand
- 3NT* Solid Suit, AKQxxx (rare)

Note: As a memory aid, it can be useful to think of the Majors showing points and the minors not.

With our modern, destructive style of preempting, it is useful to be able to let partner give us a good general feeling for their hand and their suit.

Ogust has another advantage over Feature in that it does not give the opponents specific information about declarer’s hand – Feature helps the opponents know how to defend by telling them where the Opener’s outside points are located (and where they are not located.)

Note: Some players also play modified versions of Ogust. There are many flavors!

Bid Game

Sometimes our hand is so good, that even if partner has a horrible preempt, we want to give game a try. In that case, we do not mess around – we just bid a game and hope that partner can make it!

Conclusion

Responding to 2-level preempts is a difficult part of bidding. It requires excellent judgment, good hand evaluation, and even some good luck. Our most common action is to extend partner’s preempt, but when we have a very good hand we want to explore for game. Bidding a new suit allows us to look for another fit, but if we already have one, then we use 2NT to find out more information about our partner’s hand. Make sure that you and partner have a good discuss about how to use these bidding tools. As partner preempts more, it becomes important for us be able to communicate about the quality of their hand.