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Overcalls

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General

Overcalls are wide-ranging. This makes them “bad bids”, because they are poorly defined actions. But we must make overcalls to compete in the bidding. Overcalls are less useful in helping judge partner’s strength, but useful in helping judge our fit and then we can apply the Law of Total Tricks (LOTT).

Level of Overcall

- 1-Level Overcalls
 - 7-18 points with a 5+card suit. With a longer suit, the maximum HCP is lower.
- 2-Level Overcalls (not jump overcalls)
 - 12-18 points with a 5+card good suit. 10-11 HCP need a quality 6+card suit.
- Vs. Preempts
 - Overcalls at higher levels need compensating values – HCP, shape, or suit quality.
- Sandwich Seat
 - When partner is a passed hand we may make an overcall for a variety of reasons: To try to win the contact, be lead directing, or obstruct opponents.

Suit Quality

- The fewer HCP, the better suit quality needed. Preempt with just a good suit.
- 1-level overcalls are extremely wide-ranging in suit quality (as well as HCP).
- In some situations, consider a 1-level overcall on a good 4-card suit with a good hand.
- 2-level overcalls should be a good 5+card suit (often 6+card suit). Partner will raise with 3-cards, violating the LOTT. Make overcall with a 5-card suit at 2-level only with a good hand.
- Vulnerability also effects suit quality requirements: NV be aggressive; Vul have a decent suit.

Hand Strength – Buckets

Just as we think of Opener’s hand as belonging to *Buckets* (ranges of strength) we also think of different buckets for Overcaller’s hand strength. At the 1-level Overcaller’s possible hand strengths are:

- 7-9 points Subminimum Values
- 10-12 points Minimum Values
- 12-14 points Sound Values
- 15-18 points Extra Values

2-level overcalls have either Sound or Extra Values (not Minimum or Sub-Minimum Values).

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Overcaller's Rebids

How Overcaller shows their strength and shape after the first round of the bidding is a complex topic. The general rule (and most important) is that the Overcaller strives to limit their hand as soon as possible. If forced to make a second bid, the Overcaller can show a subminimum or minimum hand by rebidding their suit at the cheapest level, which does not promise a 6th card in the suit.

Purpose of Overcall

There are many different reasons that we might make an overcall. Some are:

- Try to win the contract.
- Try to push the opponents a level higher.
- Make a lead-directing bid.
- Try to make it more difficult for the opponents to find their fit (tactical bid).
- Show partner information about our shape and strength – get partner involved in the auction.
- And others...

Often the player making an overcall cannot predict how the auction will progress. Thus, it is difficult to make a plan about what we expect to happen. We make overcalls for a variety of reasons and see what happens next.

Overcall vs. Double

There are many situations where we are forced to choose between making an overcall or a takeout double. These are usually when the opponents have opened the bidding with a minor and we are short in the opponent's suit with our own 5-card suit. (Say 5431 with a singleton in the opponent's opening bid minor.) How to compete in the bidding is not an easy decision.

Let's look at the different hands based on their strength.

- If we have subminimum values (7-9 HCP), our only option is to make an overcall.
- If we have minimum values (10-12 HCP), we make our decision based on the quality of our 5-card suit. If our hand looks 1-suited (points are concentrated in our one long suit), we make an overcall. If our values are more scattered around, we make a takeout double.
 - With 5/3 in the Majors we usually overcall our 5-card major.
 - With 5/4 in the Majors we overcall our 5-card Major if it is of decent quality. If our 4-card suit is strong and our 5-card suit is weak, then consider making a takeout double.
 - With a 5-card minor (4/3 in the Majors), we usually make a takeout double. Only consider overcalling a 5-card minor suit when it is extremely strong and both Majors are weak.
- If we have a sound or better hand (12+ HCP), we plan to take multiple calls with our hand. In this case we start by making an overcall of our 5-card suit (to look for a fit there) and then make a takeout double later, to look for a fit in our other suit (particularly true with 5/4 in the Major suits).

This is only one example of many of the complex auctions that require planning and thought before entering the auction with a simple overcall.