

/ February 6, 2024 / [Guest Columnists](#)

Risk vs Reward in Bridge, Part 1 - Preemptive Openings and Raises

An important factor in playing good bridge centers on evaluating risk. Every time you take an action at the bridge table you're taking a risk. Even Pass can be costly if at that moment, the right choice is to bid. Some actions are more risky than others. But risk is not always a bad thing. You only want to make risky bids if the rewards are worth it. The rewards from a bid can be things like making a contract with a hand that would not normally win, helping partner get off to a good lead, or getting the opponents to make mistakes in their bidding.



Robert Todd

One example of a type of a bid that has both risk and reward is a preemptive opening bid. Yes, a preempt opening can cause us to bid and make a game with fewer high-card points (HCP) than normal. But what's more likely is for a preemptive opening to be an effective disruptive bid that forces the opponents into making difficult bidding decisions. If the goal of preempting is to do as much damage as possible without getting into too much trouble, then we need to know how to evaluate risk in different situations; when it's safe to act and when it's potentially risky.

The way to properly evaluate a hand that could be a candidate for a preemptive opening bid has a lot more to it than just HCP, and having "two of the top three honors" in the suit.

Better hand evaluation (risk analysis) requires deeper consideration:

- HCP in the Hand
- Suit Quality of Preempt
- Shape of the Hand
- Location of Honors in the Hand

HCP – The number of HCP we need in order to make a safe yet damaging judgement varies based on the situation.

Suit Quality – The safest suits are the ones that play well opposite shortness. The best suits are not the ones that have top honors, but the ones that have solid cards in the middle of the suit.

QJT9xx
KJT9xx
AJT9xx
KQT9xx
Etc..

Shape of the Hand – 6322 is the worst shape of any hand that has a 6-card suit. 6331 is slightly better. 6421 even better than that. 6430 has even more playing strength.

Location of Honors – Hands with points in long suits are much better than hands with points in short suits.

<p>S South</p> <p>♠ KQ109xx</p> <p>♥ xxx</p> <p>♦ Kxx</p> <p>♣ x</p>	<p>S South</p> <p>♠ xxxxxx</p> <p>♥ Q10x</p> <p>♦ K9x</p> <p>♣ K</p>
---	---

Both of these hands have the same number of HCP and shape. But the first hand is clearly much stronger than the second. Consider all of these factors when you're making a decision about the playing strength of a hand – and thus how much risk you are prepared to take.

But there are other things to consider when analyzing risk for a preemptive bid:

- What the Vulnerability is?
- What Position you are in?
- Who your Opponents are?
- How well is your game is going?

Vulnerability - There are 4 types of vulnerability to consider. Favorable (we are non-vul, and they are vul), All White (everyone non-vul), All Red (everyone vul), and Un-Favorable (we are vul, and they are non-vul). The less vulnerable we are the more risk we can afford to take.

Position – Our actions can vary based on the seat we're sitting in. In 1st, 2nd, and 3rd seats we have different chances of our preempt successfully harming the opponents. In the 1st seat we have the best chance of a preemptive opening bid harming the opponents, in the 2nd seat it is less likely since one of the opponents is already a based hand. In the 3rd seat we may vary our preempt as our partner is already a passed hand and we want to create as much complexity as possible for the 4th player.

Opponents – When you are the big underdog (i.e. playing against much more experienced opponents) and you just play down the middle, you're likely to lose. So you should take more risk when playing against much more experienced players. Conversely, if you're the hot favorite (playing against far less experienced players) then you're likely to do well by just doing "normal things", rather than taking risks. .

How Well is Your Game Going? - When you're having a great game then don't take too much risk, try to avoid getting a disastrous result. On the other hand, when you're having a bad game, you should take more risk and preempt a bit more aggressively... you need to get some good results if you can.

Many of these same factors are considerations for other types of preemptive actives. We consider all of these things when we are extending partner's preemptive opening bid or if we are making a weak jump raise of partners opening bid or overcall.

Make sure that when you preempt the bidding, either with an opening bid or a preemptive jump raise you don't just follow a simple formula or law. You need to assess all of the available information and evaluate the risk vs reward of a particular action. Is the risk worth it, and do the circumstances require you to take the risk in the first place? Getting better at determining risk vs. reward will help you get more consistently solid results at the bridge table.

Let me know your thoughts on preemptive openings and raises in the comments below and be sure to come back next month when I'll be diving into the risks and rewards of overcalls.

About the Author

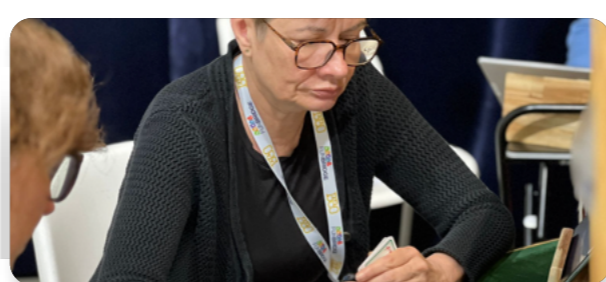
Robert is a professional player and teacher that you'll find all over North America (and the world). He is the founder of [Adventures in Bridge](#) and you'll find him hosting events, either virtual or in-person, almost every week of the year! Robert's also the president of the [ACBL Educational Foundation](#) where he's working to build an institution to shepherd the long term good of bridge!

Write a comment...



Risques et Récompenses au Bridge – Ouvertures et Relances Préventives – Partie 1

Un aspect important du bridge est l'évaluation des risques. Chaque fois que vous...



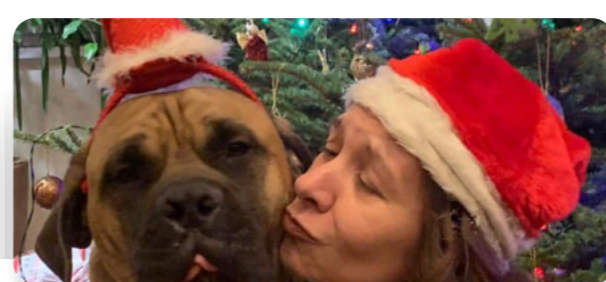
Guide de préparation aux tournois pour les joueurs de bridge

Quand il s'agit de se préparer pour un tournoi important, il faut considérer...



A Bridge Player's Guide to Tournament Preparation

When it comes to gearing up for an important tournament, you need to consider te...



Leçons de vie tirées de la table de bridge

J'ai joué au bridge pendant toute ma vie d'adulte. Parfois, je me demande q...

Home

Articles

ACBL

Videos

Events

Quizzes

Bidders Challenge

Vugraph

Our Games

- Churros Express Pairs
- Express Swiss-Pairs
- Intermediate-Advanced Express
- Express - 4 Fast Boards
- Express Reward - 4 Fast Boards
- Instant Tournaments
- Daylong
- Robot Duplicates
- Zenith Daylong Rewards
- Robot Rebate 55%
- Robot Rewards

ACBL Games

- ACBL Speedball Pairs
- ACBL Open Pairs
- ACBL 0-499 Pairs
- ACBL 0-1500 Pairs
- ACBL Express Individual
- ACBL Daylong
- ACBL Daylong 0-20
- ACBL Daylong 299er
- ACBL Instant Tournaments
- ACBL Robot Duplicates

BBOers Festival

- Games
- Schedule
- Winners

