

Preemptive Bidding—Part I (March 29 2021)

I want to begin today by telling you a story about one of the most famous hands in the annals of bridge.

| | | |
|------|-------|------|
| | North | |
| | 3D | |
| West | | East |
| ? | | Dbl |
| | South | |
| | 742 | |
| | J1075 | |
| | 9543 | |
| | 85 | |

Dorothy Hayden Truscott (DHT), famous player/author/teacher/member of ACBL Hall of Fame, held South's hand. She bid 7D over East's takeout double! Here's is what she knew:

1) that her partner held at least seven diamonds and a weak hand. She held four diamonds and one point; 2) that E/W had at least a small slam; and, probably a grand slam in one of the majors; and, 3) that her side (N/S) was not vulnerable; E/W side was vulnerable. Even if N/S was doubled in 7D, the outcome might not be too costly.

Her bid of 7D really put the pressure on E/W. If she had bid only 5D/6D, the opponents would have had bidding room to explore for the best final contract. Unfortunately, West bid 7H which was down one. DHT's side got plus 100. You may ask why she didn't double 7H; she held four hearts to the J1075. She knew that E/W had a grand slam in spades. A double by her of the 7H bid would have pushed N/S to bid 7S, which makes!

She was smart not to double. Let's say E/W doubles the 7D bid instead of bidding 7H. If they set the contract:

6 tricks = +1400
7 tricks = +1700
8 tricks = +2000
9 tricks = +2300 (down too many)

NOTE: 7H or 7S making = +2210.

However, the likelihood of N/S going down nine tricks is very small given that their side holds a minimum of eleven trumps between the two hands.

In conclusion: +100 (N/S) vs. -2210 (E/W), which is what every other E/W pair made.

Whose shoes would you rather be in on this hand?!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Definition of a Preemptive Bid:

An OPENING bid of 2 (except two clubs), 3, 4, or 5 of a suit is preemptive. It shows a long suit; but, not enough high card points (HCP) or quick tricks (AK, KQ, AQ, etc.) to open the suit with a one bid. Note: opening bids of 2D/2H/2S normally show anywhere from 5 to 11 points (by partnership agreement—see convention card) and a six card suit headed by two of the top three honors.

The purpose of this type of bid is to rob the opponents of bidding space. You already “know” where you want to play the hand. The opponents will have to GUESS—and they might go wrong. Maybe they will bid game in the wrong suit, not get to a cold slam, etc. Recall the 7H disaster above!

You might think it is dangerous to bid so much without knowing whether your partner has anything, or not. But your long trump suit provides a safety valve. Preempts are classified as **defensive bids**.

Below are some guidelines for making a preemptive opening bid:

- 1) Don't preempt past the game level. Preempt to the four level in hearts and spades and to five level in diamonds and clubs.
- 2) Don't preempt in a minor suit if you hold four card support for a major. You might miss game in the major.
- 3) Don't preempt in one major if you hold four cards in the other major.
- 4) When you open with a preempt, bid as strongly as you can depending on the level of vulnerability. Then "SHUT UP!" You should never bid again unless your partner "asks" you a question. Your original preempt has told your story; leave the rest of the bidding decision(s) up to your partner.

CAUTION: It is important to follow the above guidelines. If you start preempting where your suit is not good enough, or you have a side four-card major, etc., your partner will never know when she should make a bid. The result will be too many bad contracts or the missing of some good ones.

NOTE: Never preempt in fourth seat. Why? The purpose of a preempt is that of making it difficult for the opponents to bid or reach their best contract. PASS. Move on to the next hand.

Rule of Two, Three, and Four

First, add up how many tricks your hand will take if your suit is trumps. The optimal level of your preempt will depend on the number of cards in your suit and on the vulnerability. The table below is a useful guideline.

| <u>Your Side</u> | | <u>Opponents</u> | <u>No. of Tricks to Overbid</u> |
|------------------|----|------------------|---------------------------------|
| Nonvulnerable | vs | Vulnerable | Four (Rule of Four) |
| Nonvulnerable | vs | Nonvulnerable | Three (Rule of Three) |
| Vulnerable | vs | Vulnerable | Three (Rule of Three) |
| Vulnerable | vs | Nonvulnerable | Two (Rule of Two) |

How do you determine how many tricks your hand will take?

One way is to count the number of losers in your hand and subtract the total from 13. To get a raw count, count losers only in the first three cards of each suit. There are never more than three losers in a suit. There are never more losers in a suit than the number of cards in a suit.

Let's look at some examples below.

1) AJ108653 7 653 82 (Vulnerable vs. Nonvulnerable)

If you open 3 spades with this hand, you promise to take a minimum of seven tricks (Rule of 2). The most tricks coming from this hand equals five. You should PASS this hand.

Number of losers: 1/2 in spades, 1 in hearts, 3 in diamonds and 2 in clubs = 7/8 losers.

Subtracting the losers from 13, you get either 5 or 6 winners coming from this hand.

2) 8 KQ107532 QJ10 96 (Vulnerable vs. Nonvulnerable)

If vulnerable, open 3 hearts. You promise to take seven tricks (Rule of 2). If not vulnerable, many players probably will open 4H holding the above hand (Rule of 4).

Number of losers: 1 in spades, 1 in hearts, 2 in diamonds, 2 in clubs = 6 losers

Subtract 6 from 13 to get 7 winners coming from this hand.

3) AK98732 75 K65 9

This hand is too good to preempt. You have a six loser hand as well as two and one-half quick tricks. Open 1 spade with the above hand.

Number of losers: 1 in spades, 2 in hearts, 2 in diamonds, 1 in clubs = 6

Subtract 6 from 13 to get 7 winners coming from this hand. Normally, one should always open one of a suit when holding a seven loser hand.

How do you respond to your partner's preempt? The opponents are in a guessing game over where to play the hand and how high to bid. NOT YOU.

- 1) Usually you PASS.
- 2) Avoid the temptation to respond 3NT unless you have 9 tricks in your own hand.
- 3) If you have a bad hand and a fit in partner's suit, you may wish to increase the preempt level. Let's say your partner dealt and opened with 3 spades nonvulnerable. The opponents are vulnerable. The next person doubles. You hold the hand below:

K952 73 Q754 986

What do you know? The opponents can make a bundle. If they bid hearts, your side will probably take either one or no spade tricks. You should bid four spades. If they reach 6 hearts, bid 6 spades. Why? The opponents are vulnerable. If they make a small slam, they score 1430. If you bid 6 spades and they double, you should be able to hold it to down 6 (-1400) or down 5 (-1100).

4) With a good hand, you might want to take partner to game. Count your tricks and add them to partner's. THINK TOTAL TRICKS between the two hands. Forget point count.

If you are vulnerable and partner has opened three hearts, he promises to take 7 tricks. You need three to take him to game. These need to be quick tricks, i.e., aces and kings. Queens and jacks don't figure to be worth much.

The Artificial 2NT Asking Bid

- a) Some players use the artificial bid of 2NT to ask about the quality of his partner's hand and suit (Ogust).

3 clubs = bad suit, bad hand
3 diamonds = good suit, bad hand
3 hearts = bad suit, good hand
3 spades = good suit, good hand

| | | |
|------------|--------|------|
| Example 1. | West | East |
| | AQ8752 | K63 |
| | 76 | AK42 |
| | J8 | 64 |
| | 643 | A872 |

West opens 2 spades (8/9 loser hand). East makes the 2NT asking bid. West should respond 3 diamonds with his hand. He has a good suit and a bad hand. The good thing about West's hand is that most of his points are in the spade suit. East has four sure winners; but knowing that there are potentially two diamond losers and two club losers, he should sign off in 3 spades.

| | | |
|------------|--------|------|
| Example 2. | West | East |
| | AQ8752 | K63 |
| | 76 | AK42 |
| | K8 | 65 |
| | 643 | A872 |

West opens 2 spades (8 loser hand). East makes the 2NT asking bid. West should respond 3 spades with his hand, showing a good suit and a good hand. Now, East correctly bids 4 spades with his hand.

- b) Others, use 2NT to obtain information regarding partner's Losing Trick Count (LTC). The responses are as follows:

3 clubs = nine loser hand
3 diamonds = eight loser hand
3 hearts = seven loser hand

- c) While others, use the 2NT bid to find out if partner has an outside feature, such as an ace or king in another suit.

Depending on which meaning you and your partner agree on when partner bids "2NT", the opener's response will help the responder in determining the final contract.

NOTE: Some responders use the Rule of Seventeen to determine whether to raise partner to game. Count your total high card points and add them to the number of trumps you hold. If the total equals seventeen, or more, raise partner to game.

Let's look at some examples:

1) A952 K86 A7653 9

Partner has opened 3 hearts vulnerable. He promises 7 tricks. You have at least 3. Bid 4 hearts.

2) A964 6 AK72 J1054

Partner has opened 3 hearts nonvulnerable. He promises 5 to 6 tricks. You have three. PASS. However, if your side is vulnerable, partner promises 7 tricks. Your three are enough for game. Bid 4 hearts. Don't worry about the singleton trump. Partner should have seven trumps.

3) K754 3 QJ106 KJ102

Partner opened with 3 hearts nonvulnerable. Even though you have 4 or 5 tricks, they are NOT quick tricks. You should PASS.

Finally, I want to emphasize one more time that once you have made a preemptive bid, you should never bid again unless your partner bids the artificial “2NT” asking bid. All subsequent bidding decisions should be made by your partner. The following hand illustrates what can happen should you disregard this extremely important guideline.

| | | |
|--------|---------|--------------------|
| | North | |
| | QJ1074 | |
| | VOID | |
| | 10654 | Bidding: S W N E |
| | AQ74 | 3H 3S P P |
| West | East | 4H (!!!) P P X |
| AK9863 | VOID | All Pass |
| 32 | K1064 | !!! is a No No Bid |
| A9 | K832 | |
| K793 | J10862 | |
| | South | |
| | 52 | |
| | AQJ9875 | |
| | QJ7 | |
| | 5 | |

N/S: vulnerable; E/W: Nonvulnerable. Opening Lead: king of spades

Analysis of the Hand:

- 1) West leads the king and ace of spades. East discards two small clubs.
- 2) West cashes the ace of diamonds (East should signal with the 8 of diamonds) and leads the 9 to his partner's king. East returns a small diamond for his partner to ruff.
- 3) East will no doubt get at least two more trump tricks.

Postmortem: E/W takes 2 spades, 2 diamonds and at least 3 heart tricks for a total of 7 tricks. N/S is down four, doubled and vulnerable for -1100.

Not to be ugly, but I wonder if North pointed out to his partner that E/W will be off at least 3 tricks if allowed to play in 3 spades for a score of +150 for their side.

Conclusion: If you make a preempt bid, allow your partner to make all subsequent bids.

Next Week: Preemptive Bidding—Part II

