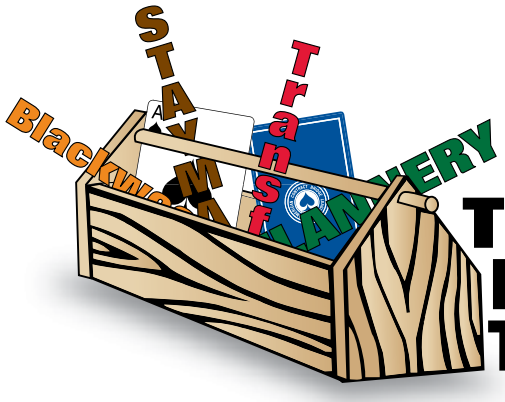

THE BIDDING TOOLKIT

Overcalls – part 2

Overcalls at the one-level were discussed last month. An overcall interferes with your opponents' bidding, invites partner into the auction and helps your partner on defense.

Responding with support

Your partner overcalls and you have at least three-card support — how should you proceed? Raising partner is the first priority. Here are some guidelines:

1. Make a simple raise with 6 to 10 support points. Support points refer to high-card points plus points added for distribution.
2. With11-plus support points, cuebid the suit the opponent opened.
3. With 4 to 6 support points and four or more trumps, make a preemptive jump raise.

Example #1:

Suppose you hold:
♠K 5 2 ♥10 6 5 ♦A 10 4 2 ♣J 4 3
and it's your turn to bid:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
1♦	1♠	Pass	?

You have support for partner, so bid 2♠. It's true that you have diamonds stopped, but don't bid 1NT. It's more important to show partner your support.

Example #2:

You hold,
♠K 6 4 2 ♥K 10 6 ♦A 9 4 2 ♣4 3,

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
1♦	1♠	Pass	?

Bid 2♦. You have 10 HCP plus one point for your doubleton club. Your 11 support points is a limit raise.

Example #3:

Suppose your hand is stronger:
♠K 7 4 2 ♥A K 4 ♦A 4 ♣J 4 3 2.

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
1♦	1♠	Pass	?

Again cuebid 2♦. This promises a limit raise, but may be better.

Example #4:

What if you have good support, but you are weak? You hold,
♠K 10 4 2 ♥4 2 ♦10 4 ♣ Q 7 5 4 2.

Bid 3♠. This is preemptive and weak. You have the requisite four trumps. Your hand is weak in terms of HCP (and defense), but you have distributional values. The 3♠ bid sends that message to partner, and obstructs the opponents.

Rebidding after overcalling

After you overcall, partner should let you know if he has support. Your overcall may be based on a wide range in terms of strength. After a cuebid, therefore, you have to tell partner how strong you are. If you are strong enough to make game opposite a limit raise, you should bid it. If you have a weak overcall (less than an opening bid), you should repeat your suit. If you have a hand that is in between, you should make a bid in a new suit, one that may be only three-cards long.

Here are some examples. In each case, the bidding has proceeded

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		1♣	1♠
Pass	2♣	Pass	?

Example #1:

♠A Q 10 4 3 ♥4 3 ♦K 8 4 ♣10 5 3.

Rebid 2♠. Your hand is too weak to make game if partner has only limit-raise strength. If he has enough to make game opposite this hand, he will bid again.

Example #2:

♠A Q 10 4 3 ♥7 3 ♦A K 4 ♣K J 10.

Rebid 4♠. Partner has a limit raise (or better) so you accept his invitation.

Example #3:

♠A Q 10 4 3 ♥5 3 ♦A 8 4 ♣K 10 4

Rebid 2♦. The message this sends to partner is that you do not have enough to go directly to game as in example #2, but you do not have a weak overcall as in example #1. If partner has a minimum limit raise, he can sign off in 2♠ and you can pass. If partner has more than invitational values, he can bid 4♠. Notice that you only have a three-card diamond suit. This will often be the case. You have a known spade fit, so you are not trying to play diamonds.

Responses when you don't have support

Often you will not have support for partner after he overcalls. If you have a stopper in the opponent's suit, you can bid notrump with 7 to 10 (or 11) HCP. If you have a good suit of your own, you can bid it.

Here are two examples. In both cases the auction has proceeded:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
1♥	1♠	Pass	?

Example #1:

♠J 3 ♥K J 4 3 ♦K 10 3 ♣J 10 8 4

Bid 1NT. You enough HCP to act, you have a stopper and a balanced hand.

Example #2:

♠8 3 ♥K Q 3 ♦J 3 ♣K Q 9 8 4 2

Bid 2♣. You have 11 HCP and a good suit.

In both examples, if you pass 1♠, you may miss game if partner has a good overcall. If partner rebids spades, you can pass. You have shown your hand. ❑