

# play bridge

*A section designed with the newer player in mind.*

I have found that there is one bid that tends to be harder for partner to field than any other. You might be thinking about all sorts of exotic conventions, but the answer is a lot easier — the simple overcall.

Because people don't know how (or when) to overcall, their partners don't know how to respond. When I ask what the expectations are when they hear left-hand opponent open 1♣ and partner overcall 1♠, the most common answer is, "about eight points and a five-card suit." In a quick check of overcall ranges at the club one day, I found a low of five points and a high of 18. (I will always wonder what a five-point overcall looks like.)

If partner's bid could have a 13-point range, how to respond becomes a problem.

There are several reasons to overcall. You suggest a lead, you invite partner into the bidding, and you make it difficult for the opponents to communicate. If you have a weak suit and a weak hand, an overcall will seldom accomplish any of these goals.

You are unlikely to be able to compete, unless of course partner really has a great hand, in which case he may bid too much. If you end up on defense, partner is likely to get off to a poor lead. When the opponents hold most of the high cards, your bid sometimes gives the opponents extra options they would not have after a pass. Have a reason, therefore, before you overcall.

One tactical aspect of making an overcall is that you give the opponents more problems when you skip more suits. Here's an example: If your RHO opens 1♦ and you

overcall 2♣, that makes it extremely difficult for the partner of the opening bidder. Even though he has the negative double available, that may not fit his hand. Bidding a new suit at the two-level requires extra values, and 1NT is no longer an option. Now consider this auction: 1♣-1♦. The responder can bid a new suit at the one level or bid 1NT without showing extra values, and he still has the negative double to show both unbid suits.

What about making a two-level overcall? Even those who advocate very light overcalls at the one level know they must beef up those at the two level. Experienced players treat the two-level overcall as playing tricks and good values.

Here is a short quiz. RHO opens 1♠. What is your bid with the following hands?

1. ♠Q65 ♥AQ742 ♦Q93 ♣82.
2. ♠QJ ♥AJ932 ♦K54 ♣QJ7.
3. ♠6 ♥QJ10987 ♦A109 ♣A87.

The only one that is a good two-level overcall is No. 3. It has six playing tricks and a suit that needs little support. Hand No. 1 is weak in overall strength and suit texture — there are too many losers. Hand No. 2 is an opening bid with a terrible suit and, again, too many losers. Do not be surprised if you go minus 800 if you overcall.

Okay, so now that we know what an overcall is, we have to look at responder's choices. Most people treat the overcall as if it were an opening bid — even at the one level. One tool the responder must have in his arsenal is the cuebid. This is a way



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of showing you have a good hand without getting too high if partner has made a light overcall.

Your second quiz: LHO opens 1♣ and partner overcalls 1♠. What is your bid with the following?

1. ♠QJ4 ♥52 ♦A10876 ♣973.
2. ♠K8642 ♥9 ♦K7654 ♣103.
3. ♠Q964 ♥A854 ♦A954 ♣7.
4. ♠76 ♥A54 ♦KQ10965 ♣82.
5. ♠98 ♥AQ4 ♦A987 ♣KJ109.

#### *Answers:*

1. Raise to 2♠ with 8 support points.
2. Raise to 4♠. The same principles apply if partner had opened 1♠.
3. With 13 support points, cuebid 2♣.
4. Bid 2♦, constructive but not forcing.
5. Cuebid 2♣, planning to bid 2NT next. □

## *Notes from ACBL Accredited Teachers*