

# play bridge

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

## Overhauling your overcalls

Summer is upon us, and things are relatively quiet at the club. The snowbirds have all flown, but they are only a mouse-click away. The computer is a wonderful way of keeping in touch — not only with e-mail and instant messaging but also with our club web site.

We find the summer a good time to clean out things at the club, starting with the office and my desk. It also just might be a good time to clean out your convention card. Take a look at what you have on the card and decide if it's something you really need and use or if it is the latest gadget someone convinced you to try.

While you are at it, you might consider overhauling your overcalls. It seems like I hear "It's a bidder's game," or "Gotta interfere with the opponents," or "Just threw in a lead-director, pard" or "I had 10 points and a 5-card suit" more and more frequently.

My caution to you is that you should have a good reason for overcalling. A strong suit certainly has a lot going for it. Even if you have a weak hand, you are less likely to get into trouble if your suit is good. It also helps set the defense by getting your partner off to the right lead. Don't forget to make a jump overcall if you have a weak hand with a decent six-card suit. It is more descriptive and makes life more difficult for the opponents.

The idea of interfering with the opponents' bidding might not be as accurate as you think. When you overcall, the opponents have two

calls they didn't have over a pass — they can make a negative double and they can cuebid. In addition, many players have the ability to show five cards or more in an unbid suit if they freely bid it after an overcall, allowing their partner to comfortably raise with three-card support.

The most effective overcalls for interfering with the opponents are the ones that skip the most suits. For example, a 2♣ overcall after a 1♦ opening frequently presents difficulties for the responder. He might have one four-card major but not the other. He might have a five-card suit but only 6 or 7 high-card points. In addition, if the responder passes, the opener might not have the right hand to bid again.

Even a 1♠ overcall after a 1♣ opening can make the responder's life harder. The responder might have held a 1NT response without a spade stopper. He might hold a minimum hand with a diamond suit. There are simply more bids at the one level that he can no longer make. So, if you have a hand with a marginal overcall that will take up some of the opponents' space, you might consider making it.

The worst hand for an overcall is one with mediocre points and lacking a good suit. Two terrible things can happen. You may be outbid by the opponents and get partner off to a bad lead — remember when you overcalled J-8-5-4-3 and he led the king of your suit from K-2? Or your partner might never stop bidding until you are in the stratosphere, with the useful comment, "Thought



*Val Covalciuc*  
*ACBL Accredited Teacher*  
*valerick@comcast.net*

you had something, partner." Even undoubted, you could be in minus 200 territory.

One last tip about overcalls: do not be afraid to overcall with a good hand. Suppose you hold:

♠ A K J 7 5 ♥ A 8 4 ♦ K J 3 ♣ 6 4.

Your RHO opens 1♣. You can double but are not in a good position if your partner bids 1♥ or 1♦. Do you leave him where he is or bid the spade suit now? If you double and then bid spades, partner might not know to rebid his five-card heart suit when he has two low spades. LHO might raise to 3♣, shutting partner out and making you wonder if you should be back in at the three level.

It is more effective to overcall 1♠. If you have another opportunity to bid again — after LHO bids 2♣ or 1NT, for example — you can reopen the bidding with a double, showing a five-card spade suit for your overcall, tolerance for the red suits and a good overcall. Does that sound like an accurate picture of your hand? □

*Notes from ACBL Accredited Teachers*