

Newer Players

Ask Jerry



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Dear Jerry,
My partner and I are having a heated argument. He strongly prefers to play that our agreements following an overcall are basically the same as when following an opening bid. I strongly prefer that after an overcall, I can bid a new suit without forcing him to speak again. What do you think?

Doug

Hi Doug,

Great question – and one that I have a firm opinion on! What a shock. For starters, let's get a few definitions out of the way.

When your partner opens the bidding, bridge jargon defines you as “responder.” When your partner makes an overcall, you become the “advancer.” Perhaps the distinction in terms could be the first clue there are differences in your responsibilities.

When your partner opens the bidding, especially in a minor suit, he is often interested in alternative contracts and values your opinion. Because of this, one of responder's prime obligations after hearing a 1♣ or 1♦ opening bid, despite holding primary support for opener's minor, is to mention a four-card or longer major suit. For example, if your partner opened 1♦ and, as responder, you held:

♠Q642 ♥A4 ♦A9852 ♣63,

a forcing response of 1♠ is 100% the correct initial action. This facilitates finding a possible 4–4 spade fit with a diamond contract held in reserve. Contrast that with:

1♣ 1♦ Pass ?

This time your partner has overcalled, suggesting a desire to compete

for the opportunity to play the contract. In addition, unlike an opening bid, suit quality comes into play, as they are typically lead directing.

Typically an overcall expresses primary interest in the suit bid, and often little interest in other strains. With the hand above, as advancer, you have a clear obligation to raise diamonds immediately, choosing whatever methods you have to show a limit raise or better. Bidding 1♠ here should not be considered.

On to another example. You hold:

♠3 ♥853 ♦AQ9875 ♣Q72

and the auction proceeds:

1♥ 1♠ Pass ?

You have constructive values and a good suit of your own. I cannot fathom being forced to pass as I would if a 2♦ advance was a forcing bid! A friend and frequent partner, Sarge, provided what I think is excellent advice in many auctions. “Bid where you live.”

I cannot conceive of passing with those diamonds, nor do I want to force partner to speak again! I define a new suit advance as natural, constructive and never forcing. The overcaller has a number of options including pass with nothing further to add. He should always support with support or bid again with extra length, extra values or extra shape.

This begs the obvious question: How do you force partner to speak again after his overcall? My first comment is that, unless you hold support for his suit, it will be rare that you hold a hand that you absolutely want to force partner to speak again no matter what he has. Keep in mind, if as advancer, you change suits, your partner is expected to raise any time he has support. If

you change suits, he is expected to bid again when he holds either extra values or extra shape, i.e., length or a good second suit. If the overcaller holds none of these and passes, game is unlikely. If you happen to be dealt the rare very strong hand after an opening bid is followed by an overcall, I suggest you cuebid the opponent's suit, which in most cases will be a limit raise or better in partner's suit, but on occasion, simply the start of a forcing auction. As a passed hand, the cuebid is always a limit raise of partner's suit.

I remember a quote from world champion Mike Lawrence, who is one of my favorite bridge writers. It was something like, “People who use a new suit advance as a forcing bid obviously don't like to bid much.” So as to not misquote, I actually phoned Mike to see if I was correct. His answer: “I actually don't remember saying that, although it sounds like something I might have said.” ☺

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