

## Newer Players

## Ask Jerry



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**Dear Jerry,**  
**I play frequently online, and it seems that my opponents take great delight in wild preempts, which makes our constructive bidding difficult at best, impossible at worst. I never seem to be sure when or how to bid, either directly or in response to partner's overcall or double. Any advice?**

**Brow Beaten**

Hi BB,  
Your problems are nothing new. As early as 1942, Eli Culbertson said, "There is no good answer to a shut-out (preemptive) bid." Eddie Kantar agreed in 1978: "Let it be known that there is no good defense to an enemy preemptive opening." Mike Lawrence once said, "Some of the most difficult moments in bridge are when an opponent preempts and you have a good hand."

Suppose you hold:

♠A53 ♥KJ965 ♦A4 ♣854.

If your RHO deals and passes, you would open 1♥. If your RHO opens 1♣, a 1♥ overcall seems normal. What if your RHO opened 3♣?

You still have a reasonable hand, but entering the auction at the three level with these values and only a five-card suit seems dangerous. I have often taught that in a competitive auction, the word pass means one of two things: Either I have nothing to say, or there's nothing I can say that says what I have. By my standards, this is a clear pass. With that in mind, your question involves what do you need to enter the auction in the direct seat after an opponent's preempt.

In some early bridge literature, I read some discussions about predicting, or hoping, for values partner might hold

when your RHO starts with a preempt. Though it depends on the level of the preempt, the consensus seemed to be to expect – or perhaps better, hope – your partner holds around 6 or 7 points, and tolerance for whatever action you might choose.

Originally, I taught this as "the right of assumption." After a while, I came up with an acronym to sum this up: ESP – Expect Seven Points. To clarify, after RHO preempts, if you overcall and partner produces the 6 or 7 points you have arbitrarily assigned him, your overcall is reasonable. If you make a takeout double and advancer has around 7 points and picks one of your suits, the theory is your action was reasonable.

On the hand above, if your partner held:

♠K1072 ♥Q84 ♦Q752 ♣J2,

a very reasonable 8 HCP with better trump support than might be expected, you will lose at least one spade, one heart, one diamond and two clubs – and this assumes that hearts break 3-2, and that a third round of clubs doesn't promote a second trump trick for the defenders. If 3♥ is doubled, expect the worst! Therefore this hand should pass 3♣.

If your hand was slightly better, perhaps:

♠AJ3 ♥KJ1095 ♦A4 ♣854,

I would bid 3♥. A reasonable 7-point dummy, like the one above, gives you a play for nine tricks.

Your partner, advancer, needs to keep ESP in mind. If you take action, and he has the 7 or so points expected/hoped for, stay at the lowest possible level. If he holds less than what was expected, stay as low as possible and later

apologize for underholding! If he holds substantially better than what was expected, he needs to take some type of forward-going action.

Using the same 3♥ overcall as endorsed above, if advancer held:

♠K1072 ♥A8 ♦KJ52 ♣762,

he is well above the ESP his partner was hoping for. Despite only a doubleton heart, raise to 4♥ and see what happens.

Interesting in that if the opponents did not preempt, you are highly unlikely to reach a heart game, which has a reasonable chance of making! Most of the time, preempts hurt you, but occasionally they propel you to a good spot. Remember ESP is a guideline and not a guarantee for success. Some basis for making a guess is better than no basis. ☺

## BAMSA Conference June 28–July 1

**Bridge: A MindSport for All (BAMSA)** is hosting a free online international conference designed for academics, bridge players, teachers and organizers. The overall aim of the conference is to push the boundaries of current academic thinking and shape a future research agenda.

Broadly speaking, the sessions on the first and third day are theoretical in focus, and those on the second and fourth day are more practical. In addition to the live sessions, recordings will be available on the BAMSA website from May 2021. The full program and more information (including the registration form) are on the BAMSA website at [bridgemindsport.org](http://bridgemindsport.org). Any queries to [bamsa@stir.ac.uk](mailto:bamsa@stir.ac.uk).