



A series on overcalling and the competitive auction

VB#18 Year 1 Overcalls Part 2 SA	Contract: 2DX
Date: 21/07/2014	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North
 ♠ AQJ8
 ♥ AQT86
 ♦ 3
 ♣ JT2

West
 ♠ 9754
 ♥ K92
 ♦ 52
 ♣ 8653



East
 ♠ K2
 ♥ 753
 ♦ AJ974
 ♣ AQ4

South
 ♠ T63
 ♥ J4
 ♦ KQT86
 ♣ K97

This series continues to look at one of the trickiest areas of bidding – the contested auction.

There are all sorts of traps for the unwary when contesting the auction and the tactics of when you should bid, how much you should bid and when you should keep your mouth shut could fill an entire book. In truth, such topics have indeed filled books... Here we can only introduce you to the basic principles.

Now, vulnerability plays an important part in this area of the game as the risks for bidding are high and penalties are greater when vulnerable. So far in V-Blue we have ignored vulnerability – from this issue forward we will include it.

When the North, South, East, West indicators on the table are Red you are vulnerable – when they are Green you are not vulnerable. You will note that on Hand 1 both sides are not vulnerable. On Hand 2 North-South are vulnerable, East-West are not. There is a pattern, which is recognized across the world, connecting Hand numbers and vulnerabilities. No, you do not need to remember this pattern...

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	P
P	1♥	2♦	X
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ J



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This is something of a fantasy hand because the bidding belongs in the Dark Ages but there is a very powerful point (or two) to be made here.

Bidding. North (your partner) opens 1♥ and East enters the fray with 2♦. You (South) Double that **for penalties** and everybody Passes.

[Note – in the mid-20th century this is how they used to bid. Today such a Double by you would have a different meaning. What, exactly? Buy a few more editions of V-Blue and we will explain....!]

Play. This is just too excruciating to go through in detail. It is, in short, a nightmare for declarer who manages just three tricks (the ♦A, the ♠K and the ♣A).

Your partner is not one to allow East-West to grieve in private. "I make that 1100 points", crows North, loudly, "or have a missed a nought out somewhere?"

Post-mortem. Now, was East unlucky or did he do something wrong? Take a careful look at his hand – was that worth a 2♦ overcall after North had opened 1♥? After all, look again at the hands that have been overcalling 1♠ in the previous set of deals. You have overcalled on as little as 9 points – here East has a robust opening bid, a whole 14 points.

The truth is that East was (a little) unlucky to run into such a firestorm but it is certainly true that his overcall was an awful bid.

Why? Well, an overcall at the two-level is very different animal from a one-level overcall. This may need some explanation.

Hand 1. This deal contains a cautionary lesson for the unwary. We are going to put you in the pleasurable position of teaching the opponents a sharp lesson but to do that we will have to put you in a Time Machine.

Fasten your seat-belts as we are returning to the 20th century. When the lights stop flashing we will alight in a time where there is Flower Power, psychedelic designs and a distinct lack of bidding subtlety. However, this will work in your favor...

Firstly you cannot realistically expect to contest the auction when your suit is a minor. If the opponents have Hearts or Spades they will simply outbid you. The great Eddie Kantar put it succinctly when he said, "You can't fight tanks with toy soldiers". Brilliant.

Secondly, you should be very wary of bidding at the two-level on poor suits. Here, ♠A J 9 7 5 has more holes than a proverbial Swiss cheese. In the play of this deal it was worth precisely one trick, remember.

Thirdly, no experienced player likes to make a two-level overcall on a 5-3-3-2 hand. Such stubby-shaped hands simply contain too many losers to be suitable to contest the auction. Even if not Doubled you won't take many tricks with this type of hand.

In conclusion it is a truism that there are certainly hands that would open the bidding but not overcall and there are certainly hands that would not overcall but would open the bidding.

The world of competitive bidding is a dark and difficult one. Don't expect to learn all its secrets immediately.



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VB#18 Year 1 Overcalls Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/07/2014	By: West
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North
 ♠ 82
 ♥ K7643
 ♦ 8642
 ♣ 97

West
 ♠ QJ4
 ♥ AT2
 ♦ J93
 ♣ J864



East
 ♠ 973
 ♥ QJ8
 ♦ AKQT
 ♣ AK2

South
 ♠ AKT65
 ♥ 95
 ♦ 75
 ♣ QT53

If the gods played cards, they would always have Spades. So when you have them, behave in a god-like manner and take control – if it makes sense, of course.

Just a brief reminder of the three reasons we overcall:

- 1) It may actually be our hand.
- 2) We can tell partner what to lead... often one he wouldn't normally make.
- 3) Overcalls make it more difficult for the opponents to find the perfect contract when it isn't our hand. That doesn't mean you overcall indiscriminately. You can't have both a bad hand **and** a bad suit!

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♦	1♠
1NT	P	3NT	P
P	P		

Lead: ♠ 8

Bidding. Is that South hand worth an overcall of 1♠, non-vulnerable, over East's opening bid of 1♦? Well, most players these days would say Yes, especially against vulnerable opponents. Your suit is good and you have the all-important top-ranking suit. It is written in the good book, "*He who hath Spades ruleth the auction*" or it will be when one of us here at VuBridge gets round to writing it...

Note that a Spade lead beats 3NT whereas North's natural Heart lead lets it through. Many overcalls are made for lead-direction purposes (although mainly at the one-level; two-level overcalls belong to a different species altogether).


Play. South has to follow up his strategic bidding with sensible defense; after North leads the indicated Spade you must play small (or the ♠10) to retain communication with your partner's hand to beat 3NT.

Declarer has little option but to try the Heart finesse. When North turns up with the ♥K he still has a Spade left to lead to your remaining winners.



A series on overcalling and the competitive auction

Overcalls year 1 V-Blue	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/07/2014	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

	North		
	♠ 5		
	♥ K9		
	♦ JT53		
	♣ AKJ986		
West		East	
♠ AKQ83		♠ 642	
♥ QJ62		♥ T8754	
♦ KQ6		♦ 984	
♣ 7		♣ 54	
	South		
	♠ JT97		
	♥ A3		
	♦ A72		
	♣ QT32		

We have seen a sloppy two-level overcall get murdered to the tune of 1100 points (Hand 1).

What sort of hand should you expect if your oh-so-reliable partner does overcall at the two-level?

Note that he is vulnerable on this deal – and yes, that does make a difference.

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	P
1♠	2♣	P	3NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ A

Bidding. This is the other side of the coin to one mentioned earlier about unspeakable two-level overcalls on poor suits, especially in a minor. After West opens 1♠ North overcalls 2♣, vulnerable. With a 6-4-2-1 pattern and a good six-card suit 2♣ is a respectable bid, if minimum.

What should you do with the South hand? Well, you can bank on six Club tricks (a two-level overcall in Clubs with a reliable partner usually shows a six-card suit) and two Aces so why not have a stab at 3NT? Where there are eight sure tricks there are usually nine...

West might try a Double but he'd be hard pushed to find a Heart lead or shift – the only way that he might stop an overtrick. If West does Double there's a strong case for giving him the lash with a Redouble ...

Play. There is nothing at all to the play (sorry about that, folks!) as you have nine "toppers". The point of this hand is to emphasise that overcalls, especially two-level overcalls vulnerable, show *playing tricks*, not necessarily points. Here you make an easy game on just 23 points.



A series on overcalling and the competitive auction

VB#18 Year 1 Overcalls Part 2 SA	Contract: 2S
Date: 21/07/2014	By: West
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

West	North	East	South
1♠	P	2♣	P
2♦	P	2♣	P
P	P		

Lead: ♠ 3

A hand that has seen the light of day a few times in the past. This deal has been set for various classes and many players have ended up with egg on their faces.

Bidding. Do you overcall on that South collection after 1♠ by West, 2♣ by East? If so, **why?**

Listen to the bidding – West has an opening bid (say 12+ points) and East has a two-level response (so has 10+ points). You have 17 points so North has...? Well, the answer is that North can have at most 1 point and as you are staring at all four Jacks that becomes a little unlikely.

With North marked with a blizzard how can you possibly contest the auction?

If the hand is a **fit** hand the opponents will outbid you in Spades or Hearts – if the hand is a **misfit** then bidding asks for trouble in a big way. You may be Doubled and set zillions. If you Pass, 2♠ is where East-West will settle and the score will be about 140 (for 2♠ plus one).

However, 2♦ Doubled costs about 1400, an inflation rate of 1000%. If this happens to you please don't use the word "unlucky" when you try to make excuses to your partner. It isn't.

The key points here are that your Spade honors are badly placed and your hand consists of Jacks. These are good cards to defend with but not to declare with. Also, if you did bid 2♦ and didn't get walloped for a massive penalty your opponents must be Santa Claus and Rudolph.

North
♠ 543
♥ 8743
♦ 73
♣ T832

West
♠ AQ987
♥ QT
♦ KQT8
♣ 97



East
♠ 62
♥ K962
♦ 65
♣ AK654

South
♠ KJT
♥ AJ5
♦ AJ942
♣ QJ

You have a lovely hand here. What is the best way of bidding it?



A series on overcalling and the competitive auction

Overcalls year 1 V-Blue	Contract: 3S
Date: 21/07/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ KT87	
	♥ 9642	
	♦ 92	
	♣ AT8	
West		East
♠ 532		♠ 4
♥ J5		♥ AKQ87
♦ AT8		♦ QJ64
♣ KQ965		♣ J42
	South	
	♠ AQJ96	
	♥ T3	
	♦ K753	
	♣ 73	

On this deal you make your pitch (by overcalling on a decent suit) and leave it up to partner to decide how far to contest the auction.

This sort of decision is difficult. If you (as a pair) under-compete you allow the opponents to steal the contract far too easily. On the other hand, if you over-compete you may find that the opponents were about to go down in a contract and now you are going down in yours... Tricky.

Sometimes very tricky.

West	North	East	South
-	P	1♥	1♠
2♣	2♠	3♣	P
P	3♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ J

On this deal it looks as though your partner, sitting North, has done too much. On the other hand, maybe he has judged it to perfection.

Bidding. East (on your right) starts proceedings with 1♥ and you have an obvious intervention of 1♠. True, 1♠ over 1♥ doesn't take up much bidding space but you do have a good five-card suit and it is worth dipping your toes in the water now, while you still can.

West (on your left) responds 2♣ and partner raises you to 2♠. Although you are unaware of this at the time North has already made East's life distinctly awkward. What do you suggest that player should bid? 3♦? That's pushing it – up at the three-level with no guarantee that West has any interest in Diamonds or Hearts. Pass, then? Well, they used to take men out at dawn and shoot them for such acts of cowardice in the face of the enemy.

East, quite reasonably, decided to support his partner's suit – much the best solution when pushed into a corner. Neither you nor West have anything more to say, and this is Passed to partner who decides to push further with 3♠. Knowing when to bid and when to Pass in these situations is very difficult – here North has judged very well.

3♠ ends the auction and West leads his partner's suit – the ♥J.

Play. Despite being heavily outgunned (the points are split 23-17 in favor of East-West) you have a genuine chance of making 3♠. If East (the player who opened the bidding) has the ♦A you can make five Spades, one Diamond, one Club and two ruffs on the table.

With this in mind, you cross to the ♣A and lead a Diamond to the ♦K, losing to the ♦A. This defeats 3♠, although you can still scramble eight tricks for one off.

Was North wrong to bid 3♠? Well, let's look at what would have happened in 3♣.

As defenders you would make one Spade trick, no Heart tricks, no Diamond trick and one Club

trick. East-West would have made *at least* ten tricks in Clubs.

If the ♦A had been lying right you might (just!) have held 3♣ to nine tricks but now you would have made 3♣. Either way, it was right to play in 3♣ as you were certain to get a minus score otherwise.

By bidding to the three-level it was a case of heads you win, tails you don't lose. How did North know to bid to 3♣ with only 7 points? Well, the "trick" is that (in general) you should bid to the level of the ***known number of trumps***. North knew that your side had nine trumps so he was justified in bidding to the nine trick level.

This may appear odd logic but it works surprisingly often.



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VB#18 Year 1 Overcalls Part 2 SA	Contract: 2H
Date: 21/07/2014	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

North
 ♠ 643
 ♥ K2
 ♦ 9763
 ♣ AT54

West
 ♠ 7
 ♥ 753
 ♦ QJ542
 ♣ K983



East
 ♠ AQ985
 ♥ AQ64
 ♦ T8
 ♣ J7

South
 ♠ KJT2
 ♥ JT98
 ♦ AK
 ♣ Q62

Some deals you want to fight tooth and nail to gain the declaration, not really minding if your final contract fails by a trick or two. One example of this is Hand 5.

On other deals it is best just to let the opponents get on with it and play the hand themselves.

When there is a **fit** you should be bidding. When the hand is a **misfit** then, quite simply, you should be Passing.

What sort of hand is this?

West	North	East	South
-	P	1♠	P
1NT	P	2♥	P
P	P		

Lead: ♥ J

Sometimes the best bid is "No Bid"...

Bidding. East (on your right) opens 1♠ and you (South) have to find a bid. What would you choose? Well, the correct bid, without a doubt, is Pass. (And smoothly, too. Don't give anything away with hesitations, mannerisms or somesuch).

What is the alternative to Pass? 1NT? Well, that normally shows 15-17 points (or thereabouts) so you aren't actually strong enough to do that. Double? Well, that action is seriously flawed. That asks (demands) that partner should bid something. Do you really want partner to bid 2♣ or (worse) 2♦ on a weak hand with a bad four-card suit?

The opponents want Spades to be trumps – and so do you! The best way of ensuring that happy outcome is to step courteously out of the way and let them get on with it...!

After you Pass West responds 1NT and East rebids 2♥. You have nothing to say and that gets Passed out.

Play. This is an unusual sequence but one where you can picture the dummy before it appears in all its glory. West is clearly stuffed with minor-suit cards. He is short in Spades and prefers Hearts (if he had, say, two Spades and two Hearts it would be his duty to correct 2♥ to 2♠). So dummy is likely to have short Spades and declarer is likely to lead Spades and trump them on the dummy. How can you prevent that? Simple – lead a trump.

After a trump lead 2♥ plays appallingly for poor East. He can win the Heart lead, cash the ♠A and take a Spade ruff but after that the hand falls apart. Declarer has to come to a Spade, a ruff, two trumps and a Club but that's it – three down. Unlucky. Note that East-West have done nothing wrong.

Post-mortem. Now that you have taken a sizeable penalty off 2♥ do you think it's right to have bid over 1♠? Of course not! This is a deal where neither side can make anything. (Well, you might have made 1NT but it's not certain that you would do so after a Diamond lead).

One of the major learning points of this deal is that bridge hands broadly fall into two categories – **fit** hands and **misfit** hands. A **fit** hand is where both sides have a trump suit that they like (an example is Hand 5). On these deals both sides can make contracts (in the case of Hand 5 North-South can make 2♠, East-West can make 4♣) so it is important to bid as high as you dare.

A **misfit** hand is where neither side has a decent trump fit. Hands 1 and 4 fall into this category. On this type of deal no one can make much beyond 1NT or so. Here, the golden rule is to Pass (or Double!) and let the opponents declare the hand. If they make their contract you can rest easy that you were missing nothing.

As soon as you diagnose a *misfit*, Pass! And the clearest indication of a misfit is when the opponents open the bidding in your best suit.