

COMMON-SENSE HAND EVALUATION

Lesson 3, 8 Dec 2011

Bob Boyd

PROBLEM: Flight C players miss a disproportionate number of games for two reasons: 1) as opener and overcaller, they often do not adhere to normal standards, and 2) as responder and advancer, they often focus too much on high-card points (HCP) rather than visualizing how the two hands fit together.

SCOPE: Tonight's lesson is limited to those cases where opener or overcaller shows a major suit and you, partner, have at least three cards in the suit.

ASSESSING YOUR HAND:

- A major-suit game usually requires 25 points; assume opener or overcaller is reliable and has the high card point (HCP) values we have discussed in the first two lessons
- With a fit of at least three cards in the suit bid, include dummy points in the hand:
 - Void: 5
 - Singleton: 3
 - Doubleton: 1 (at best)
 - With four trumps, count both values for two short suits; with only three trumps, count only the shorter of two suits
- **Do not get fixated on HCP; distribution is magic.** After 1♠ opening bid w/5 spades and only 12-14 HCP, this 5-HCP hand (♠J864 ♥8 ♦8 ♣AT97643):
 - Will produce game about 70% of the time
 - Will yield at least nine tricks in a spade contract about 95% of the time
 - Is worth at least an invitational bid (5 HCP + 6 dummy points = 11); a jump to game is reasonable (see last bullet under Forcing Responses)
 - NOTE: Simulations show this has the same value as ♠J864 ♥K8 ♦K87 ♣AT97 (11 HCP)
- HCP plus dummy points equal your hand's value; show this by a:
 - Simple **raise**: "Good" five to a "bad" 9 points
 - **Invitational** raise: "Good" 9 to 11 points
 - **Game-forcing** bid: 12 or more points
- "Good" hands may have an extra trump, an extra doubleton, or tens and nines for texture; "bad" hands have flat distribution, queens and jacks instead of kings, and lower spot cards

SELECTING YOUR RESPONSE TO AN OPENING BID OF 1♠ OR 1♥:

- **Raise:** Self-explanatory; a simple raise requires only three trumps
- **Invitational:** Jump in the suit
 - Old style: At least three trumps headed by the queen or better
 - New style: At least four trumps; with only three, start with a Forcing NT, then jump in the suit (RECOMMENDED)
 - After a 3rd or 4th seat opening, most players use the Drury Convention to show a limit raise so they do not have to take the risk of bidding three with minimum hands (NOTE: If you do not play Drury, you should not open very light hands in 3rd seat because of the risk you will be too high if partner has a fit)

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- Old style: Bid 2♣ with at least three trumps
- New style: Bid 2♣ w/ three trumps, and 2♦ w/ four trumps (RECOMMENDED)
- The Bergen Convention combines artificial raises and preemptive jumps in opener's suit; that's a topic for another day
- **Forcing:** Several choices with support, each for different types of hands:
 - **New suit.** With only three-card support and 10+ HCP (12+ in Two-Over-One), it is best to force opener to describe his hand (NOTE: An advantage of Two-Over-One is that this sets up a game force and you can both describe your hands without worry). Once you support opener's suit, you can cue bid to see if there might be slam. If you both have minimum hands, you may be able to try 3NT for a nine-trick game
 - **Jacoby 2NT.** This is a game-force promising four or more trumps and 12+ HCP. Partner will respond as follows:
 - New suit at the 3-level. Singleton or void
 - New suit at the 4-level. Second suit (NOTE: Some pairs bid a new suit at the 3-level with a singleton and at the 4-level with a void; this means you cannot show a second suit, so it is not recommended)
 - Game in suit bid. No extra values, no shortness
 - 3 of suit bid. At least a king more than minimum, no shortness (NOTE: If you open 1NT with a five-card major, this bid would usually show 18 HCP or so)
 - **Splinter.** This is a specialized bid showing about 10-12 HCP with four trump and a singleton or void in a side suit. (NOTE: This counts as 13-17 total points—HCP plus dummy points.) Usually the singleton is not an honor, but if you have 10 HCP besides that honor, you can splinter. I like to have some honor in each of the two remaining suits. The advantage of a splinter is that partner immediately knows if he has wasted values in the suit you bid. If he doesn't, he can investigate slam by cue bidding and you may reach an unbeatable 26 HCP slam
 - **Jump to Game.** In the old days, this bid was described by the mantra "Four trumps, singleton, trick-and-a-half." This is still a good idea; there is a preemptive element about this bid. With a good hand, you should opt for one of the other forcing bids to avoid missing a slam. (NOTE: If you play Bergen, this is a weak bid with five trumps)

IMPORTANT: Inexperienced players often blast to game with a good hand because they are afraid partner may not recognize a forcing bid and will pass short of game. Observe this **basic tenet of bidding:**
A new suit by a responder who is an unpassed hand is forcing

(Exception: If you play New Minor Forcing, 1♣/♦—1♠, then 1NT by opener and 2♥ by responder is not, since with a good hand, responder will check for four hearts or three spades with the new minor)

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RESPONDING TO AN OVERCALL

- Because partner may have less than an opening bid and at least one opponent has a good hand, the chance of game is less, so advancer (i.e., responder to an overcall) has fewer options:
 - **Raise:** Competitive, promising at least three trumps
 - **Jump Raise:** Used to be forcing, but it is now usually preemptive with four+ trumps
 - **Cue bid:** Limit raise or better (same requirements as responding to an opening bid); if the opponents have bid two suits, consider using this simple convention:
 - With three trumps, cue bid the lower-ranking suit
 - With four+ trumps, cue bid the higher-ranking suit (CAUTION: Only do this if it will not force overcaller to bid at the 4-level)
- A minority of players considers a new suit by advancer (if an unpassed hand) as forcing; most play it as non-forcing, so the cue bid is the only force. **Advice on bidding a new suit:** Unless your suit is nearly solid, don't bid it without a doubleton in partner's suit so he can go back to it

Questions? E-mail me at bobbyd72@aol.com

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MAGIC!
♠J864
♥8 **70%**
♦8 **Game**
♣AT97643
1

MAGIC!
♠J864
♥K8 **Same**
♦K87 **70%**
♣AT97
2

*PROBLEMS
ASSUME 1♠
OPENING OR
OVERCALL*
3

GOOD 5
♠KJ42
♥85
♦J7652
♣73
4

QUES. 5
♠KJ4
♥852
♦J765
♣732
5

BAD 5
♠Q94
♥852
♦J765
♣Q32
6

GOOD 9
♠QT2
♥K85
♦AT652
♣73
7

QUES. 9
♠QT2
♥K85
♦J7652
♣K3
8

BAD 9
♠QT2
♥K85
♦J7652
♣QJ
9

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??????

♠T654
♥Q82
♦AQ652
♣7

10

DRURY?

♠KJ42
♥K85
♦Q652
♣73

Yes

11

DRURY?

♠KJ4 **No.**
♥K85 **Raise**
♦Q652
♣732

12

DRURY?

♠QJ42
♥K85
♦Q6532
♣7

Yes

13

JACOBY 2NT

♠AJ42
♥9854
♦AK5
♣Q3

14

SPLINTER

♠KT74
♥9
♦Q652
♣AQ42

15

Responses to Overcalls

GAME JUMP

♠J962
♥985
♦AQ532
♣7

16

JUMP RAISE

♠QT65
♥7
♦98743
♣K63

Vul?

17

CUE BID

♠9842
♥K95
♦A862
♣K3

18