

## NVBA I/N Teaching

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### Entering the Auction after Opponents' Preempts, Advancing

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**Q:** Why do the opponents continue to preempt?

**A:** Because it works!

So what do Pard and I do about it? We have the same five options we have over any of their bids:

\* a pass

\* a new suit

\* a cuebid of their suit

\* a NT overcall

\* a double

Let's see what Bill Root says about this, in "*Commonsense Bidding*."

When an opponent opens the bidding with a preemptive bid, your side is deprived of much bidding space. Your side may have to do some helter-skelter bidding in an effort to get to your best contract. You must rely heavily on good judgment (and good luck!) to achieve the maximum result.

Root suggests relying on balancing. Don't enter the bidding when RHO preempts unless you have solid, sound values -- especially when you are vulnerable. But then how does your side get in?

When LHO preempts *below game level* and it is passed around to you, you should often bid with doubtful values. Is this gambling? Yes, but it is also protecting partner who passed.

### Suit Overcalls of Preemptive Bids

You hold ♠ A Q T 8 5 ♥ 7 2 ♦ A Q 4 ♣ 9 5 2; RHO opens 1 ♥. Of course you overcall 1 ♠. But with the same hand, if RHO opens 3 ♥, Root suggests you pass! He says your suit is too weak. Your Pard should expect you to have a stronger hand; Pard may raise you to 4 ♠ when you'll go down 2.

Of course Root wrote this 29 years ago, and a lot has changed since then, but Root's teaching is still well-respected. What does that mean for you? As always, **it's most important that you and Pard are on the same page.** (S)he must know what to expect when you directly overcall a preempt; you must know the same when Pard makes that direct overcall.

Same hand, auction goes (3 ♥) p (p) to you. RHO's pass of 3 ♥ shows a hand limited in HCP or ♥ length; indicating Pard holds some values. If Pard is short in ♠, the trump stack is in front of you and not behind you. If you bid, Pard will know you may be weaker than if you bid 3 ♠ directly over their preempt, so will be less inclined to raise you to game. Root bids 3 ♠ in balancing seat; so do I, so should you.

You hold ♠ A Q 9 8 5 2 ♥ 9 3 ♦ 5 ♣ A K J 3; RHO opens 3 ♦. Bid 3 ♠. Your suit is good (note 6 of them), distribution is excellent (note a good second suit and two short suits). Small chance you will be doubled and set; if Pard raises to game (or even slam), you have values that should not disappoint and should make it easily.

Same hand, auction goes (3 ♦) p (p) -- bid 4 ♠. You have more than Pard will expect if you only bid 3 ♠; so you gamble that Pard has the little you will need for game.

Third example hand, you hold ♠ A Q J T 9 2 ♥ 4 ♦ K J 4 ♣ 7 6 5; RHO opens 3 ♥. Root bids 3 ♠ because of the strong ♠ suit. Another reason is that your defensive values are limited; you fear a double game swing or missing a good sacrifice if you don't overcall.

Fourth hand, same as above but swap the Major suits. RHO opens 3 ♠. Root bids 4 ♥ directly only if not vulnerable; with a seventh ♥ (one less black card) he bids it at any vulnerability.

**The strategy for balancing with shady values applies only below game level**, because you can then predict that Pard has values. The requirements to bid in balancing seat when they preempt at game are about the same as in direct seat. Location of honors might influence you to gamble a bit more in balancing seat.

You hold ♠ 7 ♥ A Q T 6 4 3 ♦ A T 5 3 ♣ 8 2; auction (4 ♠) p (p) -- and you balance with 5 ♥. Why?

\* you may make it

\* it may be a good sacrifice against their making 4 ♠ contract

\* they may bid on to 5 ♠ and go down.

Of course you may be unlucky and go down a few in 5 ♥x -- but this is less likely in balancing seat as any missing ♥ honors are more likely in front of your suit than behind it.

### **Cuebid over Preemptive Bids**

A cuebid of the opening bidder's suit shows a powerhouse. The advancer (Pard) is expected to bid one of the unbid suits, and requires very little to bid slam. *Be sure you and Pard are on the same page here; if you can cuebid with a one-suited powerhouse, Pard should NOT figure you for adequate support in every unbid suit.* You hold ♠-- ♥ A Q T 2 ♦ A Q 7 4 3 ♣ A K J T. RHO bids 3 ♠. Cuebid 4 ♠. If Advancer bids 5 ♣/♦/♥, you should pass as Pard may have a very poor hand. If a slam can be made, it is up to advancer to bid it.

### **NoTrump Overcalls of Preemptive Bids**

A 2 NT overcall of a weak 2 bid shows a 1 NT opening or a shade more. Do NOT try this if RHO has bid the weak 2 and you have a balanced 15 HCP, many of which are Quacks! Do NOT try this if you have only one stopper in their suit, and no obvious source of tricks. This is a very good time and place to be conservative.

The point-count requirements to overcall a 3-level preempt with 3 NT are "hard to define." It depends on how much of a gambler you are. Root's suggestion for a direct overcall (RHO preempted) is at least 18-19 HCP, and 15-16 in balancing position (LHO preempted).

You hold ♠ K 4 2 ♥ A J T ♦ K J T 7 ♣ K T 5. Auction: (3 ♥) p (p) -- bid 3 NT. You have only 15 HCP but the three tens will help. If RHO opens 3 ♥, pass. Your hand is too weak for a direct 3 NT overcall and unsuitable (*pun intended*) for any other bid.

You hold ♠ K 9 ♥ A J 8 ♦ A K J 7 3 ♣ K T 5. Over RHO's 3 ♥, bid 3 NT. If (3 ♥) p (p), bid 3 NT.

You hold ♠ A J ♥ A J 8 ♦ A K Q J 3 ♣ K J 2. Over RHO's 3 ♥, bid 3 NT. If (3 ♥) p (p), bid 3 NT. You have 25 points (incl. one for the 5th ♦), and you are too strong for this bid -- but anything else may get you beyond a makeable game. Pard will not expect such a strong hand, and may well pass when slam is cold. Remember, the opponents preempt because it works. Take your plus score. Why not double? Pard could be a bust, preempter may be void in ♦, and actually make the contract. Settle for your plus score.

You hold ♠ 7 3 ♥-- ♦ A K J 9 2 ♣ A J T 8 5 4. Over RHO's 3 ♥/♠ preempt, bid 4 NT. Yes, the **Unusual NT** is alive and well at this level, but requires what you have here -- a "very substantial hand."

A 4 NT overcall of a 4 ♥/♠ preempt is takeout; over 4 ♥ it shows both ♦ and ♣; over 4 ♠ it's a three-suited takeout.

You hold ♠ 7 ♥ 3 ♦ A Q J 7 6 4 ♣ K Q J T 2. Over RHO's 4 ♥ opener, bid 4 NT. Over RHO's 4 ♠ opener, bid 5 ♦. You can't stand Pard's expected 5 ♥ bid over a 4 NT three-suited takeout from you. You can't show both suits, so show the longer. Remember, they preempt because it works. Do the best you can to show what you have.

### Doubles of Preemptive Bids Below Game Level

All of these are *takeout doubles*, according to Root. Distribution requirements are similar to those for takeout doubles of one-level opening bids, but due to the higher level, you need a stronger hand. As with overcalls, Root says be very sound in direct seat, less is required in balancing seat.

You hold ♠ K T 5 3 ♥ 8 3 ♦ A J T ♣ K J 6 2; RHO opens 3 ♥. Pass. Over 1 ♥ you double, but you are too weak to act directly at the 3 level. If the auction goes (3 ♥) p (p), then you double.

You hold ♠ A J 7 4 ♥ 5 ♦ A T 6 2 ♣ K J T 9; RHO opens 3 ♥. Double; your shape is textbook, and you have those T's and that 9.

You hold ♠ A Q 6 ♥ 7 4 3 ♦ A 8 ♣ K Q 9 3 2; RHO opens 3 ♥. Pass. When your hand does not fit the pattern for a takeout double and your long suit is not strong enough to bid, it may be wise to pass with a strong hand.

In balancing seat (check the vulnerability), it may be right to gamble with a double. If you pass, you could miss game when Pard has a similar-strength hand. *It's apparently never right to introduce a K Q 9 3 2 suit at the 4 level without something from Pard first.*

As at lower levels, with a hand where you want to double for penalty, you pass and hope Pard balances with a double. In balancing seat, you just pass and stifle your *sigh* as that's giving unauthorized information (UI) to Pard.

You hold ♠ K J 9 8 ♥ 4 3 ♦ A Q 6 ♣ A T 7 2; RHO opens 3 ♠. Pass. If LHO opens, and you see (3 ♠) p (p), you also pass (*sigh!*). If LHO opens, and you see (3 ♠) DBL (p), you also pass (*smile!*). Watch out for sharing UI with Pard; develop the "poker face" and wear it!

## Doubles of Preemptive Bids at Game Level

Root says doubles of 5 ♣/♦ are penalty and that if you double 4 ♥/♠ you should be prepared for Pard's pass or bid -- these doubles he calls *optional* doubles. Your mileage may vary from Root's, but should not vary from Pard's. ***Be on the same page as Pard!***

### Okay, what does Advancer do?

**Pard overcalled** -- if that was in direct seat, Pard has solid values; if in balancing seat, may have shadier values. As advancer, you take this into account.

You hold ♠ K 8 ♥ 5 4 2 ♦ T 9 7 6 3 ♣ A Q 4. You see (3 ♥) 3 ♠ (p); bid 4 ♠. If you see (3 ♥) and you pass, then see (p) 3 ♠, (p); then pass. Pard may well have stretched to bid 3 ♠ in balancing seat; you have no more -- and maybe less -- than Pard counted on when balancing.

### Pard bid 4 NT --

You hold ♠ T 8 7 ♥ 9 7 5 4 3 ♦ 8 2 ♣ A 6 4; you see (4 ♠) 4 NT (p); bid 5 ♥. If you see RHO's 4 ♠ and pass, then see (p) 4 NT (p), you still must bid 5 ♥. Change a small ♥ to the A; in the first case you would be justified in bidding 6 ♥; in the second, no way.

You hold ♠ K Q 9 4 3 ♥ 7 6 5 ♦ T 8 3 ♣ 8 2; you see (4 ♥) 4 NT (p); bid 5 ♦. You are NOT strong enough to pass and force Pard to play it; Pard has no better than ♠ x x. Gotta bid something, suck it up and bid your best minor.