

COMMON-SENSE HAND EVALUATION

Lesson 3, Responses to ♥/♠ Opening Bids & Overcalls with Support, 30 May 2019

ASSESSING YOUR HAND:

- A major-suit game usually requires 25 points; assume opener or overcaller is reliable and has the high card point (HCP) value and suit quality we discussed in the first two lessons
- **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 and nine tricks about 95% of the time
 - Is worth at least an invitational bid (5 HCP + 6 dummy points = 11), but a better bid is an immediate jump to game (this specialized bid is discussed below)
 - Has the same value as ♠J864 ♥K8 ♦K87 ♣AT97 (11 HCP) according to simulations
- Until you get a good feel for tricks and losers, when you have at least 3-card support, count dummy points. With 3-card support, add the best one of these: 5 points for a void, 3 for a singleton, or 1 for a doubleton. With 4-card support, add those values for two short suits.
- 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.

RESPONDING TO AN OPENING BID OF 1♠ OR 1♥ (NO COMPETITION):

- **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**)
 - If playing Standard American and you hold a good suit of your own, bid it as a one-round force. Partner may rebid his suit or raise yours. If not, you can show support later.
 - 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). Drury is simple:
 - Old style: Bid 2♣ with at least three trumps
 - New style: Bid 2♣ w/ three trumps, and 2♦ w/ four trumps (**RECOMMENDED**)
- **Forcing**: Several choices with support, each for different types of hands:
 - **New suit**. If playing Two-Over-One, with only three-card support and 12+ HCP, it may be best to bid your suit to force opener to describe his hand (**NOTE: An advantage of Two-Over-One is that the new suit is a game force and you can both describe your hands leisurely**). After you support opener's suit or she supports yours, you can cue bid to see if there might be slam.
 - **Jacoby 2NT**. This jump to 2NT is a game-force with four or more trumps and 12+ HCP. Opener will respond as follows:

- New suit at the 3-level. Singleton or void in that suit
- New suit at the 4-level. Second suit
- 3 of suit bid. At least a king more than minimum, no singleton or void
- Game in suit bid. No extra values, no singleton or void
- **Splinter.** This specialized bid is a double jump in a new suit showing a good 9 to 11 HCP with at least four trumps and a singleton or void in that suit. (**NOTE:** This counts as 12-16 HCP and 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; the bid is primarily preemptive although game often makes. This bid takes up all the bidding space and prevents the opponents from exchanging information, which may avoid a double or keep them from making a 5-level game. With a strong hand, opt for one of the other forcing bids to avoid missing a slam.

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).

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

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