

Pre-emptive bidding: Lecture 3

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Other responses to weak twos:

The convention card standard is that a new suit by responder – eg 2D – (P) – 2S is **forcing**. If you want to play it as non-forcing it's alertable. Pre-empter has two options: with even a couple of small cards in the responder's suit, raise it; otherwise, repeat the opening suit. The meaning of a new suit by responder is (1) I also have a long suit, 6 cards or better, and (2) my hand is better than yours!

Examples: after opening pre-empt of 2D by partner, you have:

Kx, AQJTx, Jxx, Ax – 15 HCP and a very nice heart suit. Bid 2H – if opener responds 3H (he has at least two cards) you have a decision to make – pass or try 4? It's possible but marginal – depends how lucky you feel (more tempting to try for game if you are vulnerable so that partner presumably made a decent preempt). If partner responds 3D I would pass. 3NT is too risky.

Suppose instead you have Kx, AQxxxx, x, AQxx – 15 HCP but only one diamond. This is tricky. You could try either 2H, showing suit, or 2NT, asking about an entry in another suit. But in either case, partner might respond 3D (showing either no help in hearts or no outside entry). Now you have gone to the three level in a suit where you are mismatched, The moral is: if you bid a new suit in response to partner's preempt, you have to be prepared for them to repeat their suit. If that would make you uncomfortable better to pass.

Alternative: if you and partner agree that a new suit in response to a pre-empt is not forcing, it is alertable and should be marked on your card. Then you can agree that if opener can support your suit, he will raise, but otherwise will pass – then it becomes possible to bid 2H on the previous hand. Except that 2H might work out just as badly as 2D – or worse (partner might have no hearts!)

Another response system: Ogust

Responder makes the usual 2NT forcing response to preempt to find out more about opener's hand. The rebids by the preempter are:

- 3C: weak hand (bottom half of point range); weak suit (no more than one of AKQ)
- 3D: weak hand; good suit (at least two of AKQ)
- 3H: good hand; weak suit
- 3S: good hand; good suit
- [optional] 3NT: AKQ in the suit bid (meaning it is likely to take 5 or maybe 6 tricks)

I find this a more informative system than asking for a feature. The tricky thing to remember is the meaning of the 3D and 3H bids (some people play them the other way around!)

Suppose partner bids 2H and you have: AQxx, xxx, AJx, AJx – 16 HCP – you know you have a heart fit and you see chance for game. Ogust responses can help you decide. You bid 2NT and partner says 3S,

meaning a good hand and a good heart suit – you can happily bid 4H. With a 3C response (weak hand, weak suit), you're better off keeping to 3H (less than 23 HCP and less than stellar hearts). With 3D response (good hearts, not that many points) you may well try 4H anyway, because you have a nice trump suit, only one club loser... You may need a finesse to work but that's OK. If partner responds 3H (good hand, only one heart honor) you might decide on 3NT – partner must have some values outside the heart suit, you should be able to set up some heart tricks, and you only need 9 tricks total, not ten. As always, it's responder's choice to set the contract.

Other topics:

I haven't said much about **three-level preempts**. You can lighten on HCP because a seven-card suit has more trick-taking power. As always, you should be stronger when vulnerable but can bid on as little as 3 or 4 HCP not vulnerable. Discuss with partner. Some players like to make three-level bids in third seat on next to nothing – because they can, and because it creates trouble!

One difficulty with three-level preempts is that there aren't any standard or helpful 'asking' responses, analogous to 2NT in response to a two-level preempt. So if partner makes a three-level bid and you have a strong hand, you should rely on your partnership agreement to understand what sort of hand partner has and make a decision about a final contract. Be very wary of 3NT contracts in this situation – the preempter may have a pretty raggedy 7-card suit and absolutely nothing else, so you may never be able to set up and run his long suit.

For **four-level pre-empts** you should have 8 cards but a hand too poor to open. Better to open at the one level if you can – you don't need a whole lot of support to get to game or even slam.

Example:

AQxxxxx, Jxx, xx, -

The only place you can play is spades, even if partner is void. You're hoping for a couple of tricks from partner's hand, even with few points. 4S has a decent chance to make, and even if it goes down one or two it may be a good result.

A couple of examples of competitive pre-empting:

Here's an example that came up recently in a Swiss game (I can't remember my hand exactly). Opponents were vulnerable, we were not. LHO was dealer and bid 1S. Partner bid 3C. RHO bid 3S. My hand:

x, QJxxxx, xx, AJxx (8HCP)

I'm pretty sure at this point that the opponents have game in spades. But my partner and I have a great club fit and I have a singleton spade, plus a heart suit that might be worth a trick or two. I could bid 4C but I'm certain LHO will go to 4S. So I bid 5C. This gives LHO a tough decision – bid 5S or double? If he

doubles, does LHO then take it to 5S or leave the double in? In the end, he doubled and it was left in. Partner went down 2 for -300. At the other table our opponents made 5S for +650. Nice result!

Another recent example from a pairs game: Bob Boyd on my right, two passes to him. He bids 5D, I have:

K, AKQT73, Q82, T73 – 14 HCP. But I hope my partner has about 10 HCP, and that he's short in diamonds. Do I double or bid 5H? (Went for the latter, down 1; 5D goes down 2, so double would have been better! But it comes down to a guess!)

Bob's hand: 76,.., AKJ7653, QJ82

Partner: Q9854, 965, T, AK64 – 9HCP, three H, singleton D – if only he'd had the spade Ace!

As I said at the beginning, preempting is an aggressive move – often it forces the opponent to make a guess – sometimes they guess right, sometimes they don't!