

Practice Games #11 - Competitive Bids and Strategies:

Overcalls:

1. An overcall is simply a bid higher than the opponent's opening bid.
2. An overcall at the 1 level shows 8-16 pts. With more than 16 pts, double instead.
3. An overcall at the 2 level shows 10+ pts and a good 5-card suit.
4. Responding to partner's overcall by raising to the 2 level may require more than the minimum responding bid of 6 pts. Use judgment.

Overcalling a 1NT opening bid and how to handle the interfering bid:

1. Overcall an opening bid of 1NT with 12+ pts and a strong 5-card or longer suit.
2. An overcall over 1NT can make it more difficult for opponents to bid and can be lead-directing if partner gets the lead.
3. After partner opens 1NT and opponent overcalls in a suit, a double by responder means "stole my bid." This is to say that the opponent's bid would have been the responder's bid and means whatever that bid would have meant if the responder had bid it, but not the same as what the opponent meant by the bid. (E.g., opponent overcalls 2♣, and responder wanted to bid Stayman, double to say "stole my bid." Opponent overcalls 2♦ or 2♥ and responder wanted to use that same bid as a transfer, double to say "stole my bid.")
4. Using a double to communicate the message, "stole my bid," is used only after an interfering bid by opponent when partner opens 1NT. At no other time does a double mean "stole my bid." If partners do not use the double to mean this, the responder should bid the actual suit instead, provided that they both understand the meaning of the bid and understand that it's not a transfer.

Take-out Doubles:

1. A double after opponent opens 1 of a suit means one of two things: (1) the player who doubles has shortness in opponent's suit and good support for the three unbid suits or (2) has 17+ pts (too strong for an overcall).
2. A double after an opening bid by partner in a suit and an overcall by opponent in another suit shows support for the two unbid suits (negative double). Often used when having 4 cards (not 5) in the unbid major. You should have 10+ pts to force your partner to bid at the 3 level.

Negative Double:

1. A negative double is useful to show 4 cards in the unbid major when partner opens the bidding in a suit, opponent bids a major suit and responder has 4 of the other major suit and enough pts to compete. Another way to explain this: Partner bid a suit; opponent overcalled in another suit; a double means responder has good support for the two unbid suits and cannot support partner's opening suit.
2. If responder has 5 cards in a suit, it may be better to overcall by bidding the suit instead of using the negative double. Judgment is required.

Lead-directing double:

1. Lead-directing double: A double of opponent's artificial bid means that partner should lead that suit, when and if they get the lead. Because the opponent's artificial bid does not identify a suit and because the artificial bid is almost always forcing, the double is not for take-out. Both partners must be aware of what this double means or should not use this bid. It can also be used after Stayman ("Partner, lead me a club") or Jacoby transfers (to say, "Partner, lead me a diamond or a heart").
2. It is valuable to know when opponents use a lead-directing double. As Declarer, you can identify where a strong suit is (for finessing or ruffing). It is also important for Declarer to realize that this double is not necessarily showing a lot of points, so do not be deterred from reaching game or a slam. You should know what your partner's bids mean and you should know what the opponents' bids mean. The clues you get should help you play the hand more competitively.

Rule of 20:

Count high card points plus number of cards in two longest suits. For example, a hand which has 10 HCP, 6 hearts and 4 clubs ($10 + 6 + 4 = 20$). Open with 1 of a suit when the Rule of 20 qualifies your hand for opening. With 6 cards in one suit, some may open a hand as a "weak two," but if it meets the "Rule of 20," it is probably too strong for a Weak 2 opening bid.

Law of Total Tricks:

The "Law of Total Tricks" means that you can bid as high as the total number of cards in the trump suit with you and partner together. With 9 cards together, bid to the 3 level. With 10 cards together, bid to the 4 level. This is usually easy to assess when one player opens with a pre-emptive hand (weak but showing the number of cards in one suit). Vulnerability should also be considered since usually this "Law" is used expecting to go down and preventing opponents from bidding game in their suit.

Fast Arrival:

An immediate jump to game in the first round is considered to be "fast arrival" unless there has been a significant jump by opponents. Partner should get the message that slam was not possible unless they had a very strong hand and/or a long suit. "Fast Arrival" means that a jump to game was made to discourage partner from considering slam and to deter partner from considering NT as an option. To encourage slam bidding, bid slowly but ensure you use forcing bids when necessary so partner does not pass too soon.

Michaels Cue Bid:

Bidding the same suit as opponent is called a cue bid. Michaels cue bid is used after an opening bid by opponent and shows five cards in two suits. Suggested point ranges to use for Michaels: 8-11 HCP or 16+ HCP. With 12-15 HCP, bid the higher-ranking and then the lower-ranking suit. Bidding the opponent's minor suit at the 2 level shows five cards in both majors. Bidding the opponent's major suit at the 2 level shows five cards in the unbid major and five cards in one of the minor suits. If you wish to keep this simple, use it only after a minor suit to show the two majors, as the bidding responses can become complicated.