

## Overcalls & Takeout Doubles

WHEN THEY OPEN it pays to bid aggressively to interfere with the smooth progress of their bidding. But do so quickly, before they have the chance to confer. Once they have exchanged information, coming in has less to gain and more to lose. There are two ways to compete, overcall and double: Overcall with good **suits**, double with good **hands**.

### OVERCALLS

Several good things can happen when you step in over their opening bid. You might:

- make a contract
- force them too high
- get in their way
- suggest the killing lead

The main requirement for an overcall is a good five card or longer suit. While the length cannot be compromised, the strength depends on several factors: level, vulnerability, the space the overcall consumes, and your length in their suit. With a good suit, you don't need much else:

<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
(1♦)	?	♠ AQJ64
		♥ 85
		♦ Q86
		♣ 632

Overcall 1♠. Your suit is too good to even think of passing. Of course you would prefer to have more points but this is all they dealt you.

An overcall shows about 8-16 HCP, but use your judgement:

<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
(1♦)	?	♠ KQJ96
		♥ 4 2
		♦ 74
		♣ Q843

Bid 1♠. Take the chance to snap at their heels, but this is about rock bottom.

Points don't make up for a bad suit:

<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
(1♦)	?	♠ J8753
		♥ Q32
		♦ KQ8
		♣ Q6

Pass. Although you have 10 HCP, the suit is too thin on top. An overcall could provoke an overbid from partner, or it could inspire a costly spade lead from a fragile holding such as a doubleton king. At the two level you need near opening values, ideally with a six card suit:

<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
(1♥)	?	♠ 76 -
		♥ 63
		♦ AQJ653
		♣ K1063

Bid 2♦. Your suit is great, you interfere with their bidding and partner will know what to lead if they win the contract.

### TAKEOUT DOUBLES

Double of a one bid shows an opening hand, ideally with three or more cards in each of the unbid suits and a shortage in their suit. The idea is to enlist partner's help in finding the best fit:

<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
(1♦)	?	♠ AQ76
		♥ KQ75
		♦ 6
		♣ A874

Double. You have sound opening values with length in the unbid suits, including four cards in both majors. This is desirable because partner looks first for a major suit fit.

With a weaker hand, the length in the enemy suit is the key factor. The longer the length, the less attractive the double:

<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
(1♥)	?	♣ AJ7
		♥ Q76
		♦ AJ7
		♣ 8743

Pass. The flat shape suggests caution. Conversely, shortage argues for action:

<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
(1♥)	?	♠ AQ32
		♥ 8
		♦ J532
		♣ KJ74

Double. Clearcut with the singleton heart.

When you could either double or overcall, double if you hold four cards in the unbid major:

<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
(1♥)	?	♠ AJ82
		♥ 82
		♦ KQ632
		♣ K7

Double, keeping spades in the picture. If partner bids 24% pass and hope for the best. To bid 20 now would show a hand that is too strong for a simple overcall. (17 + HCP.)

Overcalls show up to 16 HCP. With 17 + HCP and a long suit, double first and show your suit on the second round. Likewise with a hand that is too strong to overcall 1NT - double first then bid notrumps.

### **Responding to a Takeout Double**

When partner doubles, bid your longest suit, preferring notrumps with their suit well stopped. Make a minimum bid with a weak hand which maybe a Yarborough (you have to bid), jump to show promising values, and make sure you reach game with an opening hand.

Since a double shows support for the unbid suits, you can add distribution points when holding a five card suit. This is the scheme:

- With 0-9 TP, make a minimum bid in a suit; or bid 1NT with 6-9 HCP a stopper, and no suit to bid.
- With 10- 12 TP, jump in your longest suit, preferably a major, or bid 2NT.
- With 13 + TP, bid game in your long suit, or 3NT, or bid their suit (a cuebid), to find the best game.

Be aggressive with a shapely hand, especially one that has no values in their suit:

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
1♥	Dbl	No	?	♠ KJ874
				♥ 762
				♦ K742
				♣ 6

Bid 2♠. Five cards in the major plus the singleton put the hand into the 10-12 TP range. The weakness in their suit is appealing - honours are, much more valuable in your suits.

Bid game directly with a bit more strength:

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
1♦	Dbl	No	?	♠ A3
				♥ KJ986
				♦ A64
				♣ Q65

Bid 4♥, a good fit and opening points call for direct action.

Bid their suit (known as a cuebid) with a game-going hand that lacks a good suit. Then partner can help you decide where to play.

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
1♣.	Dbl	No	?	♠ AK87
				♥ KJ87
				♦ Q52
				♣ 82

Bid 2♣ This shows a strong hand without a clear trump suit. Then you can show your suits without fear of being dropped.

Bid notrumps with good stoppers in their suit:

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
1♠	Dbl	No	?	♠ 75 ♥ KQ108 ♦ AJ86 ♣ J97

Bid 2NT. Add a queen and the bid is 3NT.

You can pass the takeout double with five good cards in their suit and some stuff outside:

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
1♠	Dbl	No	?	♠ KQ1086 ♥ 97 ♦ A106 ♣ J97

Pass, converting the double to penalties. However, you should be wary of taking this unilateral action. Defending at the one level is no picnic.

### *Trap pass*

It's wrong to double and dangerous to overcall when holding four or more strong cards in their suit. Just pass and hope they get into trouble:

<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
(1♠)	?	♠ K0952 ♥ A7 ♦ Q83 ♣ KJ7

Pass. Double would direct partner to the other suits - hardly what you have in mind. With luck, the bidding will be much higher at your next turn when you can trigger the ambush.

### *When Both Opponents have Bid*

Be more cautious because partner couldn't scrape up a bid and the opposition know more about each other's hands.

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
1♦	pass	1♥	?	♠ A9862 ♥ Q7 ♦ K873 ♣ 82

Pass. With both opponents bidding, there's little to gain from bidding and plenty to lose; you are unlikely to win the contract, you take no bidding space, your king of diamonds is badly placed, and you will be penalised if the spades are sitting over you.

A double by fourth hand shows sound opening values, usually with four (or more) cards in the unbid suits:

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
1♣	pass	1♥	?	♠ KQ106
				♥ A7
				♦ AJ853
				♣ 107

Double. You have length in both the unbid suits and sound opening strength - sufficient reason to overlook the dangers (2♦ is wrong).

### *They Open with a Pre-empt*

When they preempt, the risk of overcalling is naturally greater but you can't afford to be shut out. Game or slam could be on. Ignore the danger with a decent opening hand.

### *Overcalls*

Overcall with a six-card suit and opening values:

<i>North East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
(3♦)	♠ 5
	♥ AQJ873
	♦ AQ4
	♣ 873

Bid 3♥. You might go down but pass is paranoid. Game or slam could easily be on.

Shortage in their suit should encourage you to bid. With a singleton, for example, you have fewer losers when you play the hand and less defence when you defend.

<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
(3♥)	?	♠ AJ9843
		♥ 6
		♦ K82
		♣ KJ2

Bid 3♠. The point count is marginal - but the suit quality is acceptable and the heart shortage is a comfort

Be cautious with length in their suit:

<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
(3♥)	?	♠ AJ9843
		♥ Q73
		♦ K3
		♣ Q6

Pass. Although the point count and suit quality are the same as the previous example, your heart holding is ominous.

There's a limit to how good a simple overcall should be. If all you need for game is a few useful cards from partner, bid game and hope for the best. Good ol' partner usually comes up with the goods.

<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>East's hand</i>
(3♣)	?	♠ K8
		♥ AQJ9853
		♦ AK7
		♣ 5

Bid 4♥, you don't need much from partner.

With a balanced 16-18 HCP including a stopper in their suit, bid 3NT.