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Balancing After Preempts

Modern duplicate style is to preempt very light, and sometimes with terrible suits, particularly at matchpoints. So sometimes the auction will go:

LHO - weak 2 bid (or 3-bid) - P – P -?

And you will be looking at a decent hand. (Note that in this auction preempt bidder will be the dealer; otherwise you could have opened the hand. If you don't have an opening hand or better, you should not balance.)

This is an auction where you need real values and good shape to compete in the pass out seat, in particular because partner is unlikely to have a great hand. Having said that, we cannot afford to let the opponents rob us blind!

After LHO opens a weak two bid you know the following:

- Opener has a six-card suit and 5 – 10 points
- Partner chose not to take action directly over the 2-bid, so they do not have a great hand. (With a 16+ hand and stoppers partner should bid 2NT; with a good hand and a suit of their own they should overcall.)
- RHO may have a good hand with a poor fit for opener's suit.

It also depends on the suit of the preempt. When LHO opens 2 diamonds, either you or partner can still bid a major at the two-level. When the opening bid is 2S, you will be at the three level, which is much more dangerous.

Examples:

After 2D – P – P - ?

With: S-KQxx H-KQxx D-x C-Axxx, it is clear to double. Partner can bid either major at the two level, and if partner bids 3C they will have a five-card club suit.

With: S-AKxxx H-KQx D-x C-xxx at matchpoints go ahead and bid 2S. It may not always work out, but you will probably be OK

With S-AKx H-KQx D-xxx C-Qxxx, probably best to pass. Your 3 small diamond holding is the worst possible, and suggests that RHO is short in diamonds. If you double, partner may end up playing a 4-3 fit.

With S-Kxx H-KQx D-AQ C-AQxxx, consider bidding 2NT (natural). This is not safe if partner is broke, but you can't let the opponents steal you blind. (Note that double here would be takeout, not penalty.) Partner should take you for this kind of hand, and you should go quietly if partner bids a suit. Remember that if they had a good suit they would have bid directly, so when they take you out of 2NT they are just trying to find a makeable contract.

After 2S – P – P - ?

You need a really good hand to take a call here. If you bid a suit, partner should take you to game with a fit and a couple of working cards. You need a hand good enough to make it when partner raises.

For example, after 2S – P – P – 3H

P - ?

Partner should bid 4H with something like: S- Kxx H- Qx D-xxxx C-Kxxx

So you need to have something like S-xx H-AKJxxx D-Kx C-AQx to bid 3H.

After a 3-level preempt the same considerations apply, taking into account that you will be at the three level. If the opening preempt is 3 spades, you will be at the four level!