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When the Opponents Overcall – Opener's Rebid

Any time you open and LHO overcalls in a suit, it is a negative double situation. That is, partner could have made a negative double, but might do something else. As opener you have to recognize the situation, and draw the proper deductions both from what partner chose to do and not do!

There are five things partner can do after you open and LHO overcalls:

1. Partner raises
2. Partner bids a new suit
3. Partner bids NT
4. Partner doubles (negative)
5. Partner passes

When partner raises your suit, you pretty much proceed as you would have had RHO not bid, being mindful of the new information you have about RHO's hand.

When partner bids a new suit, you know he/she has at least a 5 card suit, and the auction can proceed normally.

When partner bids some level of NT, you can assume good stoppers in LHO's suit, and pretty much count up the points and pass or bid on. It pays to be a little more aggressive here in bidding a NT game as partner's stoppers rate to be well positioned behind RHO, and LHO may well have to give up a trick on the opening lead.

Things are most interesting with options 4 and 5, and this is when you have to put on your thinking cap and really consider what you know about all four hands, not just your own.

When partner makes a negative double, you can immediately know the following:

1. **YOU MAY NOT PASS!** Unless the overcall was at the 4 level or higher, you will never have a hand that justifies passing for penalty, and probably not even then.
2. Partner will have at least 4 cards in the unbid major, and probably a tolerance for the unbid minor.
3. Partner may have quite a good hand, or could be on a minimum.
4. If partner could have bid the unbid major at the 1 level, he/she almost certainly has

exactly 4 cards in the unbid major.

When partner passes and RHO opponent also passes, the auction ends if you also pass. At matchpoints, you will almost never get a good score for letting the opponents play a 1 level contract, and as a general rule I would not let them play unmolested below 2S when they have shown a fit. Therefore at least through 2S, you will usually balance by either bidding or doubling. Remember that partner might have quite a good hand with a very good holding in LHO's suit. If a vulnerable opponent overcalls 2H, a partner holding S-xx H-AJ109x D- Axxx C-Kx will pass expecting you to balance with a double, and will be justifiably disappointed if you pass 2H out. Given the common matchpoint practice of overcalling even at the 2 level with porous suits, it is essential to be disciplined and work the system. Dishing out a few -500's and -800's to the opponents will do wonders towards developing your reputation as a pair not to be pushed around.

Remember that all of this applies only if both partner and RHO pass. If RHO opponent bids, you are released from your obligation as partner will have another chance. Also, if RHO bids it makes it more likely that partner passed because he/she was broke.

In deciding on a balancing bid, I would suggest the following order of priorities:

1. If you have an independent suit so long and strong that it will play at game independent of partner, and your hand will be a disappointment on defense, rebid your suit at an appropriate level.
2. If you can tell from your own holding in LHO's suit that partner cannot have the "trap pass" hand, then consider balancing with NT at an appropriate level. At the 2 level it is occasionally right to pass if analysis indicates the hand is a misfit.
3. If neither of these two conditions apply, balance with a double.

With all this in mind let's look at some examples.

After 1C (you) – 1H – X - Pass

With S-Kxxx H-Axx D-Axx C-Kxx, bid 1S. Remember partner could have as few as 6HCP and four little spades.

With S-Kxx H-AQxx D-xx C-KJxx, bid 1NT. Partner has only four spades, and should have some kind of diamond card.

After 1C (you) – 1S – X – Pass

With S-Ax H-KQ10x D- xxx C-AJ10x, bid 2H, raising partner's heart with a minimum

opening.

With S-xx H-AQ10x D-Kx C-AK10xx, bid 3H, inviting game just as you would if partner responded 1H.

With S-xx H-AJx D-Kx C-AKJ109x, bid 3C, showing extra values and inviting game. Partner can bid 3NT with a spade stopper and a mild club fit (like Qx or xxx).

After 1D (you) – 1H – X – Pass

With S-KQxx H-Kx D-AQxx C-xxx, bid 1S

With S-AQxx H-xx D-AKQxxx C-x, bid 3S. Game is likely on with as little as KJxx of spades in partners hand.

With S-Jxx H-x D-AKxxx C-KQxx, bid 2C (your second suit)

After 1H (you) – 2D – Pass – Pass

Here's where it gets interesting. Remember partner may have a decent hand with the wrong shape for a negative double.

With S-Kxx H-AKxxx D-x C-AKxx, double. Plenty of defense and if partner has a diamond stack you will get rich. If partner has a hand too weak to support hearts immediately, he will return you to hearts.

With S-x H-KQJxxx D-xx C-AJxx, rebid 2H. Its possible partner has a diamond stack, but your hand is pure offense and will be a disappointment to partner on defense.

With S-Ax H-AQ10xx D-x C-KQJxx, double. Good hand with lots of defense. If partner has the black suits and bids 2S, we can bid 3C and partner will know what we have.

With S-xx H-AQxxx D-KJxx C-Kx, pass! This is the rare hand where you know partner is not trap passing with a D stack, and doesn't have enough values to make a negative double or raise hearts. This whole hand is a misfit, and RHO has values but no diamond fit. Anything you bid here is likely to be a bloody mess.

With S-Kxx H-AJxxx D-Qx C-Kxx, double. This may seem similar to the previous hand but here you can stand partner bidding either black suit, or bidding 2H if he has three small. Better than letting them make 2D. The difference between this holding and the previous one is that you have only two diamonds, and a decent holding in each black suit.

With S-Ax H- KQJ10xxx D-AQ C-Kx, bid 3NT. Bid what you think you can make. 3NT is almost a lock if partner has as little as both black queens.

These examples have merely scratched the surface of the negative double system. The key point is to remember to think about all four hands, and what you know about the overall situation.