

THE POWER OF PASS



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1 2 3 4 5 6 24 23 22 21

Contents

Introduction	7
1. Overcalling with a balanced hand.	9
2. Beware of poor suit quality.	13
3. Pass if an opponent opens 1NT and you were	15
about to open 1NT, too.	
4. Pass if an opponent opens with a suit bid and you	17
were going to open with the same suit.	
5. Opponent opens with a suit bid and you hold a	19
balanced 12-14 points.	
6. You open with a weak two or a pre-empt. Do not	22
bid again unless partner has made a forcing bid or	
invites you to bid again.	
7. You have made a limit bid. Do not bid again	27
unless partner has made a forcing bid.	
8. Partner has invited game or slam. Pass if you are	28
minimum.	
9. If the opponents are in a contract which you can	29
beat, pass, unless you can also beat any contract that	
they might bid if you double.	
10. The opponents have stopped at the 2-level. Partner	37
balances and they bid to the 3-level. Do not punish	
partner by bidding again. Pass!	
11. Opening in fourth seat. The Rule of 15.	38
12. Avoid bidding 5-over-4 if your side has the	42
balance of power.	
13. Avoid making a close penalty double if it is not your	44
hand.	
14. Open light in third seat only if you are suggesting	46
a good lead for partner, otherwise pass.	
15. Do not support partner's overcall or weak two or	48
weak jump-overcall if you have 10 or 11 losers.	
16. Don't bid the same values twice.	50

6 Contents

beware of bidding.	54
18. Do not open with 11 points if you have no	56
attractive rebid.	
19. Be wary of competing if there is a risk of pushing	58
them into a game which they might not have bid.	
20. If strong in a suit bid on your right, pass and hope	59
for penalties later.	
21. If partner's bid is forcing and next player bids,	62
pass if you have no useful bid to make.	
22. Be reluctant to compete 3-over-3.	63
23. Leave the 5-level to the opponents.	65
24. Be wary of balancing.	69
25. Do not compete without sound values if partner could	72
not open in third seat.	
26. Do not compete at a level higher than you wanted	75
to bid initially.	
27. You are not obliged to rebid opposite a 'passed	77
partner'.	
28. Do not compete against a strong 2 opening	79
without extreme shape.	
29. If the opponents have bid slam and you are happy	80
to receive a normal lead, pass. Do not double.	
30. Respect partner's sign-off.	82
31. Be pessimistic opposite a pre-emptive raise.	84
32. If partner doubles for takeout or showing values,	86
pass for penalties only if you have strong trumps.	
33. Do not open a 4-3-3-3 / 4-4-3-2 with eleven points	88
in first or secondseat.	
34. Do not save against an opposing game or slam when	90
there might be a good chance to defeat it.	
35. Do not compete a part-score hand to the 4-level.	92
36. Error unpunished – virtue unrewarded	95

Introduction 7

Introduction

There's a time to bid and a time to bide. The trick is knowing which it is on the current deal. This book aims to show you the frequent occasions when passing is the best action to take even when you might well be tempted to bid.

Most players beyond the beginner and novice stages bid too much. This is particularly true of those just below expert level. The mantra for these players is like the watchword at Verdun; 'They shall not pass.' They feel that their declarer play will compensate for being too high and they often make their contract even though in theory they are overboard. How does this happen? Defence at club level is often so weak that contracts succeed even when they should have been routinely defeated. Repeated success can then ingrain bad habits of overbidding.

Experts do better most of the time, but even they can fall from grace. The book is replete with examples from actual play, from club events to minor championships to national and international tournaments. By studying where the players involved stepped out of line, you will be able to avoid those mistakes yourself when a comparable or similar situation arises.

There is certainly satisfaction in bidding and making a contract. There can be even greater satisfaction in passing and then being rewarded for your discipline by defeating the opposition contract when you would have been defeated if you had bid higher.

If you currently have difficulty in passing, we have a remedy for you. Call it bridge aerobics if you like. Each morning, after you shower and shave or put on makeup, whichever it is you do, stand in front of the mirror and say 'No bid, no bid, no bid' until you can reproduce it regularly at the bridge table.

Chapter 1 Overcalling with a balanced hand

If partner is a passed hand in first or second seat and your right-hand opponent opens, you should pass if you have a balanced hand below 15 HCP unless you have a strong suit to overcall or you have 12-14 HCP with a doubleton in opener's suit, a hand which is suitable for a takeout double.

A 1-level overcall is commonly based on about 9-16 HCP. It can be a touch less if the suit is strong, such as A-K-J-10-5 or a bit more if you have scattered values, J-x, Q-x, or a singleton honour.

Not that everyone adheres to it, but there is a sensible approach to considering whether your suit is good enough for an overcall. This is the 'Suit Quality Test'. Add the number of cards in the suit you wish to bid to the number of honours in that suit. The total should equal or exceed the number of tricks for which you are bidding. Thus, for a 1-level overcall, the total should be 7: Q-8-7-4-3 is not good enough, but Q-J-7-4-3 is. For a 2-level overcall, the total should be 8: A-J-5-4-2 is not enough, but A-K-J-4-2 is. Of course, you still need the high card values to be bidding at the relevant level. Also, do not count the jack and ten as honours unless accompanied by another honour or honours, queen or higher. A holding of J-10-8-7-4 does not qualify for a 1-level overcall and likewise J-10-6-4-3-2 is not good enough a suit for a 2-level overcall, whether it is a simple overcall or a weak jump-overcall.

One of the reasons a simple overcall should indicate a decent suit is that partner will tend to lead your suit if partner ends up on lead. If partner leads from K-x or A-x and your suit is poor, the lead has been squandered and partner has probably set up tricks for declarer. Another reason to eschew overcalling with a poor suit is the danger of being doubled for penalties.

A. Your right-hand opponent opens 1♣. What do you do with:

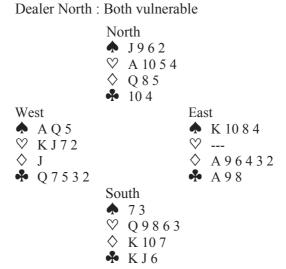
1. • Q9652 2. • KJ76 3. • AQJ86 4. • AKQ2 ♡ AJ65 ♡ A10 ♡ 1054 ♡ K76 ◇ Q8 ◇ J10754 ◇ 9852 ◇ 98 • 104 • 32 • 4

Answers:

- 1. Pass. You have 9 HCP, enough for a 1-level overcall, but the Suit Quality (SQ) of the spades is only 6. For a 1-level overcall (seven tricks), the SQ should be 7 or better.
- 2. Pass. A jack-high suit does not warrant an overcall.
- 3. Bid 1♠. Only 7 HCP, but the Suit Quality (8) is excellent.
- 4. Bid 1 . Yes, it is only a 4-card suit, but the SQ is 7. You surely want a spade lead and that is an important function for an overcall.
- B. Your right-hand opponent opens 1 . What do you do with:

Answers:

- 1. Pass. You have 13 HCP, enough for a 2-level overcall, but the SQ of the clubs is only 6. For 24, the SQ should be 8 or better.
- 2. Bid 2\$\ightarrow\$. The SQ is 8 and shortage in opener's suit is also a plus for a minimum overcall
- 3. Pass. The SQ of the diamonds is only 6.
- 4. Bid 1NT. Yes, your diamonds (SQ 8) are good enough for $2\diamondsuit$, but a 1NT overcall (15-18 or 16-18 points, balanced, at least one stopper in opener's suit) takes priority over a suit overcall.



The deal arose in the 2015 Bermuda Bowl (World Open Teams) quarter-finals. At six tables, North-South were silent. One West was +600 in 5♣ and five Wests ended in 3NT. Three were +630 after a spade lead and one was +600 on the ♣10 lead. The other West went down after North led the ♥4 to the queen and king.

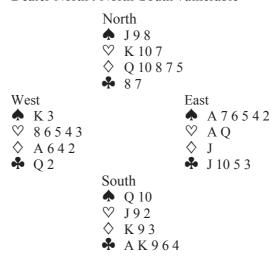
At the other two tables, it began Pass: $1 \diamondsuit : 1 \heartsuit$ by South. Facing a passed partner and vulnerable, this is courageous (read 'unwise') with a balanced hand, 9 HCP and a moth-eaten suit. With the actual layout, it is great as a lead-directing bid as long as partner keeps quiet, but neither North did.

At one table, West bid 2NT, North bid 3%, all pass. West led the \diamondsuit J, ducked to the \diamondsuit K. South played \heartsuit Q, king, ace, and ended two down, -200, for +10 Imps vs 3NT +630 at the other table. That is unlikely to dissuade South of similar overcalls in future.

At the other table, West bid $2\clubsuit$, North $3\heartsuit$. East doubled, takeout, all pass. It went $\diamondsuit J$, ace; $\diamondsuit 3$, ruffed; $\clubsuit 2$, ace; $\diamondsuit 9$, ruffed; $\spadesuit A$; $\spadesuit Q$, plus a heart trick later for three down, East-West +800 and +5 Imps versus 3NT +630 at the other table.

Not only did South have a poor hand on the deal on page 11, but the suit itself was poor. With Suit Quality of 6, the suit does not warrant an overcall. On this deal from a BBO game, the suit was better, but still below the Suit Quality requirement.

Dealer North: North-South vulnerable



West generally doubled 2^{\bullet} , takeout with 4+ hearts. Results: East 2^{\bullet} +170 x 5, +140 x 2; East 2NT +120 x 4; 3^{\bullet} +170 x 1; 4^{\bullet} +420 x 1. Two Wests passed and 2^{\bullet} was passed out. One South was four off, East-West +400, the other three off, East-West +300.

At the remaining table, it went Pass: $1 \spadesuit : 2 \clubsuit :$ Double, all pass. East figured West to be short in spades and East was short in the red suits. Playing for penalties appealed. West led $\spadesuit K$ and shifted to the $\heartsuit 8$, ten, queen. East cashed the $\heartsuit A$ and $\spadesuit A$ and switched to $\diamondsuit J$. West took $\diamondsuit A$ and gave East a heart ruff. Back came $\spadesuit 2$, $\clubsuit 6$, $\clubsuit O$. West returned $\diamondsuit 4$, ruffed, three off, East-West +800.

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These days, most players bid too much – they hope their opponents will misdefend or bid too much themselves. This book shows you how you can often do better simply by passing. There are many auctions where 'pass' is the winning call, and you will find them here, illustrated by real-life deals from the club level to international championships.

"A most enjoyable and welcome book reinforcing the value of discipline and good judgment in the bidding."

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RON KLINGER (Australia) is one of the best-known and prolific authors in bridge today, with over 70 books to his credit. He has represented his country many times, and won numerous Australian National titles.



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