



Issue 13: April 2008 BridgeHands Newsletter

Preemptive Bidding, Part III

August 2008

Dear Bridge Friend,

Welcome to *Bridgehands* eMag Newsletter, Issue 13. In this issue, we conclude our multi-part discussion devoted to preemptive bidding. In the second issue of our series, we explored responder's hand evaluation and forcing bids after opener's 2 level preempt bid. We also touched on interference bidding by the opponents.

Also in this newsletter, we're up to the Rule of 11 in our "Rules of" tips. On defense without an honor sequence, we've learned to lead the fourth best card from our honor suit (except when holding an Ace in a suit contract). So when partner leads a 2, what does that tell us? How about when bidding a 3 and we hold the 2 in that suit?

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Rebids after a Preempt – Be careful what you ask for!

Recall in the first lesson we began with hand evaluation, making adjustments for our suit distribution. That is, with a nice honor-bound suit, we add length points for suits longer than four cards. In our second installment, we looked at responder's bids after partner made a 2 level preemptive opening bid. Partnerships require trust, certainly a true-ism in Bridge.

This lesson discusses opener's rebids after making a weak two opening bid. We will segment opener's rebids based on responder's forcing or non-forcing bids. After all, it is critical to know partner's bidding intentions and make appropriate rebids. And like other things in life, when we're treading on new ground, it's often easier to get into trouble

than to get out of it. So let's ensure we have a good grasp on appropriate rebids after our preemptive opening call.

To begin, our partner's response to our preempt assumes we:

- A. Made a reasonable call, with appropriate length and strength in our preempt suit; we should not make unsound or erratic opening preempts.
- B. Know whether partner's responses are forcing or non-forcing (with or without interference).
- C. Know how to respond to partner's query bids.

Fair enough. To recap, responder's options were:

- 1. Pass
- 2. Raise or jump raise partner's opening suit
- 3. Bid 3 Notrump
- 4. Bid a new suit
- 5. Bid 2 Notrump, 4+ Notrump, or a conventional bid (Gerber)

The first three options are non-forcing, while number four and five solicit opener for further information.

1. Let's say the auction began:

2H – (P) – P – (2S);
?

And you hold: A A Q J 10 3 2 J 10 9 8 3 2

Are you tempted to "bid 'em up", overcalling 3H? While it's possible you might make 3H, many partners see this as preemptive bidding at its worst! It certainly goes against partnership trust, doesn't it? First off, with a great 12 HCP hand plus 2 distribution points, the hand has great trick taking potential; we should proudly open with only 6 losers. So we should have opened 1H. Avoid the temptation to "fix it," especially when bidding in *direct* seat. Later we will discuss direct versus passout seat bidding. Our Left Hand Opponent and partner still have an opportunity to bid, so we don't want to be a busy bidder! Worse, freely rebidding after making a preemptive opening call does not instill partnership trust.

2. Now we will explore a more common scenario: responder raises our preempt suit.

2H – (P) – 3H – (P);
?

What is going on here? Could this be an invitational bid like this?

1H – (P) – 3H;

No, when responder raises (or jump raises) a preemptive opening bid, the meaning is strictly "to play" without interest in game. Soon, we will explore responder methods to explore game or slam (typically bidding a new suit or 2 Notrump). When responder raises the preempt, the intention is to further the obstructive bidding and inhibit the opponents from finding game or slam. Now let's explore an auction where the opponents enter the auction despite responder's raise.

2H – (P) – 3H – (3S);
?

What next? J 2 A K Q 4 3 2 5 4 3 6 5

Our partner has raised our suit so should we bid again? No, when partner *raises* our preemptive suit, recall the primary purpose is to extend the preempt. So regardless of whether an opponent overcalls or not, responder's raise is not game invitational. So in answer to our question, again the answer is no. Opener should not be rebidding – it's up to our responder to assume captaincy.

3. When the auction goes: 2D – (P) – 3N – (P); ?

As opener, we are obligated to Pass. We must assume our partner can either establish a suit (probably a minor), or promote our long preemptive suit. You'll recall in our first lesson, we stressed the importance of making a sound opening preempt with honors in our long suit. So with an auction like this one, we certainly want to table a good dummy with two of the top three honors in our preempt suit. In the above auction, responder may be holding:

A 3 2 K Q K J 10 2 A 4 3 2

It would be embarrassing to table this hand as dummy:

J 6 5 J 2 Q 9 7 6 5 4 Q 10

Poor partner is probably envisioning running our long suit. With this holding, our hand is of little help to partner when playing in 3 Notrump. Instead, we should be holding something more like this:

6 5 4 3 2 A Q 6 5 4 3 3 2

Both hands have 6 HCP. With a bit of help from partner (K x x) this hand may generate six tricks, while the first hand may only produce one trick!

Incidentally, we should point out that it is not a common scenario for responder to directly bid 3 Notrump. More often, the responder will make a forcing 2 Notrump response, asking opener to show a possible "feature" (see item 5 below). Why might responder jump to 3 Notrump?

- a. Responder has a very good hand with a long running minor suit and no chance for a major suit game.
- b. Responder fears game might be missed (opponents' interfering bid or opener might mistakenly pass).
- c. Responder is risking a gambit, hoping the opening lead will be made in a suit that the responder holds the Ace-Queen; along with an outside Ace or King-Queen and running 6 cards in preempt suit will make 3 Notrump.
- d. Responder is bluffing a psyche bid. Let's say responder has a weak hand and few defensive tricks. Certainly the opponents must have a game somewhere and the advancer (Left Hand Opponent of the responder) is likely to make a call. Perhaps opener began with 2 Diamonds. With a good trump fit and favorable vulnerability, the normal response would be to raise the preempt to 3, 4, or maybe 5 Diamonds. Enter the psycher who instead bids 3 Notrump. So, what's going on with this illogical bid? Ah, the responder is psyching, hoping the opponents will pass! Sure, the opener would probably go down a fair number of tricks. Yet the net score would still be better than if the opponents made a game or slam contract. And what happens if the opponents make a penalty double? Easy says the psycher, who runs to 4 Diamonds! Mind you, we are not advocating this bizarre bidding style. Or as some would say, it's hard enough playing Bridge with two opponents so partner shouldn't be a third!

4. As we discussed in our last issue, for most players "RONF" is in! Recall R.O.N.F. is an acronym standing for "Raise Only, Non Forcing." In short, any bid other than a raise in opener's preempt suit is forcing (assuming responder is not a passed hand). RONF has several advantages:

- a. Precious bidding space is conserved. Without RONF, the responder must make a jump bid 3 level bid to force opener to rebid. Suddenly, the auction is approaching the four level, potentially without a partnership fit. If responder had to jump bid 3 Spades and opener had shortness in Spades, should opener bid 3 Notrump or retrace to the 4 level in the preempt suit? For sure, that's a tough decision.
- b. Responder has elegant methods to locate either a major suit or 3 Notrump game.

Using RONF, let's begin with this bidding:

(P) – 2H – (P) – 2S;
 (P) - ?

As always, responder's new suit bid at the two level promises 5+ cards in length. Naturally, we are always happy to support responder's major suit when we hold 3 cards in partners suit; ditto with a fine 2 card suit

(Ace or King) and a shapely hand with nice honors in the preempt suit (Ace-King or Ace-Queen). Otherwise, our typical call without any suit honors is to rebid or preempt suit at the three level. Assuming you have a very good preempt suit headed by the Ace-King-Queen, rebidding 3 Notrump is a reasonable response (hopefully offering 6 tricks).

But perhaps it's our lucky day and we hold a suit-suit primary honor when responder bids a new suit:

(P) – 2H – (P) – 3C;
(P) - ?

Here we are hoping for a 3 Notrump game; playing game in 5 Clubs would be a long haul, requiring two additional tricks (11 versus 9 tricks). Thus, we should show our "stopper," a side-suit with an Ace or King. This information will be very helpful for responder to comfortably bid 3 Notrump. Here are a few illustrative hands:

K 2 A Q 10 4 3 2 9 8 7 3 2 Bid 3 Spades

4 3 2 K Q J 10 9 8 K Q 8 7 Bid 3 Diamonds

J 10 2 K Q J 10 9 8 Q 3 2 J Rebid 3 Hearts (try not to look sad)

As opener, after we have made our rebid, it's up to the responder to "place the contract." So unless the responder belatedly makes a conventional bid as a slam Ace-asking call, we typically pass.

As stated earlier, when the opponent in advancer's seat makes an overcall, as opener we are not obligated to rebid even if partner made a RONF call:

2H – (P) – 3C – (3D);
?

Again, the general rule applies: do not make an unnecessary "freebid" in direct seat. By direct seat we mean a bid immediately after an opponent's overall; here the auction will not be over *until* partner has passed. The adjunct to the general freebid rule is that we should only make a call when we have complementary length or strength not disclosed in our prior preemptive bid. Here's an example:

2H – (P) – 2S – (3D);
?

Q 3 2 A Q J 9 4 3 5 8 7 6

Bid 3S, particularly with a nice 3 card holding in partner's major and shortage in the opponent's suit. Even when holding a good doubleton suit with a primary honor (Ace or King) and a shapely hand, consider

raising partner's suit. However, we should definitely pass when the "pointy suits" (Spades and Diamonds) are reversed and we cannot support partner's suit:

5 A Q J 9 4 3 Q 3 2 7 6 5

Misfit hands like this often spell disaster when bidding goes to too high. Passing partner's 2 Spade call and RHO's 3 Diamond bid sends a clear message we are happy to defend. Quite possibly our Left Hand Opponent has length in both of our suits and shortness in the advancer's suit. Such an opponent can spell disaster should our side make indiscriminate bidding at lofty levels. Don't be a busy bidder, giving your LHO the opportunity to double for penalty.

5. Okay, we've saved the best for last – opener's rebids after responder makes a forcing 2 Notrump call. Why is this so important? Well, assuming the partnership does not have a fit, then the most likely game is 3 Notrump. When responder queries with a 2 Notrump call, the opener has an opportunity to show a side-suit Ace or King. In Bridge circles, this is often known as a "feature" so responder's 2 Notrump call can be thought of as a feature asking bid. Opener's rebids are:

- A. Holding an Ace or King in a side suit, bid that suit at the 3 level
- B. Holding a great preempt suit (Ace-King-Queen), rebid 3 Notrump
- C. Lacking a stopper, rebid the preempt suit

Under no circumstance may the opener pass (except when responder has previously passed). As always, responder is the "captain," responsible to steer the auction – perhaps partscore, game, or maybe heading for slam.

We will begin with a typical scenario where responder holds a very good hand, without a fit and wonders if a 3 Notrump contract is sound. The bidding begins:

2D – 2N; ?

Responder's hand:

A 10 9 K Q 6 5 K 10 2 J 10 2

Here's two opener hands:

5 4 3 A 2 A Q 9 8 7 6 4 3

5 4 3 J 2 A Q J 8 7 6 Q 3

Both hands have 10 High Card Points but contrast the trick-taking potential of the two hand. On opener's first hand, the partnership loses two Clubs and one Spade; one Spade loser will be pitched on the

dummy's third Diamond (Queen) after pulling trump. But on the second hand, declarer would lose two Clubs, one Heart and at least one Spade (when opponents see responder's hand, they should attack the single-honor Spade suit).

As an aside, even with a 9 card Diamond suit fit we hope responder wasn't considering playing the auction in 5 Diamonds. Outside of the solid Diamond trump suit, responder is missing many primary honors: the Spade King, The Heart Ace, and the Club Ace-King. So a 5 Diamond contract is out of the question! That is not to say after opener's 2 Diamond preempt, a partnership should never play in a minor suit game. Again, here's two opener hands and we will add a third one:

5 4 3 A 2 A Q 9 8 7 6 4 3

5 4 3 J 2 A Q J 8 7 6 Q 3

K 4 3 3 2 A Q J 8 7 6 4 3

This time the responder holds:

A 2 Q 3 K 10 5 4 3 A K 9 8

On the first hand, opener rebids 3 Hearts (stopper) and responder bids 3 Notrump knowing the partnership can make 10 tricks. On the second hand, we can assume opponents will attack the Heart suit (they have 9 Hearts) and will easily set a Notrump or 5 Diamond contract. Accordingly, opener must rebid 3 Diamonds and responder should pass. On the third hand containing the Spade King, opener will rebid 3 Spades. Now responder can clearly see 3 Notrump is out of the question, but how about playing in 5 Diamonds? Yes indeed, responder can count only 2 Heart losers so the minor suit game is assured. One final note on minor suit game bidding – our regular reader's will recall this scenario from our prior newsletter:

2D - ?

3 2 2 K 5 4 3 2 A 5 4 3 2

We **know** opponents have a major suit game and we have a great Diamond fit. So the only question is, how high should responder bid 'em up? Our thoughts are that unless you are playing against weak opponents reticent to bid game, time is of the essence. So bid to the level of your sides combined suit length, we bid 5 Diamonds (6 + 5 = 11, the 5 level). Of course, prudent bidders may choose 4 Diamonds with adverse vulnerability, procrastinating on the 5 Diamond call until next bidding round. Finally, we mentioned earlier that the psycher would bid 3 Notrump with this type of holding, but that's pushing the envelope!

By the way, responder's 2 Notrump query does not necessarily indicate responder does not have a trump fit with the opener. Responder's 2 Notrump call is also a useful gadget to query opener for extra assets. We know the preemptive opening should have 2 of the top 3 honors in the trump suit. Rebidding a feature would show opener actually has a better hand, helping responder gauge the success in a major suit game. Let's say responder has 3 card trump support with a reasonable hand:

A 2 A 5 4 K Q 5 4 Q J 9 8

2H – 2N; ?

The partnership has a 9 card Heart fit (6 opener, 3 responder) so they clearly should play in a Heart contract. Yet responder is unclear of the losses, perhaps 2 Clubs, 1 Diamond, and 1 Spade. So if the opener has an Ace or King in one of these three suits, game looks good. And lacking a feature, the partnership should play in a 3 Heart part score contract. Okay, let's try rebidding two possible opener hands:

Responder's possible hands:

K 5 K Q 10 7 6 5 9 8 4 3 2

6 5 K Q 10 7 6 5 9 8 4 3 2

On the first hand, opener rebids 3 Spades holding the King. Responder now happily bids the 4 Heart game. However on the second hand opener lacks a primary honor and must rebid 3 Hearts, wishing to signoff in a partscore. Incidentally, the responder may have held an even stronger hand interested in slam so opener shouldn't assume a signoff attempt automatically ends the auction.

This concludes our series on preemptive bidding, one of the most exciting aspects of Bridge bidding. As we underscored, Bridge is a wonderful exercise to improve communications and partnership trust. We have certainly witnessed this regarding preemptive bidding. And remember, poor contracts are built on a house of FLIMSY cards! Good luck and good hunting.

The Rule of 11: defensive leads are all about subtraction

[Rule of 11](#) – We've been counting up the "Rules of" and have reached the lucky number 11. This guideline is helpful to determine how many cards are held by *all* players in the suit of the opening leader.

On defense and lacking an honor sequence, we've learned is often best to lead the fourth best card from our honor suit. So when partner leads a 2, what does that tell us? How about a 3 and we hold the 2 in that suit? Yes, inquiring minds must know – enter the Rule of 11. If you're not interested to know *why* this works and are happy enough just to know how to use the Rule of 11, feel free to skip forward several paragraphs.

Back in the early days of Bridge, some creative soul devised an arithmetic formula to deduce how many cards each player held in the suit lead by the defender. The concept was predicated on the principle that when a player led their fourth-best card in a suit, a formula could be used to deduce the number of cards each player held in that suit. A basic tenant of Bridge play is that each side wishes to promote cards in their long suit, hoping to generate winning tricks. Thus, when a player leads a long suit, the length should be at least a four card suit. Using this rationale, here's how they came up with the Rule of 11.

We all know each suit contains the 2 through the 10, and four face cards: Jack, Queen, King, Ace. Mathematically, we could assign numbers to the face cards: Jack = 11, Queen = 12, King = 13, Ace = 14. So the top card of each suit (Ace) is equal to a "14." Now then, let's say we led a 2 as our fourth-best card for our opening lead. Subtracting 2 from 14, we know the remainder is 12 – twelve cards are above the opening lead of the 2. And since our opening lead is known to be the fourth-best, out of the remaining 12 cards we are promising three in our hand. So subtracting our 3 cards from the remainder of 12, we know there are 9 outstanding cards held in the other hands that are above the opening lead of the 2. Recap:

$$14 - 2 \text{ (lead)} = 12 \text{ total cards outstanding (4 players)}$$

$$12 - 3 \text{ (our remaining cards)} = 9 \text{ total cards outstanding (3 players)}$$

Okay, how about if our fourth-best was a 4:

$$14 - 4 \text{ (lead)} = 10 \text{ total cards outstanding (4 players)}$$

$$10 - 3 \text{ (our remaining cards)} = 7 \text{ total cards outstanding (3 players)}$$

Now let's say we led a 6:

$$14 - 6 \text{ (lead)} = 8 \text{ total cards outstanding (4 players)}$$

$$8 - 3 \text{ (our remaining)} = 5 \text{ total cards outstanding (3 players)}$$

At the table, this would be a bit too much math so let's try to find a simpler approach to find a pattern. On the first hand, notice when we lead a 2, there are 9 outstanding cards for the remaining 3 players. On the second hand, when we lead a 4 there are 7 outstanding cards. And on the third hand, we lead a 6 and there are 5 outstanding cards.

Hmm, it looks like in each case if we were to add the two numbers, we come up with 11! Aha, we've discovered a shortcut. By subtracting the value of the card number on the opening lead from the number 11, we know the total number of cards held in the suit by the remaining 3 players.

$$11 - 2 = 9 \text{ total cards above (3 of which are held by leader)}$$

$$11 - 4 = 7 \text{ total cards above (3 of which are held by leader)}$$

$$11 - 6 = 5 \text{ total cards above (3 of which are held by leader)}$$

So we know the total cards held by each player that are above the opening lead. Now we can count our cards above the value of the opening lead in our hand and determine the remainder by the other two hands. And looking at the dummy, we actually can determine the quantity in all four hands – how cool! Let's put the math to practice:

A 4 3	
K J 7 <u>2</u>	Q 9 6 5
10 8	

Partner leads the 2, so $11 - 2 = 9$ remaining cards above the 2. The dummy shows three cards above the lead, $9 - 3 = 6$ remaining cards above the two in our hand and the declarer (South). We hold four cards above the 2, $6 - 4 = 2$. Thus, the declarer holds 2 cards above partner's opening lead of the 2. Incidentally, we know partner West cannot have more than four cards in the suit. Why? Well, if partner did hold more than four cards in the suit and promised to lead the fourth-best, then partner would have to lead something higher than the 2! Good, ready for another?

A 3	
K J 7 <u>4</u> 2	Q 9 6 5
10 8	

This time partner opens with a 4, so $11 - 4 = 7$ remaining cards above the 2. Dummy has one: $7 - 1 = 6$. We have four: $6 - 4 = 2$ held by declarer. Notice this time the partner has a card *beneath* the opening lead of the 4. So while we know the number of cards *above* the value of the opening lead, partner may have additional cards below that value. In this case, as East we could easily deduce that partner has five cards in

the suit. How? Well, looking at our hand and the dummy, we can already see one card beneath the 4. And when the declarer South placing the 8 on the first trick, we can safely assume partner has the 2. Sometimes we can see all outstanding cards beneath the value of the opening lead.

A 5 3
K J 7 4 Q 9 6 2
10 8

Partner again leads the 4. We see the 3 in the dummy and hold the 2 in our hand. Since partner promises to lead the fourth best, partner cannot hold more than four cards in the suit. You may ask, "But could partner be holding a three card suit?" Yes, although that is not a likely scenario. Good partners try to promote their long suits with an honor holding, hoping to establish tricks in the suit. When might partner not want to lead the suit? Let's say the opponents are in a 4 Heart suit contract and the leader holds:

A J 10 4 3 2 2 Q 5 2 J 7 5

Partner does not want to lead the Spades when opponents are in a *suit* contract – leading away from an Ace in an unprotected suit, a suit without accompanying King, is a no-no (but fine in a Notrump contract). The Ace might be lost or give away tricks to opponents – certainly leading the Ace won't gather any honors from the opponents. Leading a singleton in opponents' trump suit is also unwise most of the time – partner may be holding Q x x or J x x x and not be too happy with your unfortunate lead. So here partner must lead a three card minor suit. Again, this is an uncommon situation but ostensibly we would hold a large number of cards in the suit and can easily deduce partner's dilemma (partner would not lead a three card suit bid by opponents).

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Best wishes,

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