



Play & Learn

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Make a good bid better

Vulnerable against not, you are South holding:

♠ A K 9 7 4 2 ♥ 9 4 ♦ 3 ♣ Q J 8 4.

What action would you take with your hand in each auction below?

- | | | | | |
|---|------|-------|------|-------|
| 1 | West | North | East | South |
| | 3♦ | 3♥ | Pass | ? |
| 2 | West | North | East | South |
| | 3♦ | 3♥ | 4♦ | ? |
| 3 | West | North | East | South |
| | 3♦ | 3♥ | 5♦ | ? |

Before discussing your answers, how do you take partner's overcall? Is it strong or does partner have a hand that would have opened with a 3♥ preempt? It's generally accepted that only one side preempts on a hand and West got there first, so 3♥ should show a decent opening hand with a good heart suit. Ideally, partner should have at least six hearts, but your opponents' bidding sometimes forces you to make uncomfortable bids, so North might have only a good five-card suit.

Auction 1: Did you bid 3♠? Will partner take 3♠ as forcing? Make sure you and partner know what bids are forcing after you overcall your opponent's preempt. The bid of a new suit below game over partner's overcall should be forcing and show at least five cards.

Auction 2: Now your cheapest spade bid is 4♠ – a new suit but no longer below game. It's likely you will play in 4♠.

Did you make that bid? It's uncomfortable because no fit is guaranteed. What are your alternatives? You could try 4♥, reasoning that partner will often have six hearts.

One call you should not make is pass. You have 10 HCP and partner has shown at least a reasonable opening hand. Your side has the majority of strength, which means you should not let the opponents play undoubled. You know this. Partner does not. So it's your job to identify ownership of the hand. Your partnership should have some agreement about what your double would show. Is it penalty or does it simply show strength and no clear direction? With a six-card suit, I'd choose 4♠ rather than double, but I wouldn't be sure it was right. That was East's intent in raising to 4♦ – to make any call by you uncomfortable.

Auction 3: This is even worse. Again, the hand belongs to your side and you must do something – bid 5♠, bid 5♥ or double. Your choice is far from clear, but pass is definitely not an option. *When your side has enough high-card strength to bid a game or slam, you cannot let the opponents play undoubled. You must bid higher or double for penalty.*

Which of the three auctions made you most uncomfortable? It should be auction 3, where your first bid comes at the five level. What kind of hand does East need to bid 5♦? East could have a weak hand with a big diamond fit or a strong hand that expects to make 5♦ (not at all likely in this case, given your strength and partner's bidding). You are the only

player on your side with enough information to know that East is stealing. It's your job to take some action to try to salvage the best possible score. Look at the complete deal below.

Dlr: West ♠ Q J 5 3
Vul: N-S ♥ A K J 10 8 5
♦ 10
♣ K 7

♠ 8 6		♠ 10
♥ 6 2		♥ Q 7 3
♦ K Q J 9 8 7 4	W	♦ A 6 5 2
♣ 10 5	N E S	♣ A 9 6 3 2
		♠ A K 9 7 4 2
		♥ 9 4
		♦ 3
		♣ Q J 8 4

As you see, East has little enough that N-S can make game but not slam. Immediately furthering West's preempt to 5♦ is East's best action. The 11-card diamond fit and East's spade shortness make 5♦ a good *sacrifice*, going down only two on perfect defense. As the cards lie, North-South can make 5♠ but only 4♥. East is willing to give up 300 points for down two doubled not vulnerable in an attempt to jam the bidding to make it difficult for North-South to reach their best contract. East-West could even escape for down one if North-South fail to set up their club trick before the ♥Q becomes good for a club discard. Bidding 5♠ is the winning action with South's hand in this case, but that's clear only when you see all 52 cards. The opponents have forced South to guess. ■