



Play & Learn

BY PAT HARRINGTON ✉ mrsbridge@embarqmail.com

Partscore fights: When to push and when to quit

Answer the following two questions and don't read any farther until you have answered them both.

- ① Your side is vulnerable, and you hold:
 ♠ K Q J 6 ♥ K Q 9 7 4 ♦ 5 ♣ A K Q
 and hear partner open 1♥ in second seat. What is your plan for continuing the auction?
- ② The opponents are vulnerable. What action would you take holding:
 ♠ 9 4 3 ♥ 8 ♦ K Q J 10 9 8 6 4 2 ♣ —
 after your right-hand opponent opens 1♥ in second seat?

Answers

1. With 20 high-card points plus distribution opposite a one-level opening bid, your side is clearly in the slam zone. All that's left is to determine the best slam, which might be 6♥, 7♥ or even 7NT. The best way to do that is to take control by bidding 4NT to ask for aces. If partner has only one ace, you will stop in 5♥. If partner shows two aces, you can bid 6♥. What contract would you choose if partner shows all three missing aces? If you mentally replace one low card in each suit with the ace, you can count 13 tricks and should bid a grand slam. Your 10-card fit leaves no chance of a heart loser, so you should bid 7NT. If you are playing duplicate pairs, 7NT will score more than 7♥. Even at social bridge or teams, 7NT is the safest contract because it precludes a ruff by an opponent.

2. I hope you would make a preemptive jump overcall. PJOs work like opening preempts. As long as your overcall skips at least one level, partner will expect a hand that looks similar to a preemptive opening bid at the same level. Vulnerability, suit quality and distribution matter, but in most cases the length of your suit determines the level at which you preempt:

- Preempt on the two level with a six-card suit (but remember, a PJO must be a jump).
- Preempt on the three-level with a seven-card suit.
- Four- or five-level preempts show eight-card suits. Bid the same with a nine-card suit.

The suggested action with the hand given in (2) is a PJO of 5♦. Conditions are ideal to preempt: favorable vulnerability (you're not and the opponents are); partner dealt and passed so it's unlikely you have a game and the opponents probably have a game or slam. When preempting, don't be a late-blooming rose – say it all immediately.

How would a 5♦ overcall by RHO affect your answer to question 1? 5♦ makes it impossible for you to ask for aces. Consider your options over 5♦. What would you do at the table? Choices made by my Newplicate players were pass, 5♥, 6♥ and double. Bidding 7♥ is possible on a gamble, but responder really has no right to expect opener to produce the ♦A. Bidding a new suit could easily be taken as natural, and cuebidding 6♦ is likely

to cause confusion. Let's examine the choices made by my players.

Pass. When partner has shown strength and you have a good hand that you have not shown, you must not pass the opponents' preempt. Only you know that your partnership has the strength for slam and a huge heart fit.

Double. Yes, you might set 5♦, but at this vulnerability, even plus 500 won't make up for the score you get for even 5♥. Your strength, diamond shortness and big heart fit point to bidding more.

Bid 5♥. Better than pass or double but wimpy when your partnership is clearly in the slam zone. Yes, you could be missing two aces, but preempts often make you guess. Bidding 6♥ is the most reasonable choice.

Many inexperienced players find it hard to accept that it is not poor sportsmanship to make a bid that attempts to steal the contract from your much stronger opponents. It's all in the game. As you can see, 7NT is an easy make. Getting there after the jump overcall of 5♦ is not so easy.

Dir: South ♠ K Q J 6
 Vul: N-S ♥ K Q 9 7 4
 ♦ 5
 ♣ A K Q

♠ 9 4 3 ♠ 8 7 5 2
 ♥ 8 ♥ J 10
 ♦ K Q J 10 9 8 6 4 2 ♦ 7
 ♣ — ♣ 10 9 8 7 6 5

♠ A 10
 ♥ A 6 5 3 2
 ♦ A 3
 ♣ J 4 3 2 ■