



Play & Learn

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Don't be a late-blooming rose

Weak two-bids leave a reasonable amount of room for the opponents to find their best spot. This makes raising partner's preempt with a weak hand having a good fit very important.

When furthering the preempt, follow the law of total tricks and compete for as many tricks as your side has trumps. A weak two tends to show a six-card suit. With a weak hand and three-card support, raise to the three level, bidding for nine tricks based on your nine-card fit. Raise to the four level with four-card support and a 10-card fit. Your opponents are more likely to double for penalty when you are vulnerable and they are not, so be cautious about making a high-level preemptive raise at unfavorable vulnerability.

Further partner's non-vulnerable weak 2♥ opening to 4♥ holding:

♠ Q J 9 5 ♥ 8 5 4 3 ♦ J 10 7 2 ♣ 2.

You know the opponents have most of the high-card points and you expect to go down. By competing for 10 tricks (as many tricks as your side has trumps), you hope to prevent your opponents from reaching their optimum contract. Because you would also bid 4♥ with a strong hand, no one else knows whether you are stealing or bidding 4♥ to make.

With:

♠ Q J 7 ♥ J 6 3 ♦ A 10 8 7 6 ♣ 10 9,

would you further partner's non-vulnerable weak 2♠ opening? Again, your opponents have the majority of strength. Try to block them further

by raising to 3♠, competing for nine tricks with nine trumps. It doesn't matter whether your right-hand opponent passed, overcalled or doubled. As long as 3♠ is an option, bid it.

Could partner interpret your raise as a game invitation? You need agreements, but it's standard to treat raises of preempts to a higher partscore as merely furthering the preempt.

Put yourself in the opponents' shoes. Holding:

♠ K 3 ♥ K Q ♦ A 9 6 5 ♣ A K Q 10 7,

what is your call in the pass-out seat after your left-hand opponent's weak 2♥ opening? With 21 HCP, a gorgeous five-card suit and a heart stopper, bid 3NT. You have to take some chances over a preempt. You will have enough for game if partner has his share of the missing points. 2NT and 3♣ are underbids – especially in the pass-out seat – and double might get you to 4♠. You should also bid 3NT if RHO raises to 3♥.

The opponents are trying to cause problems in the bidding, but you are handling it well ... so far. What if RHO raises 2♥ to 4♥? So much for 3NT. A double of 4♥ is for takeout and is uncomfortable with only two spades. Passing lets the opponents steal and hides your strength from partner. Bidding 5♣ is reasonable. Even experts are uncertain of the best action when their opponents preempt to a high level. If you look at the full deal, you will know the right call with this hand ... this time.

Dlr: South ♠ Q J 9 5

Vul: E-W ♥ 8 5 4 3

♦ J 10 7 2

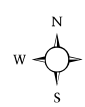
♣ 2

♠ 10 8 7 4 2

♥ 6

♦ K Q 3

♣ J 9 6 3



♠ K 3

♥ K Q

♦ A 9 6 5

♣ A K Q 10 7

♠ A 6

♥ A J 10 9 7 2

♦ 8 4

♣ 8 5 4

It turns out that 3NT is the last makeable game for East–West. It's not a high score, but assuming partner would take out a double of 4♥, the only way for East–West to go plus is if East makes the unlikely choice of pass with 21 HCP!

You might be thinking that North could pass and bid 4♥ after East–West reach 3NT, but that gives East–West a better chance to make the right decision. While a double of an immediate 4♥ raise is takeout-oriented, a double is penalty-oriented once East has shown strength by bidding 3NT. Giving up a small penalty in 4♥ is better for North–South than letting East–West score 600 points in 3NT. Better yet would be to put the plus score in the North–South column, which can happen if East makes the wrong decision over 4♥. That's less likely if North only comes to life after East–West reach the right contract.

Don't be a late-blooming rose. To cause the most problems for your opponents, put a thorn in their side by preempting the full extent of your hand immediately.