



Play & Learn

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How responder can be a troublemaker

A reader asks: The cuebid-raise methods you suggest work well when the overcaller's suit is higher ranking than opener's suit. Advancer (overcaller's partner) can cuebid opener's suit to show a limit raise or better and the pair can stop at the two or three level opposite a weak overcall. What does advancer do when opener's suit is higher ranking than overcaller's suit?

The reader is correct that these auctions can be troublesome. So are auctions where responder raises opener's suit. Take this auction with neither side vulnerable:

1.	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♣	1♥	Pass	?

When partner makes a one-level overcall, using the cuebid advance to show a limit raise lets the pair stop at a safe, low level when the overcall is minimum (maybe only 8 points.) If East passes, South can cuebid 2♣ to show a good hand with a fit. With enough to make game possible, the priority is to look for a major-suit fit.

If East responds 1♠ or makes a negative double, South still has a 2♣ cuebid available. But if East raises to 2♣, South has to bid 3♣ to show a limit raise or better, and the pair is forced to the three level with possibly only 19 combined points.

Raising opener's suit – even a minor – can be an effective blocking tool. How many clubs would East need to bid 2♣? Only four. Yes, opener could

have only three clubs, but the odds favor having an eight-card fit, and the small risk of having only seven clubs is worth the grief you might cause your opponents. Even worse, East could make a preemptive jump raise to 3♣, showing up to 6 points and at least five clubs. You will occasionally get one level higher than the Law of Total Tricks suggests, but most of the time, you will have a nine-card or better fit. East's 3♣ raise means South's cuebid would have to be 4♣, which is quite dangerous when overcaller could be so weak.

Many newer players don't appreciate how effective responder's raise of opener's suit can be. Holding only 6 points and support for opener's suit, they pass with a sigh of relief rather than raising opener's suit. It's far better to raise – either a single raise showing 6 to about 10 points or a preemptive raise showing 6 or fewer points and a likely nine-card fit.

Is this auction more or less problematic for advancer South?

2.	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♠	2♥	2♠	?


Holding a good hand with heart support, South is no longer worried that partner bid on only 8 or 9 points. Remember, a two-level overcall shows a hand worth opening. If South also has opening strength, the pair belongs in game.


But what if South has a limit raise?

Cuebidding 3♠ forces the pair to 4♥ even when they may not have sufficient strength. When a cuebid that lets you stop below game is not available, you might agree to make a non-jump competitive raise to the three level with 6 to a bad 11 points. With so little room for discussion, it's important to compete for the more likely partscore than it is to focus on reaching game. Bid game or cuebid with more.

What if East had passed instead of bidding 2♠ in the second auction? Your side would be winning the bid at the moment. A raise to 3♥ in that case shows enough strength to invite game opposite a good overcall – about 8 to 10 points. You could cuebid 2♠ with more.

Hopefully this article has made two things clear:

 Aggressive bidding – especially with a fit – can make it harder for your opponents to communicate accurately.

 You need partnership agreements on how to raise partner's suit in various competitive situations.

Next month, we'll continue this discussion by looking at complete deals. But don't expect miracles. Perfect communication isn't possible when everyone is bidding. ■