



Play & Learn

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The borrowed king

Take a look at the private score on your convention card the next time you play duplicate. How many hands did your opponents play at the one or two level? What were your matchpoint results on those hands? If you got poor results, chances are you should have been in the bidding.

Don't lament the fact that your opponents stopped low enough to make their contract while other pairs got too high. Sometimes you have to act to give your opponents a little push to make them bid too much. Sometimes you'll win the bid and make your own contract. Sometimes you go down but lose less than you would have if you'd stayed out of the auction. Balancing helps you accomplish these things.

Consider the following auction where you are South in the passout or balancing seat. What do you know about your opponents' hands? What do you know about your own partner's hand?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♠	Pass	Pass	?

As opener, West's hand could range from 13 all the way up to 21 points. East's pass shows fewer than 6 points.

North, your partner, could have a good hand, but no good bid. For example, North might have:

♠A 6 5 3 ♥3 2 ♦K Q 4 3 ♣K J 5.

What actions were available to North immediately over West's 1♠ opening? An overcall promises at least a five-card suit. North doesn't have one. A takeout double promises adequate support for any unbid suit. North lacks support for hearts, the suit South is most likely to bid if North doubles. North-South could have the majority of points on this deal, but won't get into the auction unless South balances.

North could also have a long suit, but not enough strength to enter the bidding on the two level. North would also have to pass 1♠ holding:

♠K 6 3 ♥Q J 10 9 4 ♦K 6 3 ♣9 2.

North-South could have a heart fit but won't be able to compete for a partscore unless South balances.

What are the guidelines for bidding in the balancing seat? The easiest method to follow when the opening bid is passed around to you in the balancing seat is to "borrow" a king (or any 3 points) from your partner's hand and bid accordingly. You can:

- Make a takeout double with the right distribution and only 10 total points
- Overcall at the one level with a long suit
- Overcall at the two level with a long suit, but only 10 points
- Overcall 1NT with 3 fewer points than usual!

Of course, when you borrow 3 of partner's points to scrape up enough to bid, partner must deduct those points before acting. After deducting the 3 points you borrowed, partner uses your agreed-upon advances to overcalls and takeout doubles.

When you have a pretty good hand with no suitable action directly over an opponent's one-level opening, it's comforting to know you have a partner who will strive to balance.

Next time, we'll look at examples of balancing over the opening bid. Meanwhile, chat with partner about how the player in the passout seat can overbid by 3 points while his partner underbids by the same 3 points. ■