

Leslie's Logo
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Bridge Students 'R Us

Volume 5, Issue 6 November/December 2005

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Defense — Passive Opening Leads

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Dodge These Bullets!

If you're not familiar with these bad moves at the bridge table, it would behoove you to spend some time investigating them.

- Giving declarer a "ruff and a sluff;"
- Setting up tricks for the opponents;
- Failing to count your winners (or losers) in order to make a plan; and
- Sacrificing at unfavorable vulnerability.

Experts might know when it's right to commit these acts, but you should dodge these bullets! If you can avoid these bridge errors, your game will improve, guaranteed.

N-S Vul	North	
Lead: ♥2	♠ 8 6 2	
	♥ Q 9 8 4	
	♦ J 8 5	
	♣ K 9 4	
West		East
♠ 10 5 3		♠ J 9 7 4
♥ K J 3 2		♥ 10 6
♦ K 4 3		♦ 10 9 7 6 2
♣ 10 6 2	South	♣ 5 3
	♠ A K Q	
	♥ A 7 5	
	♦ A Q	
	♣ A Q J 8 7	

Bidding:	West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	Pass	2♣ (1)
	Pass	2♦ (2)	Pass	3NT (3)
	Pass	4NT (4)	Pass	6NT
	All Pass			

Result: Making six, +1440 for North-South.

- (1) South's fingers were trembling with excitement as he opened with a strong and artificial 2♣ bid.
- (2) North's semi-automatic response of 2♦ is artificial and "waiting" to hear what her partner's hand really looks like.
- (3) In standard bidding, the 3NT rebid after a 2♣ opener shows 25-27 HCP and a balanced hand.
- (4) This is a "quantitative" raise, inviting 6NT if the opener is at the top of his announced range.

South started with ten top tricks; three spades, one heart, one diamond and five clubs. West led her fourth-best heart and declarer won the trick with dummy's ♥Q,

bringing his total up to eleven. South led dummy's ♦5 to the ♦Q as a finesse and West won her ♦K, but dummy's ♦J was now the twelfth trick. West led another heart, declarer won the ♥A and cashed his ♦A. He used dummy's club entry to get to the ♦J and all was right with the world.

West's ♥2 opening lead would have been reasonable had the contract been 3NT, but defending 6NT usually calls for a passive opening lead.

Before leading, West should try to estimate where the points are around the table. Let's see ... North-South probably have about 33 points to bid a small slam and since West has seven points, East must have about ... zilch, zip, nada! West should realize that since East doesn't have a red queen, leading either a heart or a diamond will only set up declarer's queen in that suit.



It's not your job to set up tricks for your opponents!



A black-suit lead would not have helped declarer in his quest for 12 tricks and assuming South lacks x-ray vision (is that you, Clark?), West will probably get tricks with both of her kings, setting the contract.

Bidding — Quit Jumping Around!

None Vul Lead: ♥2	North ♠ A 7 ♥ Q 6 ♦ 10 9 2 ♣ A Q J 10 6 5	East ♠ J 9 8 4 3 ♥ 7 5 3 ♦ K 6 4 ♣ 7 3	
West ♠ 10 6 5 ♥ 10 8 4 2 ♦ J 8 3 ♣ K 8 4	South ♠ K Q 2 ♥ A K J 9 ♦ A Q 7 5 ♣ 9 2		

Bidding:	West	North	East	South
	Pass	1♣	Pass	1♦ (1)
	Pass	2♣ (1)	Pass	3NT (3)
	All Pass			

Result: Making seven, +520 for North-South.

- (1) Even though South had a great hand he needed more information before deciding on where to play. When you need to explore for a fit, go slowly. South's 1♦ response is absolutely forcing and does **NOT** deny a four-card major.
- (2) North's 2♣ rebid showed a minimum hand with a six-card club suit. This bid **DOES** deny a four-card major!
- (3) South correctly decided on notrump as a final destination, but only bid game. Apparently, he got lost on his detour and forgot that the partnership had enough for a slam. A rebid of 6NT would have been better.

Jumping: Don't jump on your first bid when you need more information. If you slow down, who knows — maybe your partner will jump (if he has extras) and then you can know to go to a grand slam instead of settling for a small slam.

Studmuffin and I have been playing bridge for a long time, and we jump on our first bid as responder only about once every two or three years. It rarely comes up. In fact, if a novice responder NEVER jumps on his first bid, he'll probably be right 99.99% of the time.

South won the opening lead in dummy and immediately led a diamond to his ♦Q as a finesse. This was a horrible play! Declarer doesn't need any extra

diamond tricks to make the slam since he can throw away his diamonds on dummy's long clubs after they are established. He is cold for at least 12 tricks if he concentrates on the clubs. (Since the ♣K is favorably located on this deal declarer will take 13 tricks.) The location of the ♦K is irrelevant to the fate of the contract! Declarer's diamond finesse is sarcastically called a "practice finesse."



By taking the club finesse twice, declarer can win 14 tricks (six clubs, three spades, four hearts and one diamond); I guess he thought he needed a 15th trick!

More About Responder's Jumping

If a responder is going to jump on his first bid, he needs to know two things:

- A) What the trump suit is going to be; and
- B) That the partnership might have the values for at least a small slam (33+ points).

If you don't know both A) **and** B) above, then slow the auction down so you can **get** the needed information.

Many students fear that if they only respond at the one level, partner will think they have a weak hand (i.e., 6-10 points). But a new suit by an unpassed responder is unlimited (within reason, of course, since there's only 40 points in a deck) and forcing.

Many times in my classes I'll ask the opener what his partner promised with a one-level suit response and almost always I hear "6-10 points." As long as the responder is an unpassed hand, the answer should be "6 PLUS points!!" There is no upper limit.

If responder had a chance to open the bidding and passed, he is limited to a bad 12 points or less. In that case, a new suit by him would NOT be forcing.

So the next time your partner (as an unpassed hand) responds in a new suit at the one level, think to yourself, "The sky is the limit on this one, he could be very strong." Oh, the anticipation of hearing his next bid is very exciting. My heart starts pounding just thinking about it. Whatever you do, don't pass his one-level response or you might be looking for a new partner.

Defense — An Obvious Signal



	North			
E-W Vul	♠ K Q 9 6			
Lead: ♥K	♥ 7			
	♦ Q 9 6 3			
	♣ A Q J 2			
		East		
West		♠ 8 5 3 2		
♠ J		♥ A 10 9 2		
♥ K Q 8 6 5 3		♦ ---		
♦ J 10 4 2		♣ 10 9 7 4 3		
♣ 6 5				
	South			
	♠ A 10 7 4			
	♥ J 4			
	♦ A K 8 7 5			
	♣ K 8			
Bidding:	West	North	East	South
	2♥	Dbl	4♥ (1)	5♠ (2)
	Pass	6♠ (3)	All Pass	

diamonds from her hand and took the last three tricks with the ♦A-K-Q. Twelve tricks in all: four spades, four clubs, three diamonds and a heart ruff in dummy.

When the opening heart lead created a void in dummy, everyone at the table should see the futility of continuing hearts. In this situation, we say that East's attitude towards hearts is "obvious." This being so, on the very first trick East should have signaled her partner to switch to the suit she wanted him to lead; in this case, diamonds.

East can't lean across the table and say "Lead a diamond, partner," at least not out loud ...



Result: Making six, +980 for North-South.

- (1) The longer East looked at her hand, the more she liked it. She usually hated sacrificing when vulnerable but decided to advance her partner's preempt to 4♥ for several reasons:
 - With length in the spade suit, she suspected that her partner was VERY short in it;
 - She knew that her side had a 10-card trump fit;
 - She was void in diamonds; and
 - If she and partner were both weak then the opponents might have a slam. Maybe she could talk them out of getting there.
- (2) South knew game was assured and suspected more was possible. The jump to 5♠ (one more than game) invited her partner to bid a small slam.
- (3) North had a few extras and especially liked his singleton heart, so he accepted the slam invitation.

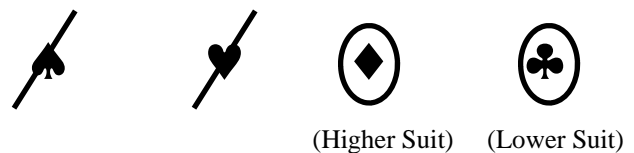


After West's ♥K won the first trick, he thought about what to do next. Since dummy would ruff another heart and leading trump didn't seem right, he had to pick either diamonds or clubs. Which to choose? West finally played ... a club!

Declarer won the ♣K, trumped her last heart in dummy and drew all the trump in four rounds. South then played three more clubs to discard the two losing

When your attitude towards partner's opening-lead suit is obvious, you should instead signal him with a suit-preference card. The size of the first card East plays in the heart suit should tell West which suit to switch to.

The first thing the defenders do is mentally eliminate the trump suit (spades) and the suit we know we both don't care for anymore (hearts). That leaves just two suits in our equation:



Since East desperately wants her partner to switch to a diamond (the higher suit), she should play a high heart on that first heart trick! If West switches to a diamond, East will trump it for the setting trick.

Every card you play should be sending some sort of signal to your partner. Which card you lead in a suit and which card you play on partner's leads are usually both "attitude" signals. However, ...

... if the attitude is obvious then suit preference becomes the message conveyed.

Bidding — Competing Over Their Big Notrump Bids

Your right-hand opponent (RHO), as the dealer, opens 1NT. If I told you that you had to compete, which of these two hands would you rather have?

Hand #1:	OR	Hand #2:
♠ K J 8		♠ K 5 4 3 2
♥ A Q 9 4		♥ Q 3 2
♦ A 5 4		♦ 7
♣ 9 7 5		♣ A 8 3 2

Many of you would choose Hand #1, which is NOT correct! When the opponents open 1NT, the best time to compete is when you have some interesting SHAPE. Here are the assets to look for when you consider competing against their notrump bids:

- A six-card or longer suit;
- Two five-card suits; or
- Singletons or voids.



What do all these types of hands have in common? Shape.

It is shape that will be your best weapon against their strong 1NT opening bids.

Judy, in class last week, was holding Hand #1 above and her RHO opened 1NT. She looked up at me and asked, "What should I bid?"

"I think you should pass with that hand," I replied.

"What? But ... I have 14 points! I really should do something. Come, look at my hand ..."

"Judy, I know what's in your hand. I made the hands up!"

"But ... passing doesn't feel right," she sighed.

"How does setting 1NT feel? The better your hand is, the better the chance of setting the opponents," I countered.

A hand with opening values (13+) is always nice to

have, and many times you can come into the auction after they've opened *one of a suit*. However, competing safely against a 1NT opening bid requires some *good distribution*. Don't get me wrong, HCP will help, but the main ingredient is distribution!

Let's look at two deals that came up at the Washington Bridge League's Unit game.

E-W Vul Lead: ♣Q	North ♠ Q 10 7 6 ♥ K 8 6 5 ♦ K 8 ♣ 9 6 4	East ♠ 9 8 ♥ J 10 9 ♦ J 6 4 3 2 ♣ K 10 5
West ♠ A J ♥ A 7 4 ♦ A Q 10 9 5 ♣ Q J 7	South ♠ K 5 4 3 2 ♥ Q 3 2 ♦ 7 ♣ A 8 3 2	

Bidding:	West	North	East	South
	1NT (1)	Pass	Pass	2♠ (2)
	All Pass			

Result: Making two, +110 for North-South.

- (1) West's hand is a wee bit too strong to open 1NT. Counting one point for the long diamond, the hand evaluates as 19 points! However, this is what happened at your roving reporter's table.
- (2) South had a singleton and a few outside honors, so he decided to compete. Playing the Cappelletti convention, this bid promised spades and an unknown minor.



I think West should have considered competing with a 3♦ bid, a contract he can actually make. However, even if that had happened, North would have competed to 3♠ with her prime spade support and good cards sitting over West's known values. Even though 3♠ goes down, it would be better than letting East-West make 3♦!



South had only nine points, but he had a singleton and he knew his partner had to have some values since the opponents' auction was dying out at the one level. His most effective asset in competing against his LHO's 1NT opening bid was his singleton!

South won the opening lead with the ♣A and led the ♦7 towards dummy's ♦K. West hopped up with the ♦A and continued playing clubs. Declarer eventually threw a losing heart on the ♦K, making his contract.

For those of us who don't go skydiving or bungee jumping, bidding with very few points might be our only source of excitement in life. (Now there's a sad thought.) But, as Jerry Helms tells us:

You should be looking for reasons to bid, not excuses for passing.

Here's the second example, but this time the opponents were "overcalling" a big 1NT.

E-W Vul	North		
Lead: ♠Q	♠ K 6 5 4 3		
	♥ A K 2		
	♦ A 4 2		
	♣ 5 3		
	West	East	
	♠ Q J 9 8 2	♠ A 10 7	
	♥ J	♥ Q 5 3	
	♦ K 10 6 5	♦ Q J 8 7	
	♣ 10 9 4	♣ A Q 6	
	South		
	♠ ---		
	♥ 10 9 8 7 6 4		
	♦ 9 3		
	♣ K J 8 7 2		

Bidding:	West	North	East	South
		1♠	1NT (1)	2♥ (2)
	Pass (3)	Pass	Pass	

Result: Making five, +200 for North-South.

(1) I might have passed with East's hand. Even though you can open 1NT with a flat 15-17, we recommend 16-18 in values when overcalling 1NT. Another negative aspect of East's hand is that there are too many "Quacks" (queens and jacks). A flat hand with soft values should definitely be downgraded.

- (2) Even with a void in her partner's bid suit, South still wanted to compete with her 6-5 shape.
- (3) West suspected her side might have a spade fit but North's 1♠ opening bid effectively silenced her. After all, she'd never liked 5-0 trump splits in the past, why should she like them now?

Declarer wanted to finesse East's suspected club honors and used dummy's high trump as transportation. She ruffed the opening spade lead and led a trump to dummy's ♥K. A low club was led from the dummy, East played "second hand low" and declarer won her ♣J. Another trump was led to the ♥A in order to lead the last club from dummy, and East hopped up with his ♣A. East returned the ♦Q (top of touching) to try to establish a diamond trick for his side, but it was too late. Declarer won the ♦A in dummy, ruffed a spade to get to her hand and cashed the ♣K to pitch a diamond from dummy. When the club suit split 3-3, the rest of declarer's clubs were good! South led a fourth round of clubs to discard dummy's last diamond; East ruffed with the ♥Q but that was the last trick for the defense. Declarer was able to trump his second diamond with dummy's last trump. South lost only a heart and a club. Making five!

We do *not* want to suggest that North-South should have been in game (even though it makes on this deal through a lucky lie of the cards).

Competing Against 1NT Overcalls

After your RHO opponent overcalls partner's opening bid with 1NT, here are some suggestions on how to compete —

- All suit bids at the two level are weak and non-forcing;
- With decent HCP values but unexciting distribution you should prefer to double (which in this instance is for penalties); and
- Feel free to raise partner's opening bid with adequate trump length, even with minimum values (six or more support points).

When partner opens the bidding and an opponent overcalls 1NT, getting to game is a low probability. You will usually just be competing for a part-score contract.

Bidding — Lies & Vulnerability

	North		
Both Vul	♠ A 5 3 2		
Lead: ♦ 8	♥ 5		
	♦ A 7 5		
	♣ J 8 7 3 2		
West		East	
♠ K J 10 9 8		♠ Q 7 4	
♥ Q 2		♥ K 8 3	
♦ 8 6		♦ K Q J 9 3	
♣ Q 10 6 4		♣ K 5	
	South		
	♠ 6		
	♥ A J 10 9 7 6 4		
	♦ 10 4 2		
	♣ A 9		

Bidding: West North East South
 All Pass Pass 1♦ 4♥ (1)

Result: Down two, -200 for North-South.

(1) Looking at her singleton spade, South was convinced that the opponents were on their way to a 4♠ contract. "Goodness, I should try to talk them out of it!" she thought. But there were a few things wrong with the jump "all the way" to 4♥ —

- She had seven hearts, which usually calls for a jump-overcall of only 3♥;
- Had she bid only 3♥, the opponents might have stopped in 3♠, which isn't game. She might actually be pushing them into a game by bidding 4♥;
- She had some good defensive prospects (her two aces); and
- She was vulnerable.

Because East-West can only take eight tricks in a spade contract (North can ruff a heart), South's -200 was a disastrous score — and she wasn't even doubled!

Good vulnerable sacrifices are rare and hard to recognize. Don't do it.



It takes courage to be creative. It takes experience to temper your creativity with caution. If you're vulnerable, it's not the time to throw caution to the wind.

Bidding — Recognizing When Partner's in Trouble

We usually don't advocate rescuing partner, but there are times when you should at least think about it. Here's a deal we played at the local club recently:

	North		
N-S Vul	♠ J		
Lead: ♣ K	♥ J 7 5		
	♦ 6 5 3		
	♣ Q 9 8 7 5 3		
West		East	
♠ Q 10 7 6 4		♠ 8 2	
♥ A 9 6 4		♥ Q 10 3 2	
♦ K Q		♦ A 10 8 7 4	
♣ A K		♣ 10 4	
	South		
	♠ A K 9 5 3		
	♥ K 8		
	♦ J 9 2		
	♣ J 6 2		

Bidding: West North East South
 Pass (1) Pass Dbl (2) Pass
 Pass (3) Pass (4)

Result: Down two, -500 for North-South.

- (1) West considered overcalling 1NT, but she didn't have a source of tricks since most of her high cards were in her short suits and she knew from the opening bid that her long suit was not splitting very well. Even with 18 HCP, she felt that passing (and possibly defending against a North-South spade contract) would be best.
- (2) East was in the "balancing seat." Since she was short in spades and had a tolerance for the red suits she opted for a "takeout double." In the balancing seat, a double says "Do something, partner, I don't want them to play 1♠!"
- (3) Although West suspected their side had a heart fit, she opted to pass her partner's takeout double, converting it to a penalty double. Sweet!
- (4) North should realize his partner is in trouble and bid 2♣. Even though North might not make 2♣, East-West will probably choose to bid some number of hearts rather than double a low-level club contract. North-South will have "scrambled" out of their bottom score.

If you have a weak hand with a long suit, it is often better to play with that suit as trump; remember, partner's high cards will still take tricks but your suit is worthless if it's not trump!



Bidding — Direct-Seat Competition Needs Solid Values

I hate to "sell out" to my opponents' low-level contracts. If my pass would end the auction, I am in what is called the balancing seat and it's my job to re-open the bidding.

In the direct seat (immediately following an opponent who just bid), there is less pressure to enter the auction with an off-shape or marginal hand. If the direct seat starts with a "double" and then later bids notrump or a new suit, then they are showing a hand that was too strong for a simple overcall. Look at these auctions —

West	North	East	South	Here South (in the direct seat) is showing a hand that was too strong to initially overcall 1NT (about 19-21 points).
Pass	Pass	1♦	Dbl	
Pass	1♥	Pass	1NT ...	

West	North	East	South	With an overcall range of 7-17 points, this South would be showing at least five good spades and 18+ points.
Pass	Pass	1♦	Dbl	
Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠ ...	

Let me illustrate why it is important to know this:

	North		
E-W Vul	♠ K 9 5 3		
Lead: ♦6	♥ K 6 5 2		
	♦ Q 9 4		
	♣ J 4		
		East	
West		♠ Q J	
♠ 10 7 6 2		♥ Q 10 9	
♥ J 7 4		♦ A K 8 7	
♦ 6 3 2		♣ Q 10 9 3	
♣ A 6 5			
	South		
	♠ A 8 4		
	♥ A 8 3		
	♦ J 10 5		
	♣ K 8 7 2		

Bidding:	West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1♦	Dbl (1)
	Pass	1♠ (2)	Pass	1NT (3)
	Pass	3NT (4)	All Pass	

Result: Down two, -200 for North-South.

(1) South knew he couldn't overcall 1NT with 12 HCP but he felt a sense of urgency to do something. He decided upon a flawed takeout double, asking his partner to bid.

However, takeout doubles in direct position should promise three things —

- Shortness in the enemy suit;
- Opening bid strength; and
- Support for the unbid suits (ideally four cards in each suit, although having only three cards in one of the unbid suits is acceptable).

South's hand didn't quite meet any of these three criteria. He knew this, but he felt that passing was too conservative.

- (2) North responded as cheaply as possible in her four-card spade suit. A cue-bid of the enemy suit in response to a takeout double would show both majors, but she wasn't strong enough to use that tool (11+ points are needed).
- (3) South was uncomfortable leaving his partner in spades without four-card support and since South's hand was balanced, he rebid 1NT. (Those strange sounds you hear are the bagpipes being tuned for the upcoming funeral.) Having already made a questionable takeout double, South should just pass North's 1♠ bid.
- (4) North thought South was showing a big hand and bid 3NT. After all, South's promised 19+ and her nine-count were more than enough for game!



In direct-seat competition you should have solid values for your bids. South's flat 12-count is not worth sticking his neck out over. South must trust North to not let the opponents play in a low-level contract. Had South patiently passed with his hand, the auction might have gone:

Bidding:	West	North	East	South	
	Pass	Pass	1♦	Pass	
	Pass	Dbl	Pass	1NT	All Pass

Do you see that North will have a chance to decide whether or not to sell out to the opponents? North is in the balancing position as a pass by her would end the auction. Yes, her takeout double is flawed, but balancers are given a lot of latitude since they are under so much pressure to bid something.

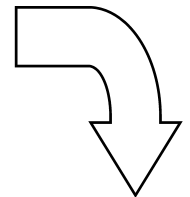
When a player in direct seat bids with a marginal or off-shape hand, they are not trusting their partner to be intelligent enough to balance. What an insult!

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Volume 5, Issue #6—November/December 2005



Why Not the ♣A?

Q: Since it is now "standard" to lead the ace from an ace-king combination on opening lead, why did West (see Page 6, Column 2) lead the ♣K instead of the ♣A?

A: Good question! This is a special lead that is used against suit contracts to show your partner that you only have a doubleton A-K and are able to trump the third round of the suit. The idea is to cash your two top honors in reverse order (king first) to "wake up" your partner to the unusual situation. When he sees you cash the second honor (the ace) partner should realize you started with only two cards in the suit and will signal "suit preference" to you on the second trick if possible.



Defenders should try to signal their partner whenever they can.

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