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Defending against artificial systems

Part I

IN the December 2008 issue of *English Bridge*, Henry Lockwood and Matt Johnson listed six types of artificial opening that are allowed at Level Four. Few of us have time to devise a different defence to every possible opening, but it is possible to have some perfectly adequate generic agreements. In this article I'll start by looking at pre-emptive openings.

Once your right-hand opponent has made some weird jump opening, the first thing to do is find out what it means, in particular if it might be a weak hand. If so, there are a few general rules:

1. Assume the opening bidder is weak, even if there are strong options. Jump overcalls are strong and jumps to game expect to make.
2. 2NT and 3NT are natural, although 3NT may be based on a running suit. As non-jump bids, they show 16-19 points; a jump to 3NT is stronger.
3. Suit bids are natural, unless opener has promised five-plus cards in the suit bid.

Double is the only call whose meaning depends on the opening bid. There are two types of artificial opening: those where opener has promised one (or more) particular suit(s) if weak, and those where opener's suit is unknown. Examples of the former include a 2♣ opening being either very strong or weak with diamonds, 2NT showing both minors, and 4♣ showing a good 4♥ bid. The commonest pre-empt without a known suit is the Multi 2♦, but there are plenty of other possibilities – thirty years ago 'Alder' three bids were popular, where a 3♦ opening showed a three-level pre-empt in either major.

Against an opening with *known suit(s)*, pretend that opener has started with a natural pre-empt. That means that double is take-out of the anchor suit(s), or any very strong hand. A double followed by

another double next round is a very strong take-out double. If responder is weak you will get another chance to act, so play that a pass directly over the opening followed by a double on the next round shows a balanced hand. At the two level this is typically a decent weak no-trump, while at the three and four levels it is stronger but unsuitable for an immediate no-trump overcall.

If opener's long suit is *unknown*, you cannot make an immediate take-out bid. Instead, use the double to show either a balanced hand (a good weak no-trump at the two level, a bit stronger at the three or four level) or any very strong hand. To make a take-out double, pass on the first round then double on the next, once opener's suit is known. This is not just a light 'protective' action; with a 1-4-4-4 14-count you pass over a 2♦ Multi hoping to double 2♠ for take-out next round.

There is some sound bridge logic for switching the meaning of double depending on the type of opening, but I don't have room to go into it here!

Examples

In each example, you hold the sample hand and your right-hand opponent opens with the artificial jump described. It's your call!

Hand 1
 ♠ K Q 5 2
 ♥ A Q 8 3
 ♦ 8 3
 ♣ K 9 3

2♣ (weak in diamonds or very strong)

Hand 2
 ♠ 6
 ♥ Q
 ♦ K Q 10 7 4 2
 ♣ A K 8 5 3

2♦ (Multi – weak with either major or strong)

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

2♦ (Multi – weak with either major or strong)

Hand 4
 ♠ A 5
 ♥ K 3
 ♦ K 7
 ♣ A K J 10 9 6 5

2NT (bad pre-empt in either minor)

Hand 5
 ♠ K Q 10 8 5 2
 ♥ 7 4 3 2
 ♦ 8 3
 ♣ 2

2♦ (weak hearts or strong with a minor)

ANSWERS: (1) Double, take-out of diamonds. (2) 3♦. 2NT shows a strong balanced hand, not both minors. (3) Double, showing a decent weak no-trump. (4) Whatever the opening was, bid 3NT. (5) Pass. 2♠ shows a better hand.

Summary

- Suit and no-trump bids are natural and constructive.
- If you know opener's long suit, double is take-out of that suit while pass then double shows a balanced hand.
- If you don't know opener's long suit, double shows a balanced hand, while pass then double is take-out.

In my next article I shall look at the later auction, and in the third and last I'll consider defending against opening and responding artificial one-level bids. □