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Defending against artificial systems

Part II

IN April I looked at how to bid when your right-hand opponent (RHO) opens with an artificial pre-empt. I recommended playing much the same defence whatever the opening:

- Even if the opening bid has both strong and weak options, always assume a weak hand until proven otherwise.
- Suit and no-trump overcalls are usually natural and constructive.
- If opener's potential long suit is known, bid as if he has pre-empted in that suit. Double is take-out of the implied suit, while pass followed by a double shows a relatively balanced hand.
- If you don't know opener's long suit, double shows a balanced hand, while pass then double is take-out.

In this article I give some suggestions on how to continue the auction. In general, try to use the same methods as after a natural pre-empt. For example, if you play Lebensohl after a take-out double of a weak two, it is still useful after a double of an artificial two.

Unfortunately there is an additional complication against an artificial opening. After a natural pre-empt and overcall, you can always bid opener's suit to show a good hand, but how can you cue-bid when you don't know what their suit is? We deal with this using two more general rules:

- If partner doubles an artificial opening and next hand passes, bidding that suit is strong and artificial (you could pass the double with length).
- If the opening bid has two possible weak suits (e.g. the 'Multi'), and partner overcalls naturally in one of them, then a non-jump bid of the other one is a cue-bid. A jump is natural and strong, in case partner has picked off opener's suit.

Finally, one optional extra. After a 'pass or correct' bid by responder, in fourth seat you might have a strong hand with length in the suit just bid on your right. Rather than pass and hope to double later for take-out, you can play double as 'multi-way', i.e. take-out of any one of their possible suits. Opener will have to reveal his suit over the double, and now you both bid on assuming that the double was take-out of opener's suit.

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This may sound a little complex, so here are some examples where North opens with an artificial jump, either the Multi 2♦ (weak in one of the majors, or various strong hands), or some other pre-empt.

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

West	North	East	South
	2♦	Dble ¹	Pass
3♦ ²	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	All Pass		

¹ Balanced (opener's suit is unknown)

² A cue-bid, as West would pass with diamonds

♠ K Q 8 7	♠ A 5
♥ A Q 9 6 2	♥ K 3
♦ 5	♦ K 7
♣ Q 8 3	♣ A K J 10 9 6 5

West	North	East	South
	2NT ¹	3NT ²	Pass
4NT ³	Pass	6♣ ⁴	All pass

¹ Bad pre-empt in either minor

² Likely to make nine tricks

³ Do you have anything extra?

⁴ Yes (might try 6NT at match-points)

♠ A 7	♠ K Q 10 8 5 2
♥ 8 6 2	♥ K Q 5
♦ K Q 8 2	♦ J 6
♣ K J 10 7	♣ Q 5

West	North	East	South
	2♦	2♠	Pass
3♥ ¹	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass ²	Pass		

¹ A cue-bid, or general force

² Delighted (4♠ may go off)

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

West	North	East	South
	3♦ ¹	Pass	3♥
Pass	Pass	Dble ²	Pass
Pass ³	Pass		

¹ Weak with long hearts, or strong with spades and clubs

² Balanced values

³ Very happy if North-South are vulnerable

♠ J 6 3	♠ 8
♥ Q 10 8 7 4	♥ A K 5 2
♦ J 5	♦ K Q 10 4 2
♣ A 8 2	♣ K 9 3

West	North	East	South
	2♦	Pass	2♥ ¹
Pass	2♠	Dble ²	Pass
3♥ ³	Pass	4♥	All Pass

¹ To play opposite hearts ('pass or correct')

² Take-out of spades

³ Playing Lebensohl, about 8+ points

Next time I shall look at what to do after an artificial one-level opening or response. □