

June 2001 English Bridge

Defence to pre-empts

In the April issue I looked at pre-empts – opening bids at the three level designed to make life difficult for the opponents. I found my class were far to prepared to give up without a fight, so let's win look at what the opponents can do to counter this attack.

In choosing whether or not to bid, you should assume partner has some values. Opener won't have more than 9 HCP and suppose you have 15 HCP, making a total of 24 HCP. Partner can be expected to have about half of the 16 remaining points, say 8 HCP. Ask yourself, could those values in partner's hand lead to a making contract?

First hand opens 3♥. Do you overcall?

♠ A K J 6
♥ 5
♦ K Q 10 7
♣ Q 9 8 7

This hand gave everybody a problem; suggested bids included pass and 3♠. But double for takeout must be best. An ideal shape with support for all unbid suits. If partner responds 3♠, you should pass. You promised spades with the double, don't get carried away when partner bids them!

♠ A K J 6
♥ 8 5
♦ A K Q 10 7
♣ Q 9

A less than ideal shape but more points. Again you should double. If partner responds 3♠, raise to 4♠, but try 4♦ over a 4♣ response. Jean and Alison both tried 4♦ instead of double and missed the spade fit.

♠ A J
♥ K 8
♦ A K Q 10 7 6
♣ Q 9 3

Bid 3NT. You have only one heart stopper where you would prefer two. You can only see seven or eight tricks where you need nine. But 3NT is the best hope for game. Placing partner with 8 HCP means you can hope for a trick or two from partner.

♠ A 6
♥ A Q 10 8 2
♦ K Q 7
♣ Q 9 4

Pass. Everybody who held this hand scratched their heads and gazed at the ceiling. Marion said there just had to be a bid. Of course 3♥ will go down, but double is for takeout. Pass and do it smoothly. Just hope partner will be able to make a takeout double, which you can pass.

♠ A Q J 10 8
♥ 8 2
♦ K Q 7
♣ Q 9 4

Three Spades. Fran wouldn't bid without a six-card suit but you have to take some risks. If you just sit back when opponents pre-empt you will be playing losing bridge. A good suit is essential; at least you won't get penalty doubled too often.

♠ A
♥ 8
♦ K Q J 10 6
♣ A K J 9 4 2

Margaret refused to believe that I recommended 4NT. Blackwood is her favourite convention and this 4NT is NOT Blackwood. 4NT is showing both minor suits and asking partner to respond in their better minor, choosing clubs with equal length. Even with three small clubs and zero points, partner has a play for 5♣.

Possible bids over an opening 3♥ by opponents

Pass	Hands that are weak or would like to penalty double the suit bid.
Double	13+ HCP with 0 or 1 cards in the suit opened. Stronger hands might be semi two-suited with perhaps a doubleton in the opponent's suit. Strong one-suited hands, jump bid the suit rather than double.
Double in 4 th	Can be shaded with shortage in the suit opened –partner might have a penalty double and be unable to bid.
3♠	6 or very good 5-card suit and 13+ HCP
3NT	16+ HCP with at least one stopper in hearts, often not balanced. No upper limit to points held.
4♣/4♦	6+ cards, good suit, distributional hand. Consider 3NT instead with heart stop.
4♥	Only if you are sure partner knows! Spades and one minor suit, game forcing.
4♠	Good long spades. Ten tricks will be made if partner produces about 7 HCP.
4NT	Two very good minor suits, five or more cards in each.