

Every bridge player would agree that an opponent's opening preemptive bid can be difficult to cope with. For example, what would you, South, bid with this hand after an opening bid of Three Clubs by East ? Your side is vulnerable :

K6
AQ972
Q976
K10

Anything might be right. If you Double for take-out you'll just have to Pass and hope for the best if partner responds Three Spades. An overcall of Three Hearts looks a more descriptive bid but is this hand good enough for that ? Partner is likely to raise you to Four Hearts with, say, eight points and 3-card heart support, and you might find that a target of ten tricks is out of reach. Maybe you should just Pass. By now, everyone knows you have a decent hand so you might feel obliged to bid something to avoid giving partner a 'hesitation problem' if the bidding is Passed around to him.

If you agree that defending against preemptive bids isn't easy, maybe you should consider giving this problem to the opponents more regularly than you might do at present, and that means stretching the boundaries a bit.

The latest Adur Valley Bridge Clubs newsletter mentions the trend towards opening at the 3-level with a 6-card suit – a perfectly legal action. There is no golden rule that demands a preemptor must hold a 7-card suit.

Back to South's problem on the hand above. This was the full deal :

	AQ9	
	K86	
	J1053	
	962	
J108753		42
J105		43
A2		K84
84		AQJ753
	K6	
	AQ972	
	Q976	
	K10	

At the table, East's opening bid of Three Clubs was Passed out. Declarer made eight tricks, one down, for a better than average score. Many N/S pairs made nine or ten tricks in hearts after East Passed or opened One Club. Best defence can beat Four Hearts – West getting a diamond ruff – but this isn't so easy to find. You might think that East got lucky here but there is no denying that his aggressive opening bid gave his opponents a problem.

Many pairs use weak two opening bids in hearts and spades. The opponents have more room to manoeuvre than after an opening bid at the 3-level but it can still be awkward for them to judge the best action. Once again, you can take advantage of favourable vulnerability and open on a good 5-card suit :

AKJ95

4

10953

J76

Third in hand after two Passes, you might give your left-hand opponent a problem if you open Two Spades. It's possible that you might live to regret it but there are many upsides to this bid : (1) opponents don't like to feel that they are being talked out of a contract and will often risk an overcall on minimum values, (2) your good quality suit reduces the chance of you being left to play in a doubled contract – opponents tend to feel happier about defending low-level contracts when they have a decent trump holding, (3) if the opponents win the contract your partner will know which suit to lead.

Finally, if you do decide to loosen your requirements for a preemptive opening bid, make sure you mention this on your convention card : opening 3-bid - might be a 6-card suit, weak two opening bids - might be a 5-card suit.

Live dangerously and enjoy your bridge !