

It is important to support your partner's overcall whenever you can, even if your hand is pretty weak. Having three or four cards in partner's suit is more important than high-card points, even more so if you have a side-suit shortage as well. On hands where the high-card points are fairly evenly divided, it is common for both sides to be able to make a part-score contract in whatever their best trump suit happens to be. The plan is to bid to your side's contract quickly and make it harder for the opponents to reach theirs.

Consider the hand below. Your left-hand opponent opens the bidding with One Club, partner overcalls One Spade and right-hand opponent Passes :

♠Q95  
♥642  
♦108754  
♣A6

Some players would Pass, preferring to wait and see what happens and intending to compete with Two Spades on the next round of bidding. The problem with this approach is that it allows the opening bidder the chance to bid again at a low level. For example, if the One Club opening bidder has this hand :

♠10  
♥AJ  
♦KJ32  
♣KQ10872

- he won't be hard pressed to compete with Two Clubs. However, if you had raised to Two Spades when you had the chance on the first round, the opening bidder would be less likely to want to compete with *Three* Clubs.

The other problem with Passing on the first round of bidding is that it might cause the opening bidder's partner to suddenly spring to life later on, as in this auction :

North	South
(1C) – 1S – (NB) – NB	
(2C) – NB – (NB) – 2S	
(NB) – NB – (3C)	

South might have this hand : Jxxx / Qxxx / x / xxxx when both Two Spades (your way) and Three Clubs (their way) will be makeable contracts. Three Spades will probably not be making though, so your choice will be to defend Three Clubs and concede 110 or to bid on and go down in Three Spades, possibly doubled. If you had bid Two Spades right away instead of Passing, your side might now be playing in a comfortable part-score contract and entering 110 in the plus column instead of the minus column !

Players can be reluctant to support partner's overcall with a minimum hand in case it causes partner to bid too high. However, there is a way around this. Consider our first hand again, and also a stronger hand that we might hold :

♠Q95	♠K95
♥642	♥K42
♦108754	♦108754
♣A6	♣A6

The first hand is worth a weak raise to Two Spades. You want to make it difficult for the opening bidder to bid again but you don't want partner to get too excited. The second hand is worth a strong raise to Two Spades – there is a chance of making a game contract if partner has a good hand for his overcall but a jump to Three Spades looks a little too much. If partner has a minimum overcall a contract of Three Spades might fail.

So how do you differentiate between these two hands, both of which are worth a bid of Two Spades ? Bid Two Spades with the first hand but bid *Two Clubs* (the opening bidder's suit) with the second. In the second auction, if partner has a fairly minimum hand for his overcall he will just bid Two Spades and you will Pass. But if partner has a better hand, he might be able to jump to Three Spades or even bid Four Spades directly.

This arrangement (the convention is called *unassuming cue bids*) allows you to be aggressive in the auction and support partner whenever you have three or four cards in his (overcall) suit.

When you have four-card support you can be bolder still and jump to the 3-level. Change your hand to this :

♠Q952  
♥64  
♦108754  
♣A6

- and you'd jump to Three Spades right away. This makes life very difficult for the opening bidder if he has a strong hand because he is unlikely to want to bid again at the 4-level. Your partner won't get too carried away because he will know that if you really had a good hand in terms of high-card points you would have started off by responding Two Clubs (or whatever the opening bidder's suit was) instead of jumping to Three Spades.

Enjoy your bridge in 2014 !