

Responding to an overcall is not the same as responding to an opening bid yet many players do not make much, if any, of a distinction. For example, say you pick up the following hand and partner opens the bidding with One Spade. What do you respond ?

5
Q942
K7652
Q105

A little too good to Pass, not good enough for Two Diamonds, so you respond One No Trump. Partner will not rebid his spades unless he has six (or seven) of them.

Now say your left-hand opponent opens the bidding with One Heart, your partner overcalls One Spade and your right-hand opponent Passes. What do you bid now ?

This is *not* the same situation as the first, where you were responding to an opening bid. It is quite wrong to think "I have six to nine points so I have to bid something." You don't, because you are not responding to an opening bid. It is equally wrong to think "I don't like spades so I'll bid One No Trump to keep the bidding open and hope partner bids another suit." You might be lucky but if partner can do no more than bid Two Spades you will be one level higher and in more danger of being doubled.

Your best action is to Pass partner's overcall of One Spade even though it might not be your side's optimum contract. If you bid, you run the risk of ending in a worse contract.

The full hand was as follows :

KQ8632	
J10	
93	
KJ8	
AJ10	974
AK863	75
A84	QJ10
72	A9643
5	
Q942	
K7652	
Q105	

With both sides vulnerable, West opened One Heart, North overcalled One Spade, East Passed and South couldn't resist bidding One No Trump. Perhaps North should have Passed this but he decided to rebid his six-card suit.

The final contract of Two Spades did not play well at all. Two rounds of hearts, then a third heart ruffed and overruffed. Then the Queen of diamonds (King, Ace) and a further two rounds of diamonds, North ruffing the last of these. The King of spades lost to West's Ace and another heart was led ... and when the dust had cleared, North finished four down. The post mortem discussion was predictable :

South : "I had seven points so I had to bid something after you overcalled."

North : "Yes, and I thought I should bid my spades again because I had six of them."

At most of the other tables South did Pass the One Spade overcall. Sometimes West also Passed, earning his side a good score when One Spade drifted two or three down. Sometimes West decided to keep things alive by bidding One No Trump. North invariably led a spade and West was able to take seven or eight tricks but his expression soon changed when the scoresheet was opened. +90 scored precisely zero for East/West but it was South's decision to Pass his partner's One Spade overcall that gave his side the chance of scoring well on the board.