§25. The Contested Auction. Overcalls.

By the end of this chapter you should understand the following terms:

A One-level Overcall: A suit bid made at the one-level after your right-hand opponent has bid.

A Two-level Overcall: A suit bid made at the two-level after your right-hand opponent has bid.

Overcalls are bids made after the opponents have opened the bidding and they can lead to intensely competitive auctions. The "rules" for overcalling are not self-evident and this part of the game can be tricky. In fact, auctions where both sides are bidding away merrily form a real bear-garden.

Firstly: What is the point of overcalling? Too easy a question? No, not really. There are three main reasons to bid after the opponents have opened:

1. **To try to contest and win the auction in a makeable contract**. This may seem obvious (it is!) but there are other, tactical, reasons as well.
2. **To make it difficult for the next player to bid**. This means that some overcalls have pre-emptive value, making it awkward for the opposition to bid.
3. **To attract the right lead from partner**. Do not underestimate this aspect. Many contracts make because the opening lead was fruitless. Some overcalls are made purely for the lead.

Let us combine two of these ideas in one hand. Your right-hand opponent opens 1♣ and you can see Example 1 in the box below.

Ex 1.
♠ A K Q 7 4
♥ 10 3
♦ 9 7 6 2
♣ 8 5

Not a great collection is it? This is some way short of an opening bid. However, after the auction has started with 1♣ on your right there are few red-blooded players who would fail to bid 1♠ now. Why? Well, there are many reasons. Firstly, you create a problem for the hand on your left. That player may have wanted to respond to 1♣ with a quiet 1♥. Now, he has to make the awkward call of 2♥. This may only be a minor nuisance, but nuisance it most certainly is. Secondly, if your left-hand opponent wins the auction and becomes declarer what lead would you like your partner to make? Exactly – a Spade. Of course, on this deal the hand may belong to your side rather than the opponents. By bidding now you have indicated to your partner what you think the best strain is.

Now, if you have absorbed the points made above, you will notice that the strategies for the opening bidder are very different from the overcaller (and his partner). Firstly, the requirements for overcalling are **not** the same as for opening the bidding. We will see later that responding to an overcall is different from responding to an opening bid. Let us lay down some ground-rules for overcalls.

4. Overcalls are always based on five-card (or longer) suits. Do not make an overcall with a four-card suit! Many players do exactly that, but rarely achieve good results.
5. The minimum for an overcall is based on partnership agreement (it's up to you!) but the weaker the hand, the stronger the suit. Certainly, overcalls do not guarantee values for an opening bid.
6. Overcalls are wide ranging (similar, in a sense, to an opening one-bid). Perhaps we might lay down the vaguest of guidelines – a one-level overcall shows *about* 8 to *about* 16 points.
7. Overcalls do not necessarily invite partner to the (bidding) party. If you overcall 1♠ over 1♣ (as in Example 1, above) and your partner bids, say, 2♥ you are free to Pass.

Let us look at some examples. In each case the player on your right opens the bidding with 1♣:

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

With Example 2 you would certainly overcall 1♥. You have a suit you want leading and the pre-emptive effect of 1♥ is reasonable. On Example 3 you would Pass. It is a big mistake to enter the auction when the opponents have bid one of your best suits. Incidentally, you are not strong enough to venture 1NT, an action that will be discussed in a later chapter. On Example 4 you would overcall 1♠. You might not like it, but you have too much strength to Pass. Your long suit is tatty, but needs must when the devil drives – and you do have a five-card suit. On Example 5 you would Pass as you have simply nothing to say. You are not strong enough to bid 1NT; anyway your Clubs are too weak to withstand an attack.

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So… whilst overcalls of a suit do not promise an opening bid there is no reason why the overcaller must have a weak hand. Also, there are some hands on which you would open the bidding but not overcall and some where you would overcall but not open the bidding. One important criterion for overcalling is that the *suit quality* should be good or the hand should be of opening strength. You may have a weak hand to overcall, but you cannot have a weak hand and a poor suit.

Two-level overcalls are a different kettle of fish. Suppose the hand on your right opens 1♠; would you bid on any (or all) these example hands?

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

It is important to understand the risks inherent in overcalling as well as the benefits. If the hand is a *misfit* then the opposition may well Double you – and going down Doubled can prove expensive. To prevent disaster you need to have a safety-net in the form of *playing tricks*. Example 6 provides a perfectly reasonable overcall of 2♣ over an opening bid of 1♠. Even if partner has peanuts, this hand should provide six tricks (six *playing tricks*) on its own via two Aces and four Clubs.

Example 7, though, is a potential death trap. Despite its 14 points this is a clear Pass of an opening bid of 1♠. Why? Well, there are very few playing tricks on the hand – if 2♦ is Doubled (which may well happen if your left-hand opponent has a Diamond "stack") you may only make about three tricks. That could cost you something close to a penalty of 1100 points. If the enemy don't have Diamonds, by the way, they will simply outbid you, probably in Spades.

Examples 8 and 9 are tricky. On Example 8, having a major, it is worth overcalling 2♥ over 1♠. This would make life awkward for your left-hand opponent. Example 9, though, should be Passed. You can't expect to contest the auction with Clubs over Spades – you will always be outbid. 2♣, note, has no pre-emptive value. Also, it is unwise to overcall when you hold three low cards in the suit bid on your right. Why? Because the enemy will always get off to a good lead should you declare the hand.

Responding to overcalls is another difficult area of the game. You have to realise that partner's hand may be quite weak and that he is likely to be bidding because of a decent suit of his own. Certainly you should look to raise his suit with a three-card or better holding and if you have a good fit it is often correct to raise partner to a high level as a *pre-emptive barrage*. Some examples may clarify this.

Ex 10. N / W E / S

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♠	Pass	?

♠ 7 3
♥ K Q 9 6 4
♦ K 9 6 2
♣ J 8

Pass. There doesn't appear to be a great future in this hand. Partner hasn't asked for your views when he overcalled 1♠, and he hasn't promised all that much in the way of values. You don't like Spades, but there must be a 5-2 fit and the hand may well be something of a *misfit*. Let it go in a part-score.

Ex 11. N / W E / S

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♠	Pass	?

♠ K 9 4
♥ J 5 2
♦ 10 5
♣ K 10 9 5 4

2♠. Don't miss the opportunity to mess East-West around. You have eight Spades between you, and 2♠ will make your left-hand opponent's next bid just that bit more difficult. 2♠ may well fail to make, but then the opponents could surely make a part-score of their own. Heads you win, tails they lose.

Ex 12. N / W E / S

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♠	Pass	?

♠ Q 10 8 6 5
♥ 3
♦ A J 7 4 3
♣ 7 2

4♠. Yes, really! You know that you have at least ten Spades between you – the hand is therefore *a good fit*. This means that one side can make a high-level contract. It may be you (4♠ may be easy) or it may be them (5♣ or 5♥ may make their way). You must give West a nasty bidding problem at the five-level.

Ex 13. N / W E / S

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♦	Pass	?

♠ A J 2
♥ A 10 8 7
♦ Q 8
♣ A Q 6 3

3NT. You can't afford to bid 1♥ as you may be left high and dry in that contract. Also, despite having 17 points, you shouldn't be too ambitious. Partner hasn't promised the Earth for a one-level overcall. With West's Clubs well held and a balanced hand, you should just bid the most likely game contract.

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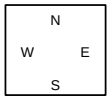
§25. Quiz A on The Contested Auction. Overcalls

In each case you are **South**

In Quiz A the bidding is opened by your right-hand opponent (East).
What would you overcall, if anything, with your hand?

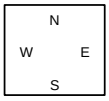
1.



♠ K Q J 10 4
♥ 9 3
♦ 6 4
♣ A 8 7 4

West	North	East	South
		1♣	?

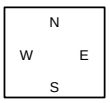
2.



♠ K Q J 7 4
♥ 9 3
♦ 6 4
♣ K 8 7 4

West	North	East	South
		1♣	?

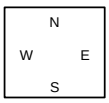
3.



♠ K J 9 7 4
♥ 5 2
♦ 7 6
♣ A 9 8 3

West	North	East	South
		1♣	?

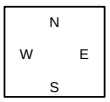
4.



♠ K 8 7 4
♥ 6 4
♦ 9 3
♣ K Q J 7 4

West	North	East	South
		1♥	?

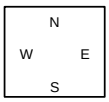
5.



♠ K 9 7
♥ A Q
♦ Q 5 4
♣ Q 10 6 5 2

West	North	East	South
		1♠	?

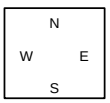
6.



♠ K 10 9 7 4
♥ A 5 3
♦ K 6 3
♣ 8 4

West	North	East	South
		1♣	?

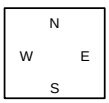
7.



♠ A 5 3
♥ K 10 9 7 4
♦ K 6 3
♣ 8 4

West	North	East	South
		1♠	?

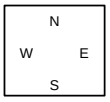
8.



♠ K J
♥ A Q 10 9 4
♦ K 9 6
♣ J 4 2

West	North	East	South
		1♥	?

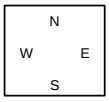
9.



♠ A 5 3
♥ K Q J 10 7 4
♦ 9 6 3
♣ 8

West	North	East	South
		1♠	?

10.*



♠ A 6 2
♥ 5 4
♦ K J 8 4
♣ A Q 10 7

West	North	East	South
		1♣	?

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§25. Quiz A on The Contested Auction. Overcalls
Answers

1.

♠ K Q J 10 4
♥ 9 3
♦ 6 4
♣ A 8 7 4

West	North	East	South
		1♣	?

1♠. Obvious, really. You would not have opened the bidding with this 10-point hand as you are too weak, but the overcall borders on a necessity. If partner is on lead (say to 3NT) you want (indeed, crave) a Spade lead. Further, 1♠ removes West's bidding space.

2.

♠ K Q J 7 4
♥ 9 3
♦ 6 4
♣ K 8 7 4

West	North	East	South
		1♣	?

1♠. The suit quality is too good to overlook here. This is worth a 1♠ overcall if not vulnerable; bidding is more dubious when vulnerable. The fact that you have the top suit (Spades) sways the balance in favour of an overcall, as does the fact that East has opened 1♣.

3.

♠ K J 9 7 4
♥ 5 2
♦ 7 6
♣ A 9 8 3

West	North	East	South
		1♣	?

1♠. Rock bottom, but acceptable when non-vulnerable. The fact that you are making West's life difficult (by taking away his 1♦ and 1♥ responses) sways the balance here – this would be a dubious overcall over an opening bid of 1♥. Having Spades always helps.

4.

♠ K 8 7 4
♥ 6 4
♦ 9 3
♣ K Q J 7 4

West	North	East	South
		1♥	?

Pass. This is not close to a two-level overcall. Liberties may be taken with cheeky one-level overcalls; having a higher-ranking suit than the opponents may allow your side to contest the auction. You are not going to get far with Clubs as your suit – you'll just get brushed aside.

5.

♠ K 9 7
♥ A Q
♦ Q 5 4
♣ Q 10 6 5 2

West	North	East	South
		1♠	?

Pass. This is not even close. Your suit is far too poor (you aren't desperate for a Club lead are you?), the bid has little pre-emptive value and your feeble suit can be easily out-bid by the opponents. Clubs? Who needs 'em? **You can't fight tanks with toy soldiers.**

6.

♠ K 10 9 7 4
♥ A 5 3
♦ K 6 3
♣ 8 4

West	North	East	South
		1♣	?

1♠. Just about worth it as the overcall cuts out a couple of bids (1♦, 1♥) that your left-hand opponent might have wanted to make. The Spade suit isn't cast-iron and made in Birmingham, but the pre-emptive effect is useful. Probably best not to be vulnerable, though.

7.

♠ A 5 3
♥ K 10 9 7 4
♦ K 6 3
♣ 8 4

West	North	East	South
		1♠	?

Pass. This is not worth a two-level overcall; these are shark-infested waters. Experienced players are wary of venturing to the two-level without a strong hand or a good suit. 5·3·3·2 hands have too many losers; if the furies are unkind you may get Doubled for millions.

8.

♠ K J
♥ A Q 10 9 4
♦ K 9 6
♣ J 4 2

West	North	East	South
		1♥	?

Pass. And without a flicker, too. If the opponents want to play the hand in Hearts why should you want to dissuade them? It is (almost) always wise to Pass when the opponents open the bidding in your best suit. The auction isn't over yet and it might get interesting…

9.

♠ A 5 3
♥ K Q J 10 7 4
♦ 9 6 3
♣ 8

West	North	East	South
		1♠	?

2♥. Yes, only 10 points (as there are in Q7, above) but there are two major differences between that hand and this one. Here, you have a six-card suit and, crucially, the quality of that suit is excellent. Put another way, you have a load of *playing tricks*. A clear-cut overcall.

10.

♠ A 6 2
♥ 5 4
♦ K J 8 4
♣ A Q 10 7

West	North	East	South
		1♠	?

Pass. Again, as in Q8 above, don't wander into the auction when the opponents have bid one of your suits. The deal looks like a *misfit* – in these cases give your opponents some rope with which to hang themselves. Anyway, what could you bid? 1NT is not the right call.

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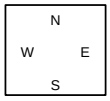
§25. Quiz B on The Contested Auction. Overcalls

In each case you are **South**

In Quiz B the bidding is opened by your left-hand opponent and your partner (North) makes an overcall.
What is your best bid, as the "responder" to an overcall, on these hands?

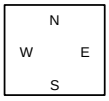
1.



♠ A 2
♥ Q 9 4
♦ 10 8 7 5
♣ J 10 7 5

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♥	Pass	?

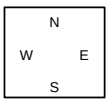
2.



♠ A 2
♥ Q 9 4
♦ 10 8 7 5
♣ J 10 7 5

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♠	Pass	?

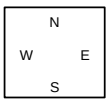
3.



♠ A 2
♥ K J 7
♦ A K 8 7
♣ J 10 7 5

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♥	Pass	?

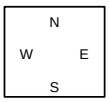
4.



♠ A 2
♥ Q 9 4
♦ A 10 8 7
♣ J 10 7 5

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♠	Pass	?

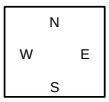
5.



♠ J 6 5
♥ 8 4
♦ K J 9 4 2
♣ 9 7 3

West	North	East	South
		Pass	Pass
1♥	1♠	2♥	?

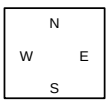
6.



♠ 7 2
♥ 10 9 2
♦ 8 4
♣ A K 9 7 5 3

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♥	2♠	?

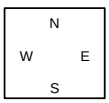
7.



♠ K J 8 6 4 2
♥ 9 7 5 3
♦ J 8
♣ 4

West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠	2♣	?

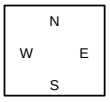
8.



♠ K 10 8 7
♥ 9 6 4 2
♦ 9 2
♣ A 10 8

West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠	2♣	2♠
3♣	Pass	Pass	?

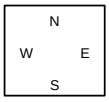
9.



♠ A 10 5 3
♥ A J 10
♦ 9 6 3
♣ 8 6 4

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♦	Pass
1♥	1♠	2♣	2♠
3♦	Pass	Pass	?

10.*



♠ J 10 9 7
♥ A 3
♦ A 7 2
♣ Q 10 3 2

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♣	Pass	?

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§25. Quiz B on The Contested Auction. Overcalls
Answers

1.

♠ A 2
♥ Q 9 4
♦ 10 8 7 5
♣ J 10 7 5

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♥	Pass	?

2♥. You should support partner if you can. You have an eight-card Heart fit, and that's enough excuse to raise the ante. Don't worry that partner may be weak and that 2♥ may fail – if that were the case East-West would own the hand and be able to make a contract.

2.

♠ A 2
♥ Q 9 4
♦ 10 8 7 5
♣ J 10 7 5

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♠	Pass	?

Pass. Now, with no evidence of a fit (cf Q1), there is little point in bidding. North hasn't promised much with his intervention and he certainly isn't asking you to "respond", so you should keep your peace. Sure, East-West may win the auction but they are welcome to it.

3.

♠ A 2
♥ K J 7
♦ A K 8 7
♣ J 10 7 5

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♥	Pass	?

4♥. You have unexpected strength, considering that two players have enough to bid. Partner may be fairly weak, but even so your side has at least eight Hearts and should have the combined values for game. You have no reason to hang around to pick the daisies.

4.

♠ A 2
♥ Q 9 4
♦ A 10 8 7
♣ J 10 7 5

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♠	Pass	?

1NT. When partner overcalls he is showing a lower range (say, 8-16 points or so) than for an opening bid. Your "responses", therefore, need to take that into account. 1NT shows this sort of hand – about 10-12 points, little fit and a sound stopper in opener's suit.

5.

♠ J 6 5
♥ 8 4
♦ K J 9 4 2
♣ 9 7 3

West	North	East	South
		Pass	Pass
1♥	1♠	2♥	?

2♠. Yes, you have very little, but you do have an all-important three-card Spade support. Sure, 2♠ is likely to fail, but bidding makes life tricky for West and may push him over the edge. Going off in a part-score is no tragedy if the enemy were about to make a contract.

6.

♠ 7 2
♥ 10 9 2
♦ 8 4
♣ A K 9 7 5 3

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♥	2♠	?

3♥. Not 3♣, a suit that your partner probably has no interest in. With three-card support you should, er, support. A two-level overcall should be taken seriously, so partner has a good hand and you shouldn't Pass. Anyway, don't let the enemy *steal the deal* in 2♠!

7.

♠ K J 8 6 4 2
♥ 9 7 5 3
♦ J 8
♣ 4

West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠	2♣	?

4♠. You have a lot of Spades between you, so you must take up as much space as you can by bidding as high as you dare as fast as you can. How can North know whether you hold this type of hand or a good one (cf Q3)? He can't, but neither can the opponents!

8.

♠ K 10 8 7
♥ 9 6 4 2
♦ 9 2
♣ A 10 8

West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠	2♣	2♠
3♣	Pass	Pass	?

3♠. Knowing how far to compete is tricky, so we'll give you a rule-of-thumb. It often pays to bid to the same level as the *combined number of trumps*. This (admittedly weird) rule suggests that you should be willing to bid to 3♠, since your side has nine Spades.

9.

♠ A 10 5 3
♥ A J 10
♦ 9 6 3
♣ 8 6 4

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♦	Pass
1♥	1♠	2♣	2♠
3♦	Pass	Pass	?

3♠. As in Q8 you have a nine-card Spade fit, so should compete to the three-level. 3♠ may make or it may fail, but the safety net with failure is that 3♦ is likely to make, and conceding a small penalty is better than yielding a part-score. Heads you win, tails they lose.

10.

♠ J 10 9 7
♥ A 3
♦ A 7 2
♣ Q 10 3 2

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♣	Pass	?

3NT. Partner shouldn't overcall in Clubs without a good suit (or a good hand) as it's tactically pointless. If you assume that partner has a good six-card suit you can count eight top tricks in No-trumps, with a ninth if partner has anything useful outside his Club suit.

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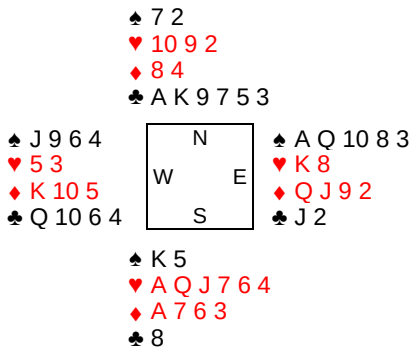
§25. Example hands 1 to 4.

Hand 1 Love all, dealer North

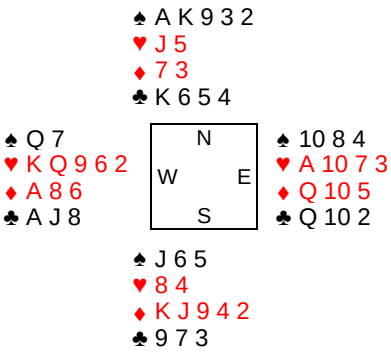


West	North	East	South
	Pass	1♠	2♥
2♠	3♥	Pass	4♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

4♥ by South — Opening lead: ♠4

After North Passes East has an obvious 1♠ opener and South an equally clear 2♥ overcall. West has an easy raise to 2♠ and now it all hinges on North's bid. With a useful *source of tricks* (in Clubs) and non-negligible Heart support he should compete to 3♥. Sure, on some layouts that may fail – South doesn't have to have a great hand for a 2♥ overcall. However, the less South has, the more East-West could make, so bidding 3♥ is a two-way shot. As it happens, South has an excellent hand to bid 2♥, so is happy to advance to game. With two finesses working (the ♥K and the ♠A), not to mention a 2-2 trump break, declarer can actually score an overtrick in 4♥.

Hand 2 North-South game, dealer East

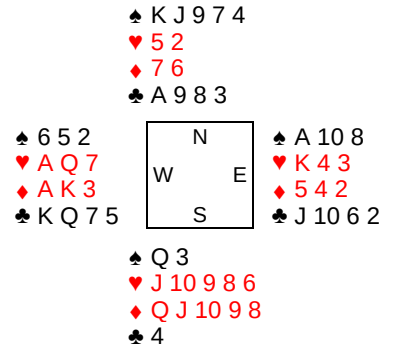


West	North	East	South
		Pass	Pass
1♥	1♠	2♥	2♠
3♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

3♥ by West — Opening lead: ♠A

After two Passes West has an obvious 1♥ opening bid and North has enough for a 1♠ overcall. That North hand is a marginal opening bid (some would open 1♠, some wouldn't), but it's a clear-cut overcall. East has an easy raise to 2♥ and now the spotlight turns to South. With three-card Spade support and a *ruffing value* (the shortage in Hearts) he should try to push his opponents about. From the South perspective 2♠ is unlikely to make, but that isn't the point. By bidding it East-West may misjudge the hand and go overboard or they may sell out to 2♠, allowing North-South to escape cheaply when 3♥ makes. As it is, 3♥ should fail, so the 2♠ bid does its job (and would have made).

Hand 3 East-West game, dealer South

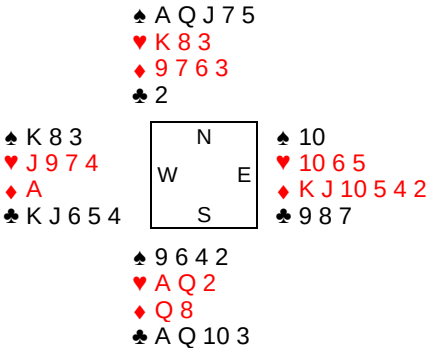


West	North	East	South
			Pass
1♣	1♠	1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

3NT by East — Opening lead: ♠Q

This hand shows one useful effect of a cheeky one-level, non-vulnerable overcall. After South Passes as dealer West opens 1♣ and North has a rock-bottom minimum hand for a 1♠ intervention. Why bid on that junk? Well, it may disconcert the opposition (East may have been going to respond 1♦ or 1♥) and it may allow North-South to push East-West around in the auction. It is written in the good book, "*He who hath Spades ruleth the auction*". Here, there happens to be another benefit – East ends up in 3NT and North's impudent overcall allows South to find the killing lead. The ♠Q (top of a doubleton) allows North-South to set up four Spade winners before East can set up his Clubs.

Hand 4 Game all, dealer West



West	North	East	South
1♣	1♠	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

4♠ by North — Opening lead: ♣8

After West opens 1♣, North should 1♠ overcall 1♠. Yes, North only has 10 points and he is vulnerable, but the overcall is clear-cut with a good suit and an attractive 5·4·3·1 shape. This time, the hand belongs to North-South. Instead of being obstructive (as in Hand 2) or *lead-directing* (as in Hand 3), the overcall gets North-South into the auction to buy the hand in game. South has just enough to raise a (vulnerable) 1♠ overcall to game as he knows of a 5-4 Spade fit and of something approaching sufficient values. After a Club lead North has to take dummy's Ace and finesse trumps. After a Heart to dummy and another Spade finesse he can draw the last trump and then patiently play for a Diamond ruff in dummy.

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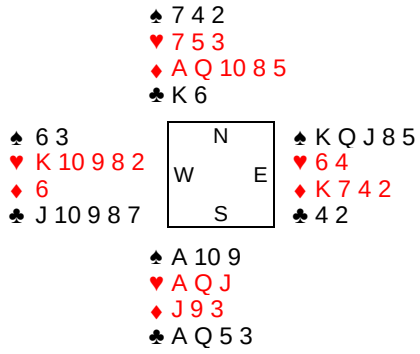
§25. Example hands 5 to 8.

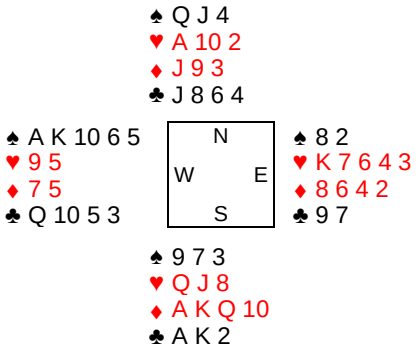
Hand 5 North-South game, dealer North



West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1♣
Pass	1♦	1♠	2NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	
3NT by South		Opening lead: ♠6	

This deal illustrates another *lead-directing overcall*. After two Passes South opens 1♣ and North responds 1♦ – all very obvious. Now, East shouldn't pass up the chance to interject a 1♠ overcall, even though both he and his partner have already Passed. This may mess North-South about; East-West may push North-South around in the bidding or, as here, it may be necessary to attract a Spade lead to defeat a No-trump contract. North-South duly bid on to 3NT, but West is on the case. With no help in the auction he'd surely lead a Heart; now he leads a Spade (the ♠6, top of a doubleton). This allows East-West to set up four Spade winners before South can set up Diamonds.

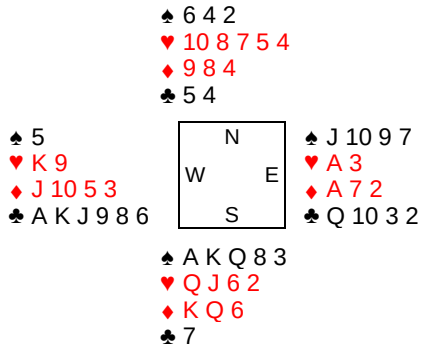
Hand 6 East-West game, dealer East



West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♦
1♠	1NT	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	
3NT by North		Opening lead: ♠8	

East Passes as dealer and South, with a balanced 19 points, opens 1♦. With a good Spade suit (which means he would *really* like a Spade lead) West risks a 1♠ overcall. North, with 9 points, tries 1NT and South raises that to game. With nothing to guide him East would have led his fourth-highest Heart. As it is, the Spade overcall lights a flare-path for the defence; East leads the ♠8 against 3NT. Now, the hand is still tricky. Reading his partner for two Spades only (North must have ♠Q J × for his 1NT bid) West *ducks* the first Spade, allowing declarer to win trick one. Still, North needs the Heart finesse; when it loses a second Spade lead cooks North's goose.

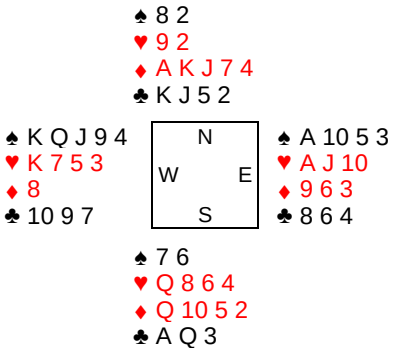
Hand 7 Game all, dealer South



West	North	East	South
			1♠
2♣	Pass	3NT	All Pass
3NT by East		Opening lead: ♠A	

This deal illustrates the fact that two-level overcalls should be taken seriously – they are not made on a wing and a prayer, especially vulnerable. South has high hopes of his hand (17 points and a 5·4·3·1 shape) and opens 1♠. West overcalls 2♣, and is about minimum for that action (decent shape and a good suit – it is not a good idea to bid Clubs with a poor suit as it is pointless). North Passes mournfully and now it is up to East. 3♣? No, not at all! West should have a good six-card suit for his overcall, so East can visualise eight tricks off the reel (six Clubs and two Aces). With a Spade stopper as well, and the strong probability that West has a high card outside his Clubs, East blasts 3NT. The play borders on the trivial.

Hand 8 Love all, dealer West



West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥
1♠	2♣	2♠	3♦
Pass	Pass	3♠	All Pass
3♠ by West		Opening lead: ♦A	

A tricky, but oh-so-typical competitive deal. Hands such as this are real bear-gardens. After North-South have started 1♦ – 1♥ West should certainly overcall 1♠, after all, the deal may still belong to his side. North may bid Clubs, East should certainly support Spades and South should, in turn, support his partner's Diamonds. Now what? West has done his bit – it's all up to East. Well, when you know of a nine-card fit the "rules" say you should be prepared to be pushed to the three-level. On that logic, East bids 3♠. He doesn't expect it to make, but a small penalty is better than conceding a 3♦ part-score. As it is, though, if West guess Hearts he should make nine tricks in Spades.

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