Lesson Summary for U3ABDa14: Overcalls

Contents

Welcome! 2
Weekly summary 2
This week's lessons: Overcalling one of a suit 3
Is that a jump? 3
Risky Business 3
Other overcalls 4
This week's lessons: Responding to overcalls 4
Responding to a one-level overcall with 3+ support 4
Responding to a one-level overcall without 3+ support 4
Responding to a two-level overcall with 3+ support 4
Responding to a two-level overcall without 3+ support 4
Responding to a jump overcall 5
This week's lessons: Overcaller's second bid 5

Welcome!

To help clarify some points in this week's lesson, we're giving you this Lesson Summary. It describes the same topics from a slightly different angle and is more portable than videos. We've also included some additional detail where it seems needed.

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Weekly summary

A VERY brief overview of each week so far:

1. Open a 12-14 point balanced hand with 1NT. Respond according to your points if you don't have a long (5+) major
2. Respond to partner's 1NT opening bid if you have a long major by using a Red Suit Transfer, then rebid according to your length and strength
3. Open a 12-19 point unbalanced hand with one of your longest suit: 1C, 1D, 1H or 1S. Respond to partner's bid according to your points and shape: support a major if you have 4+, bid your own suit or 1NT or pass
4. Open a 15-19 point balanced hand with one of a suit, planning to rebid 1NT (15-16 points), 2NT (17-18 points) or 3NT (19 points). But if partner raises your suit or bids a suit of their own and there's a suit fit you may change your plan – especially if it's a major suit
5. Open a 12-19 point unbalanced hand with one of your longest suit:
   With a 6-card suit, plan to bid it again (twice).
   With a 5-card suit, plan to bid your second (4+) suit next **if you can**.
   With 12-15 points, your second bid should not be a jump or reverse.
   With 16-19 points, your second bid should be a jump or reverse.
   I say **plan** because partner might pass, or raise your first suit, or bid your second suit, or bid NT giving a point count, or change suit with a jump showing length and strength.
6. When partner opens one of a suit and rebids a second suit without jumping or reversing (showing 12-15 points), you have 4 main options:
   ONE: With an 8-card fit in either suit: raise that suit
   TWO: With no fit, but stops in the unbid suits: bid NT
   THREE: With no fit or stops, but your own 6-card suit: bid your suit again
   FOUR: With no fit, stops or 6-card suit, make a preference bid: choose the better fit
   Choose the level of your response (pass, single raise, jump raise or game) by adding up your total points, assuming partner has the minimum 12
7. When partner opens 1NT and you have a 4-card major (or two) and 11+ HCP, respond 2C (Stayman) to ask them to bid their 4-card major, if they have one; a 2D response says they don't. Then, with a 4:4 fit, bid a Game Invitation or Game, depending on total points - assuming partner has 12. With no fit, bid 2NT or 3NT based on total points - assuming partner has 12.
8. When your opponent opens one of a suit, if you have a **good** 5-card suit and 8-15 points, you can overcall at the one-level; to overcall at the two-level, you need 11-15 points. These are **constructive** bids, aiming to bid and make a contract. With a longer suit you can overcall with fewer points, by jumping; these are **obstructive** bids, aiming to stop your opponents making a contract. A good suit has at least 2 Honours.
9. When partner overcalls, raise their suit with 3 or more, to the **LEVEL OF FIT** regardless of points:
   With 3, you can raise to 2 (5+3 = 8 tricks)
   With 4, you can raise to 3 (5+4 = 9 tricks)
   With 5, you can raise to 4 (5+5 = 10 tricks)

This week's lessons: Overcalling one of a suit

If the opposition opens one of a suit and you have a long suit, you can **overcall** with your suit. There are three main reasons for overcalling:

- To try to find your best contract – a Constructive Overcall
- To try to stop your opponents finding their best contract – an Obstructive Overcall
- To suggest a lead to your partner – a Lead Directing Overcall

To overcall at the one-level (e.g. 1H 1S) you usually need:

- 8-15 HCP
- 5 cards in your suit
- 2 Honours in your suit (counting a Ten as an Honour in this case)

To overcall at the two-level (e.g. 1S 2H) you need to be a bit stronger:

- 11-15 HCP
- 5 cards in your suit
- 2 Honours in your suit (counting a Ten as an Honour in this case)

However, you can overcall with fewer points, if your hand passes the **Suit Quality Overcall Test**: add the number of cards in your suit to the number of Honours in your suit (counting a TEN as an Honour for this). The total is the highest you can bid. So, for example, if you have a 5-card suit with three Honours, you score EIGHT and can overcall at the two-level; with a 6-card suit and one Honour, you score SEVEN and can overcall at the one-level.

If you have a LONG trump suit, you can overcall with even fewer points, making a **jump overcall** to OBSTRUCT your opponents. To summarise, assuming opponent opened 1H:

- With 8-15 HCP and FIVE Spades with 2 Honours, you can overcall at the one-level: bid 1S
- With 11-15 HCP and FIVE cards with 2 Honours, you can overcall at the two-level (e.g. 1H 2C)
- With 5-10 HCP and SIX Spades with 2 Honours, you can jump overcall: bid 2S
- With 6-9 HCP and SEVEN Spades with 2 Honours, you can double-jump overcall: bid 3S
- With 6-9 HCP and EIGHT Spades with 2 Honours, you can triple-jump overcall: bid 4S

Overcalls made at the one-level and two-level **without jumping** are generally **Constructive Bids**; you have enough points to hope to make a part score or even game, with support from partner. Jump overcalls are pre-emptive, **Obstructive Bids**; you don't expect to make your contract unless partner is quite strong. Notice that the pre-emptive overcalls require fewer points than a simple overcall – you haven't got many points outside your suit, so won't do well in Defence.

With more than 15 HCP, you don't just overcall, you double first and then rebid your suit: **Double and Bid**. You can also use Doubles to compete when you don't have a long suit. Doubles are described later in this course.

Is that a jump?

A 2-level overcall may be a simple overcall OR a jump. These show different hands! For example:

- 1S 2H is a two-level simple overcall, showing 11-15 HCP and a 5-card suit
- 1D 2H is a jump overcall, showing 5-10 HCP and a good 6-card suit: FEWER POINTS, MORE TRUMPS

It's a jump when you choose to bid one or more levels higher than you need to. In the first example, you can't bid 1H over 1S, you are *forced* to bid at the two-level – so it's not a jump.

Risky Business

We're encouraging you to overcall with fairly weak hands, really. You might overall, win the contract, and lose by several tricks, at a significant cost. You pay penalties for going down! So why are we encouraging you in this risky business?

It's a question of balance. For example: your opponents can bid and make 4H, scoring 420 or 620 depending on the vulnerability. If you overcall with 4S you will make seven tricks, paying a penalty of 150 or 300, depending on the Vulnerability. While going down by 3 tricks feels like a disaster, losing 150-300 points is a lot better than losing 420-620 points!

Deliberately bidding a contract that you expect to fail is called a **Sacrifice**. A very emotive term! Obstructive bids often end up leading to a Sacrifice. This is all rather complicated, as you need to know more about the scoring system, Vulnerability, the use of Penalty Doubles – and bluffing? Yep. We will return to this area soon, in the lessons on Doubles and Scoring.

Other overcalls

If an opponent opens one of a suit and you have a stopper in their suit, you may be able to overcall with 1NT. If you have a shortage in their suit you may be able to Double. These other overcalls are described in the next module in this course.

This week's lessons: Responding to overcalls

Responding to a one-level overcall with 3+ support

Remember: Partner has 8-15 HCP and a 5+ suit.

With 3 or more cards in partner's suit you know you have a fit, so raise them as if they had opened. Be aggressive and include Shortage Points. This is usually intended as an Obstructive bid. Do NOT change suit expecting partner to respond – partner won't take this as forcing.

Responding to a one-level overcall without 3+ support

Remember: Partner has 8-15 HCP and a 5+ suit.

With 0-8 HCP: pass. Partner may only have 8 points rather than the 12+ promised by an opening bid, so you can't change suit (usually a Constructive bid) with 6+ points, as you would with an opening bid; you need 9+ points.

With 9+ HCP and an unbalanced hand: you can bid your own GOOD 5-card suit (with 2 Honours) or 6+ suit. Partner will not take this as forcing, they will pass unless they are fairly strong.

With 9+ HCP, a balanced (NT) hand, and a stopper in the opponent's suit:

- With 9-12 bid 1NT
- With 13-14 bid 2NT
- With 15 HCP bid 3NT

Partner may raise 1NT or 2NT with maximum points.

Responding to a two-level overcall with 3+ support

Remember: Partner has 11-15 HCP and a 5+ suit.

With 3 or more cards in partner's suit you know you have a fit, so raise them as if they had opened. Be aggressive and include Shortage Points. Do NOT change suit expecting partner to respond – partner won't take this as forcing.

Responding to a two-level overcall without 3+ support

Remember: Partner has 11-15 HCP and a 5+ suit.

With 0-8 HCP: pass.

With 9+ HCP and an unbalanced hand: you can bid your own GOOD 5-card suit (with 2 Honours) or 6+ suit. Partner will pass unless they are fairly strong.

With 11+ HCP and a balanced (NT) hand, and a stopper in the opponent's suit:

- With 11-12 bid 2NT
- With 13-15 HCP bid 3NT

Partner may raise 2NT with maximum points.

Responding to a jump overcall

Jump overcalls are made with fewer points and are Obstructive Bids. Evaluate your points and fit bearing in mind what partner has shown you:

- A single jump (1H 2S) promises a 6-card suit with 5-10 HCP
- A double jump (1H 3S) promises a 7-card suit with 6-9 HCP
- A triple jump (1H 4S) promises an 8-card suit with 6-9 HCP

In general, raise to the level of fit: add the number of trumps you and partner have, and bid to that number of tricks.

Do you want to play the hand or defend?

- If your hand is strong (with Aces and Kings outside your suit), you are more likely to make your contract – but the opposition is less likely to make theirs. Points inside your long suit are worth a lot less in Defence.
- If your hand is quite weak, you are less likely to make your contract – but the opposition is more likely to make theirs. Points inside your long suit are worth a lot less in Defence.

It's rarely a good idea to change suit, as partner's length and strength are in THEIR suit, not yours. Only change suit if you're sure yours is a better bet.

Bidding No Trumps is also a risky business. Your partner may have an 8-card suit but with no outside entries; you may have stops in the other three suits, but that won't be much use if partner is missing the Ace and King of their suit when you've only got one or two of them to lead.

This week's lessons: Overcaller's second bid

In general, when you overcall, that's your bidding over. If partner raises you or even changes suit, they have done so with a clear understanding of what you have in your hand – you don't bid again unless you have some useful hidden extras that partner can use, such as a fit for their suit.