

For beginning players: Overcalls

The average bridge hand contains 10 HCP so much of the time we are not destined to open the bidding (at least, the books generally say you need at least 12 HCP). It comes as a pleasant surprise therefore when you first learn that *overcalls* can be made with fewer high card points. Indeed many partnerships agree that overcalls at the one level can be made with as few as 8 HCP and at the two level with as few as 10 HCP. But to understand when you should take advantage of this license it is helpful to be aware of the purpose of an overcall. It is designed to achieve one or more of the following aims:

1. To suggest a good lead to partner if you are defending
2. To suggest that partner might like to compete (most often by raising your suit)
3. To suggest a possible sacrifice
4. To interfere with the opponents' slick bidding machinery.

In one column it is impossible to even scratch the surface of when to overcall (read a book, such as Lawrence's *Complete Guide to Overcalls*). But to at least introduce some of the thinking let's imagine you hold

♠ T 8 6; ♥ Q 8 5 3 2; ♦ K Q T; ♣ Q 2

Would you overcall 1♣ with 1♥?

Take me to your leader

This month's lead problems are from two bridge games abroad. I shall paraphrase comments from Ron Klinger in my discussion on page 8. These are difficult problems and, as so often happens in bridge, the most penetrating analysis may lead to the wrong answer. But don't let that put you off - some thought is better than no thought in the long run.

1. West to lead from

♠ T 8 6; ♥ Q; ♦ K Q T 9 7 6 2; ♣ 6 2

Auction:	West	North	East	South
	-	-	-	1♥
	Pass	1♠	Pass	2♣
	Pass	3♣	Pass	3♠
	Pass	5♣	All pass	

2. West to lead from

♠ Q T 7 5 2; ♥ 9 8 4; ♦ A J 3; ♣ T 6

Auction:	West	North	East	South
	-	1♣	Pass	1♥
	Pass	1♠	Pass	2♦ ¹
	Pass	3♥	Pass	4NT ²
	Pass	5♠	Pass	6♥

¹ Fourth suit forcing. ² Blackwood.

Answers on page 8

Contributed humour

A funeral service is being held for a woman who has just passed away. At the end of the service, the pall bearers are carrying the casket out when they accidentally bump into a wall, jarring the casket. They hear a faint moan. They open the casket and find that the woman is actually alive! She lives for ten more years, and then dies. Once again, a ceremony is held, and at the end of it, the pall bearers are again carrying out the casket. As they carry the casket towards the door, the husband cries out:

"Watch that wall!"



There would be considerable disagreement among even experienced players. The argument for overcalling is, in my opinion, extremely weak. If partner is on lead it will probably be against a spade contract. Do you really want a heart lead? Without your overcall there is more chance he will lead a diamond. Do you expect to buy the contract? They can outbid you in spades. Do you take away any of their bidding space? No. But now, interchange your spades and hearts to get ♠ Q 8 5 3 2; ♥ T 8 6; ♦ K Q T; ♣ Q 2

The argument for overcalling 1♣ with 1♠ is stronger. You still wouldn't like to encourage partner to lead a spade but you have made it much harder for them to identify a possible heart fit; and if partner has spades you might be able to outbid them safely. So I consider this a marginal overcall. However, give me this hand (with fewer high card points) and all my reservations disappear. ♠ K Q J 8 5; ♥ T 8 6; ♦ T 8 7; ♣ Q 2

Now I definitely want a spade lead, and I'm happy to encourage my partner to support me in spades. In this article, all I've talked about is some of the issues associated with overcalling at the one level with a weak hand. Space is too short to talk about overcalling with strong hands, overcalls at the two level, the vulnerability issues, and jump overcalls. Just be aware: these all have different issues.

The new member cuts his teeth

Mr Sinclair Whitlands was duly admitted to the Taieri Bridge Club at the end of September. His bridge playing abilities were somewhat difficult to assess since his knowledge of modern bidding would have been out of date even in 1975 (when he had last played seriously). His first game as a new member was with Voluptua (Randy having decided that a rare night of studying was essential). Their hasty discussion before start of play began with Mr Whitlands bowing low to Voluptua, remarking that he was "charmed, Ma'am", which so surprised her that she was rendered uncharacteristically speechless. As they sat down to play they had agreed only on "natural bidding". The first board revealed some misunderstandings all round. The auction (Sinclair was West) was bizarre:

West	North	East	South
1NT	P	2♣	p
4♣	P	4♥	P
7♣	All pass		

Since the hands were

♠ A 7 2	♠ K 3
♥ A K	♥ Q J 7 2
♦ 5 4 2	♦ A T 9 7 6
♣ A K 7 6 2	♣ Q 8

the reader may justifiably wonder what on earth

was going on but the explanations are charmingly simple. Sinclair was playing a Goren 16-18 1NT unbeknown to Voluptua. Her 2♣ was Stayman but Sinclair thought it was a suit so, with excellent support, raised to 4♣. Naturally, Voluptua thought this was Gerber and answered 4♥ to show one ace. Sinclair was now rather perplexed but thought that Voluptua must be showing a good hand so bid a grand slam in her suit (or so he supposed). Even more confused, Voluptua passed and prepared to play holding a doubleton trump alone.

A bemused South led a spade. Voluptua looked pale but drew a deep breath (thereby distracting several passing spectators). She took the lead with the King, played a spade to the Ace and ruffed a spade with 8♣. Then she played Q♣, crossed to dummy with A♥, and played two more trumps. Luckily trumps divided 3-3. So now she played the K♥ and crossed to her hand with A♦. Her Q♥, J♥ won the final two tricks.

Sinclair had watched the play closely, realising that some gremlins had disturbed the auction. "Fortune favours the brave" he declared of his own final bid, adding gallantly "And none but the brave deserve the fair" to which Voluptua blushed prettily. The rather crusty glum old gentleman sitting South caught the full force of Voluptua's dazzling smile and perked up considerably.