SIMPLE OVERCALLS

The partner of an overcaller ("advancer") will picture him as having a good long suit in a hand which may not qualify for an opening bid. It is best not to stray too far from this picture. Advancer will assume that overcaller has at least one defensive trick when not vulnerable, two when vulnerable. With less defense it is usually better to pass or preempt rather than make a simple overcall.

The hand should not be too strong, either. Even though good players raise overcalls with light support, a game may be missed if the simple overcall is based on a very strong hand. Strong hands are better shown by takeout doubles, jump overcalls, or cue bids. Do not, however, make an off-shape takeout double just because the hand is rather strong for an overcall. See section 9-1 for a discussion of the requirements for a takeout double.

Overcalls in a weak five-card suit or a four-card suit are seldom advisable. Both should occur at the one level only, and the four card variety should have three of the top four honors to make up for the shorter length.

Overcalls at the one level require a minimum of three to five playing tricks, depending on the vulnerability. A hand with only three playing tricks may be bid only with favorable vulnerability, a good suit, and good distribution:. ♠AQ1087 ♥3 ♦9873 ♣542. With unfavorable vulnerability, a hand with the minimum of five playing tricks should also include a good suit. Otherwise it is best to have extra playing strength. Be even more conservative when coming in between two bidders, unless the vulnerability is favorable.

With a good defensive hand, do not overcall without extra playing strength. Then, if partner makes what he thinks is a sacrifice bid in your suit, you may make the contract. Prefer a pass, takeout double, or notrump bid with a good hand that lacks playing strength. Overcalls that are minimum in regard to playing strength should be defensively weak also. Otherwise you will be going down when the opponents can make nothing their way.

The preemptive value of the overcall is an important consideration. Stretch to bid 2♣ over 1♦, but not 2♣ over 1♠. The 1♠ overcall of 1♣ is often very weak, but there is little justification for making an overcall of, say, 1♥ over 1♦. Partner should take this factor into account in her bidding.

Suppose you have ♠AQ743 ♥K106 ♦43 ♣K86, vulnerable. Pass over a 1♥ opening. You might double 1♦. Over 1♣ you can bid 1♠ because of the preemptive effect of skipping so many ranks. After passing hands like this, you can back into the bidding later if the auction stops at a low level. Should the bidding get too high for a back-in bid, partner will probably be broke anyway. Often you will gain a trick in defense when declarer cannot place the outstanding high cards or distribution.

Lead direction is also important. With a borderline overcall, pass if the suit you must bid is not a good one for lead direction--especially if partner is likely to be on lead.

It is possible to make a takeout double after overcalling. See section 9-1, Takeout Doubles.