



The Real Deal

by Larry Cohen

Larry Cohen, a many-time National champion, recently won the Silodor Open Pairs for a third time at the ACBL Spring North American Championships held in Houston.

One of Larry's favorite teaching methods is to analyze random deals. He feels that any time you deal out a deck of cards, there are numerous lessons that can be learned.

When Audrey sends me a Real Deal to work on, the first thing I do is "project the auction." On this deal the start is predictable. North has no choice other than to open 1♣. Surely, North is way too strong to open with a preemptive bid of 3♣. Next, it would be a huge error for East to pass. If you get dealt a nice seven-card suit and a side ace you should not "jump to pass" (as I sarcastically like to put it). Just because you have only 7 HCP, doesn't mean you are condemned to silence. East should overcall in hearts, the only question being "how many hearts?"

PREEMPTING RECOMMENDATIONS

East's hand screams for a preempt. Any time you hold a decent suit (and Q-J-9-8 at the top qualifies) of six cards or longer, you should think "jump." It is nice to be able to take away bidding space from your opponents. Of course, if the hand is

too strong, you don't make a preemptive bid, since partner expects you to be weak when you preempt. Can you hold a side ace for a preempt? Absolutely. As long as the value of the hand is "less than an opening one-bid," it is in range for a preempt. Here are my guidelines for preemptive openings or overcalls:

1) A decent suit of six cards or longer. 'Decent' means you have some 'meat' at the top of the suit. I would not preempt with J-8-7-5-4-3. I would preempt with K-J-10-8-7-6. I don't recommend a strict requirement—such as '2 of the top 3 honors.' I do recommend looking at vulnerability. Vulnerable, I try to be 'decent-plus.'

for fear that we belong in hearts. No other 'side' issues bother me. I don't mind having an ace or a void on the side, or a four-card minor.

4) With a six-card suit, I preempt at the two-level. With a seven-card suit, the preempt should be made at the three-level. With an eight-card suit? You guessed it—the four level.

5) Different teachers will tell you different things. If you try to listen to everyone's rules, you will get confused. I'm quite comfortable and confident about my 1) to 4) above, but they are not set in stone. You won't get sued or kicked out of ACBL if you stray from my guidelines.

THE AUCTION CONTINUES

So, back at the ranch, using the Larry Cohen guidelines, what should East do? If East were the dealer, the correct opening bid is 3♥, so as overcaller, East should make the same 3♥ preempt.

This causes trouble for South. Poor South was willing to bid 1♠, but now is shut out. A bid at the three level would promise at least 10 points, so South has to pass.

What about West? In general, I "Follow the LAW" over preempts. Under Bridge Articles on my website (www.Larryco.com) is a column Audrey and I wrote about this subject for BETTER BRIDGE in January, 2000. With

no interest in game, you should be content at the three-level with only nine combined trumps. However, with West's hand, you might have interest in game.

Once there is game interest, you no longer use the "LAW of Total Tricks." If your partner opened 3♥, would you pass or raise to game? This isn't obvious. Some experts would pass, while others would raise to 4♥. It could depend on your partner's known style.

THE REAL DEAL

| | | NORTH | | | | EAST | |
|-------|------|-------|---------------|-------|-----------|------|---------------|
| DEAL: | 3 | ♠ | Q 10 | | | ♠ | 9 4 |
| DLR: | N | ♥ | K | | | ♥ | Q J 9 8 7 5 2 |
| VUL: | NONE | ♦ | 10 7 3 | | | ♦ | A 6 5 |
| | | ♣ | A K Q J 9 7 4 | | | ♣ | 3 |
| | | WEST | | SOUTH | | | |
| | | ♠ | A 8 7 6 | ♠ | K J 5 3 2 | | |
| | | ♥ | A 3 | ♥ | 10 6 4 | | |
| | | ♦ | K J 9 8 2 | ♦ | Q 4 | | |
| | | ♣ | 10 2 | ♣ | 8 6 5 | | |

2) Less than an opening bid in HCP. Is there a bottom range? Normally, people think a preempt shows 5-11, but I would surely open 2♥ with: ♠ 6 ♥ K J 10 9 8 5 ♦ 10 9 7 5 ♣ 8 4. Again, when vulnerable, my lower range is a bit more respectable than when not vulnerable.

3) Side suits. I try not to preempt when I have a good four-card major on the side. With, say ♠ K J 9 7 6 3 ♥ A J 10 5 ♦ 8 4 ♣ 6 I'd prefer not to preempt in spades,

I used to play with Marty Bergen, who was a very aggressive preemptor. After a 3♥ bid by Marty, I'd pass and hope not to go down too many! Opposite a more sound preemptor—who always has extras—I'd raise to 4♥ and have a chance to make it. Opposite a jump overcall, the same considerations apply.

In my catbird seat, looking at all four hands, I will raise to 4♥. Actually, if I were a smart cat, I'd raise all the way to 6♥! In slam, declarer can play a heart to the ace—dropping the ♥K—and after drawing trumps, take five diamond tricks when the ♦Q appears from South. In fact, it takes a club lead to hold declarer to 12 tricks—on any other lead declarer can take all 13!

This kind of analysis is what we call 'double-dummy.' With one dummy, you can see 26 cards since you are holding 13 cards. With two dummies, you can see 39 cards. If you can see 39 cards, you know what the missing 13 are, so you know the location of all 52. 'Double-dummy' would be a nice way to play—you'd never make a wrong decision.

In real life—and the Real Deal—nobody would bid 6♥. They might not even make 6♥, as it is possible to lead the ♥Q from the East hand and take a finesse, losing to the singleton ♥K.

Let's get back to our auction. North opened 1♣, East overcalled 3♥, South passed.

| | | | |
|------|--------------|------|-------|
| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
| | 1♣ | 3♥ | Pass |
| ? | | | |

If West raises to 4♥, everyone will pass. If West passes over 3♥, it is possible North will peep again. Maybe North would bid 4♣, and quite possibly buy it there. North would go down a few tricks, at 50 penalty points apiece, but that would be a huge triumph. Even if East-West languish in 3♥ making five or six, the score is 200 or 230 to East-West. So, if East-West only collect 100 or so points on defense, they will get a bottom.

SUMMARY

Any East-West pair that gets to game will get a good score on this deal. The top score on this board would probably go to an East-West pair that bids to 4♥ and drops the singleton ♥K to make a score of 480. It's reasonable to assume that North holds the ♥K, since North opened the bidding.

A 'universal' top score would go to an East-West pair that somehow bid and made 6♥—but I would be suspicious of such a 'double-dummy' result. ♠



Catherine C. Murdock shuffled and dealt this issue's Real Deal at the Wianno Club where she was taking part in the annual Bridge Festival. She's known in the bridge world as 'Bundles' and the State Department as 'Bunny.'

"When I was working in the State Department in Washington, I was talking to the Chinese Ambassador. "Do you play bridge?" he asked. When I said I had when I was much younger, he replied that I should take it up again. "The leaders in China play as an exercise in memory and strategy," he said.

My life in the investment banking world, and later as the diamond buyer for Tiffany, and then Deputy Chief of Protocol for the United States didn't leave time for bridge. Luckily I make the time now, and I love every minute of it!

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