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This Week in Bridge

(43) Around the Table: Interferer

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Level: 1

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General

The *Interferer* is the first opponent to enter the auction after the bidding has been opened. That is often the player just after the opening bidder, Left Hand Opponent (in the direct seat), but can also be the opening bidder's Right Hand Opponent (in the sandwich or balancing seat.) The Interferer may compete with many kinds of bids: Takeout Double, Simple Suit Overcalls, Jump Overcalls, Notrump Overcall, or other conventional competitive bids. In this lesson, we shall examine in detail the tools the Interferer has to describe their hand and how they best choose from their options.

Types of Hands that Compete

Before we discuss the specific tools that we shall use to compete as the Interferer we want to think about the types of hands with which we might wish to compete. First, we will focus on the shape of our hand:

- Unbalanced Hands
 - *1-Suited Hands*
 - With a 5-card suit and normal strength (7-18 points)
 - With a 6+card suit and 5-10 points.
 - With 5+ card suit and 19+ points.
 - *2-Suited Hands*
 - With two suits, at least 5-4 in unbid suits.
 - *3-Suited Hands*
 - 4441 and 12-18 points.
 - 5440 (5-card minor) and 12-18 points.
 - 5440 (5-card Major) and 12-18 points.
- Balanced Hands
 - Balanced Hand and 12-14 points.
 - Balanced Hand and 15-18 points with a stopper in the opponent's suit.
 - Balanced Hand and 15-18 points without a stopper in the opponent's suit.
 - Balanced Hand and 19+ points.



Tools for Showing Our Hand

Our tools for showing these hands are a relatively short list:

- Simple Overcall of a Suit
 - 1-level vs. 2-level
- Jump Overcall of a Suit (*Weak Jump Overcall*)
- Takeout Doubles
- Overcalls of Notrump
- Conventional Overcalls
 - Michaels
 - Unusual Notrump
- Pass (*Trap Pass*)

Selecting the Right Tool to Interfere With

With many of the hands we hold as Interferer we will qualify to use more than one of these tools. We will choose the bid that best describes our hand and helps us compete in the bidding. Here are our choices for each of the hand types and how we choose them:

- 1-Suited Hands
 - **With a 5-card suit and normal strength (7-18 points)**, we make a simple overcall.
 - 7-18 points for an overcall at the 1-level.
 - 12-18 points for an overcall at the 2-level.
 - **With a 6+card suit and 5-10 points**, we make a jump overcall (to the level of our suit – weak jump overcall.) If we qualify for either a simple overcall or a jump overcall, we should make the more specific call of a weak jump overcall.
 - **With a 5+card suit and 19+ points**, we double and then bid our suit. This shows a hand that has a long suit and was too strong to start with a simple overcall.
- 2-Suited Hands
 - **With two suits, at least 5-4 in unbid suits**, we generally bid our longest suit first if we are strong enough to overcall at that level. If we have two equal length suits (5-5 or longer) then we overcall the higher-ranking suit first.
 - We also use *special conventional bids* to show some 2-suited hands that are at least 5-5 – see *Michaels* and *Unusual Notrump*.
- 3-Suited Hands
 - **With 4441 and 12-18 points**, we make a takeout double if we have the proper shortness. If we do not have the right shortness then we generally pass, called a *Trap Pass*.



- **With 5440 and a 5-card minor and 12-18 points**, we also make a takeout double if we have the proper shortness. If we do not have the proper shortness we can still overcall our 5-card suit if it is of reasonable quality.
- **With 5440 and a 5-card Major and 12-18 points**, we usually overcall our Major. We do this when we have a decent 5-card Major or not enough values to make a takeout double.

- **Balanced Hands**
 - **With a balanced hand and 12-14 points**, if we cannot make one of the above bids we will pass – trap pass!
 - **With a balanced hand, 15-18 points, and a stopper in the opponent's suit**, we have more bidding options. If we have a long suit then we can still overcall, but if we have a balanced hand (with or without a long suit) then it is usually best to describe our hand in one call if we can. If we have 15-18 points we can overcall 1NT. Notice that this 1NT overcall is a bit stronger than a 1NT opening bid. This is because one of the opponents has already opened the bidding. This makes it easier for the opponents to penalize us and thus we want to have a little extra for our 1NT overcalls.
 - **With a balanced hand, 15-18 points, and no stopper in the opponent's suit**, we start with a takeout double and then either raise partner's suit or cuebid the opponent's suit.
 - **With a balanced hand and 19+ points**, we take strong action. With a stopper in the opponent's suit, we start with a takeout double and then bid the appropriate number of notrump. Without a stopper in the opponent's suit we make a takeout double and either jump raise partner's bid or cuebid the opponent's suit.

- **Problem Hand**
 - The classic problem hand for the Interferer has 12-14 points with length in the opponent's suit. We have enough points that we want to take some action, but no action looks appropriate (assuming we do not have a long suit to overcall.) With this hand we have lots of defensive values – since our points are in our short suits or the opponent's suit. Thus, we should choose to defend – and we do so by choosing “Pass!” Many players have difficulty forcing themselves to pass with an opening hand, but the opponents beat us in the race to open the bidding so we pass and wait to see what happens next.

Special Conventional Bids

There are a couple of common conventions that are used to show 2-suited hands. Both conventions are only used in the direct seat (in their classic uses.)



Michaels Cuebid

If the opponents open the bidding with 1-minor then we can use a direct cuebid to show both Major suits – at least 5-5. This will usually be a weak hand, 5-10 points, but occasionally we will have a very strong hand, 16+ points, which we will find a way to show later. Partner will always expect to us to have the weak hand when we first make our cuebid. If the opponents open the bidding with 1-Major then a direct cuebid can be used to show at least 5-5+, with 5-cards in the other Major and some 5-card minor. This has the same strength requirements as above.

The Unusual Notrump

We also have a way of showing the two lowest ranking suits - usually the minors (or it can be hearts and the unbid minor.) We do this by jumping to 2NT after the opponents have opened the bidding. Unlike Michaels, this is always a weak hand with 5-10 points.

Note: The best way to think of these bids is as preempts with two suits instead of one.

Goals for Interfering

When we interfere in the bidding we do so for a variety of purposes. These range from constructively communicating with partner to win the auction to just trying to make life difficult on the opponents.

As the Interferer we are armed with many tools for describing our hand. If we have a close decision between two calls then we need to consider our *goals for bidding* to help us make this decision. Some of the questions we should ask ourselves are:

- Are we being constructive or destructive on this hand?
- Do we want to try to communicate with partner or do we want to focus on making it difficult for our opponents to communicate?
- How do we get into the auction and out of the auction as quickly as possible?
- How can we use the *Law of Total Tricks (LOTT)* to help us?

We use many other pieces of information to help us shape our goals and answer these questions each time we select a bid. We should be sure to keep in mind:

- Vulnerability
- Position
- Our opponents
- Quality of our hand – Offensive vs. Defensive

These tactical decisions about which bid to choose in competitive auctions can be extremely difficult. But learning to compete in the bidding and be an “annoying” opponent (the kind that always makes other players’ lives difficult) starts with learning to be a good Interferer!



Conclusion

Though each player at the table has many possible bids or actions to take to get involved in the auction the Interferer strives to get into the auction and catchup after the opponents have already taken the lead by opening the bidding (and sometimes even responding). Thus, Interferer needs many tools for how to describe their hand and get into the auction before it gets to too high a level. Make sure you are comfortable with these tools that help you compete in the bidding.