



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(88) Responding to 2-level Preempts

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Level: 3

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General

When partner preempts the bidding and we have a good hand we expect the auction to be difficult. Partner's preempt has eaten up our valuable bidding space – instead of the opponents' bidding space. We will need to have good agreements with partner and exercise some good judgment to get to the right final contract. Here we will discuss our goals for the auction, agreements with partner, and how to make good decisions in these auctions.

What Does Responder Need to Bid?

Responder can bid opposite a 2-level preempt bid for one of two reasons:

- To extend the preempt, or
- To make a constructive bid because they have a good hand.

When Responder extends the preempt they have a fit, using the LOTT (Law of Total Tricks.)

When the Responder makes a constructive bid, Responder is interested in game. They have about 15+ points worth of playing strength (depending on vulnerability). If Responder does not have this, they simply do not have interest in constructive bidding and are only using the LOTT to extend the preempt.

When Responder has a good hand (aimed at constructive bidding) they have choices:

- Bid a new suit,
- Bid 2NT,
- Bid game.

If they have a good fit for Responder's suit they use 2NT (more on this later) to explore for game. If Responder does not have a fit (or is looking for a better fit) then they bid a new suit. Let's look at how to explore for a fit.



Finding Fits

Our first goal in any bidding sequence is to find a fit (or a better fit – e.g., we have a fit in a minor, but might also have a Major suit fit.) When partner preempts, we will usually play in their suit, because they do not have much length in the other suits.

2-level Preempts show:

- 6-card suits (usually decent suit)
- No outside 4-card Major
- Not too many values outside (some are OK)

Before we go bidding a new suit of our own it is useful to think about partner's possible holdings in our suit.

- Hxx (Honor third) Best Holding (4-card very rarely possible.)
- xxx or Hx (Honor doubleton) Good Holding
- xx or less Common Holding

Thus, if we bid a new suit we expect partner to raise with a good fit (Hx or xxx or better.) That means the new suits we bid as Responder need to be good enough to play as trump opposite Hx. That is, in order to bid a new suit, it should be a 6-card suit or a good 5-card suit (good enough that it can play well opposite Hx.)

Example

2♦ 2♠ Good 5+card ♠ suit. Forcing for 1-Round (1F.)

Now let's look at how Opener rebids in these auctions: With a minimum they try to signoff and with a maximum they do something forward going.

- 2NT Rare. Scattered values. Maximum.
- 3♣ ♣ cards. Maximum.
- 3♦ Minimum.
- 3♥ ♥ cards. Maximum.
- 3♠ Minimum with ♠Hx or ♠xxx.
- 3NT Maximum with excellent ♦ (Rare.)
- 4♣ *Splinter*, ♠Hxx, 0-1♣, Maximum.
- 4♥ *Splinter*, ♠Hxx, 0-1♥, Maximum.
- 4♠ Maximum with ♠Hx or ♠xxx.



All of this bidding is natural; it just takes some understanding of what partner can have and what they are trying to show us –

- Min vs. Max,
- Fit vs. Non-Fit,
- Location of Values,

to properly judge what to do.

With a Fit for Preemptor (Support)

Before we go in to how to explore for game with a preempting Opener, we want to make sure Responder does a good job properly evaluating their hand. With a fit, Responder can re-evaluate in terms of support points:

- HCP,
- Length points,
- Support points (ruffing values).

If we have a good 15+ points, re-evaluated, we should explore game. As you can imagine it is much more common to have 15+ points in support of partner than without support.

When we have support we will use 2NT to ask Opener for more information about their hand. In standard bidding, 2NT asks for a feature. Opener bids a new suit with a good hand AND a side Ace or King (showing their Ace or King.) Opener rebids their suit with no feature OR with a bad hand that has feature.

Examples

2♠ 2NT

___?

KQT763

7

K843

52

With a good preempt, Opener shows their feature by bidding 3♦. Showing a feature also shows a good hand.

QT9763

7

K843

52

With the second hand, we do not want to encourage partner – so we do not show a feature.



2NT Ogust

A significant improvement over “Feature Ask 2NT” is Ogust. Playing Ogust, the Opener (Preemptor) describes two useful pieces of information about their hand – quality of suit and quality of overall hand. Let’s see how it works:

2x 2NT

___?

- 3♣ “Bad-Bad” - Bad Suit and a Bad Hand
- 3♦ “Good-Bad” – Good Suit and a Bad Hand
- 3♥ “Bad – Good” – Bad Suit and a Good Hand
- 3♠ “Good-Good” – Good Suit and a Good Hand
- 3NT Solid Suit, AKQxxx (rare)

Note: As a memory aid, it can be useful to think of the Majors showing points and the minors not.

With our modern, destructive style of preempting, it is useful to be able to let partner give us a good general feeling for their hand and their suit.

Ogust has another advantage over Feature in that it does not give the opponents specific information about the declarer’s hand – Feature helps the opponents know how to defend, by telling them where the Opener’s outside points are located (and where they are not located.)

Note: Some players also use Modified Ogust to allow them to show a 5-card suit as part of their response structure. If you find yourself frequently preempting with 5-card suits, then you may find this modification useful.

Conclusion

Responding to 2-level preempts is a difficult part of bidding. It requires excellent judgment and hand evaluation, and even some good luck. We want to extend our partner’s preempts to do as much damage as possible as well as try to exercise good constructive bidding – try to land on our feet when partner preempts us instead of the opponents. Having good agreements should help us better accomplish all of this.