

Fifth Chair



Preemptive Opening Bids

By Caitlin (with notes from Harold Feldheim and Willie Jago)

WHAT IS PREEMPTION?

According to bridge pro and internationally published author Harold Feldheim, "By definition, preemption is the process of attempting to block communication (due to a lack of defense) while simultaneously stating that in your opinion, the only correct place to play the hand is in your suit."

WHAT FACTORS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHEN PRE-EMPTING?

a) Suit Strength: Most of your points should be in your suit thus decreasing the danger for a large penalty and decreasing your defensive potential. SAYC provides us with guidelines that a weak two bid shows 5-11 HCP.

b) Suit Texture and Length: According to SAYC guidelines, a two-level pre-empt promises two of the top three honors. Ideally, a three-level pre-empt shows not only 7 cards but two out of the three top honors or three out of the five top honors. Now note that with a three-level pre-empt the difference between these two hands: QJT9873 versus AQ85432.

If the suit breaks badly, you will lose two tricks with the first holding and three tricks with the second. Suit texture for a four-level pre-empt should follow guidelines set out for three-level pre-empts with 8 cards.

(The range remains the same for three and four-level pre-empts.)

c) Shape: The more distributional your hand, the more opportunities for ruffing values.

d) Vulnerability: When vulnerable and opponents are non-vulnerable, be that much more disciplined as a penalty which works will indeed be hefty.

e) Position At The Table: As bridge pro and author Willie Jago points out, "The best position is in third seat. You cannot preempt partner who is a passed hand and fourth hand, who may have the best hand at the table, will be deprived of three levels of bidding. Next best position is as dealer. Admittedly partner may have a strong hand [but if so, s/he will use 2NT to ask for a feature and perhaps find that game]. But there are two opponents and only one partner, so that the odds are 2:1 that the hand belongs to the them. Preempts in second seat are less attractive and should be based on very sound values. Preempts in fourth position should never be made." (Note that P-P-P-2S is not a preemptive bid; rather, it tells partner you have six spades and an opening hand).

f) Judging Defensive Values: Holding AKxxxx in spades with QTx in hearts, is indeed dangerous for a weak two spade bid. You may well pre-empt partner out of an alternative and better contract should s/he hold five hearts. This example calls for a smooth pass, particularly in first and second position.

REVIEWING CRITERIA FOR WEAK TWO BIDS

- a) a six-card suit
- b) concentration of values in the suit in which you are pre-empting, thus two of the top three honors so that partner, with appropriate values, is confident in asking for further information from you with a two notrump bid which asks you to further describe your hand as outlined in SAYC notes
- c) 5-11 HCP
- d) no outside four card major so as not to miss a 4-4 major fit with partner
- e) no void as partner is likely to have values in your void

These guidelines should now be considered in light of the factors recommended when judging whether or not to preempt. As well, use your SAYC notes to review forcing and non forcing bids over pre-empt (i.e. a new suit with no interference is indeed forcing as is two notrump while a raise in the pre-empted suit is strictly competitive, thus RONF, Raise Only Non Forcing Bid).

The below information from Marcia West

Rules of 2,3,4 to aid in preempting:

A reasonable rule to follow on deciding whether to preempt:

If you are VUL, and they aren't, only overbid your hand by those vital tricks for you, (6 hcp which will help in the offense, or defense).

2 tricks, using the Losing Trick count to determine your loser count. (Email tarsh@aa.net for this)

If you are both either VUL or NOT VUL overbid your hand by 3 tricks.

If you are NOT VUL and they ARE VUL, overbid your hand by 4 tricks.

In each instance you are counting on your partner to have at least 2 tricks for you and approx 6 high card points. For partner to respond, s/he must have at least those two/three/four tricks, as a base. S/he can raise the bidding with more than those base tricks.