

Don't Be a Pleasant Opponent – Bid

by Jon Baldursson

Jon Baldursson of Reykjavik is Iceland's most successful and well-known player. In 1991 the structure of the Bermuda Bowl was altered and for the first time Europe was to be represented by four countries rather than the previous two. Iceland crept into that final qualifying spot and from then on proved that they were a team of destiny as they went on to become one of the most popular Bermuda Bowl winners in the history of the game. It was the first time that Iceland had won a World Championship in any discipline and they became national heroes.

In most textbooks on competitive bidding we are advised not to bid without good reason. To bid with weak hands on bad suits, the theory says, will cost in the long run, misleading partner when we end up defending, and risking severe penalties otherwise.

This sounds like sensible advice and is likely to produce consistently fair results in intermediate competition. But experience has taught me that exactly the opposite is needed to do well in top-class teams tournaments. It is better to bid at the first opportunity, even if the hands or the suits do not meet the standards the textbooks require. Indeed, it can often be less dangerous to bid right away than to wait and hope to get a second chance. Contrary to what some may believe these tactics are not as effective at Pairs, where -200 is a terrible score.

Sometimes declining to overcall can have strange effects on the defense. This deal occurred in the Spingold, a top teams tournament in the USA.

Board 10
East Deals
Both Vul

♠	—	♠	Q J 8 6 3 2
♥	A 4 3 2	♥	9 8
♦	A Q 7 6 2	♦	—
♣	A K 4 3	♣	Q 10 8 6 5

♠	K 10 9 7 5 4	♠	—
♥	6 5	♥	—
♦	J 5 4 3	♦	—
♣	9	♣	—

♠	A	♠	—
♥	K Q J 10 7	♥	—
♦	K 10 9 8	♦	—
♣	J 7 2	♣	—

West	North	East	South
Zia	Sontag	Rosenberg	Kantar
Pass	5 NT	Pass	1 ♥
Pass	Pass	Dbl	7 ♥
Pass	Pass		All pass

East's double was obviously lead-directing, showing a void somewhere. Not unreasonably, the great Zia Mahmood led his longest suit, a spade, so the grand slam made. If Rosenberg had opened two spades or if Zia had overcalled one or two spades, this problem would not have arisen. North-South would have had to deal with a high-level spade bid from East, and if the final contract were then seven hearts doubled by East, the diamond lead would be automatic.

It is standard practice that a one-level overcall promises a good suit so that partner knows what to lead if your side ends up defending. But if overcalling on a bad suit can be misleading for your partner, it can also be misleading for declarer, causing him to play the overcaller for missing honors in the suit he bid. There can also be negative inferences when a usually aggressive player does not overcall. If his partner is on lead against notrump, he knows that it is no use trying to find him with a suit he could have bid at the one level.

There is also a psychological advantage in being a busy bidder. We all know that it can be irritating when opponents are constantly entering the bidding, even if the intervention makes no difference in the end. We often find that opponents have been skating on thin ice, but managed to escape unharmed. This can

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allow them to gain a psychological edge and affect your concentration, maybe resulting in a losing board later in the match.

Of course, they are right in the textbooks. You can help declarer to make contracts with light overcalls and you sometimes go for big numbers. But I am sure that in the long run you will gain more with this style than you lose, and when you lose, just smile and bide your time. The Icelandic team used this approach in the 1991 Bermuda Bowl and, to quote Eric Kokish from the World Championship book discussing the prospects for the final, 'The Icelanders' busy competitive style had so far brought in lots of points. Would this style prove effective against the Poles who like to defend?'

So my BOLS tip is:

BOLS TIP: *Don't just sit and watch your opponents. Bid at the first opportunity.*