

Palo Alto Bridge Club Lesson
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Cue Bids by Responder and Advancer

Preliminary Definitions

In order to talk meaningfully about cue bids we need to have a few definitions of the players involved. The “Opener” is the first person to make a bid other than a Pass. The “Overcaller,” is an opponent of the Opener who makes an overcall in a suit or no trump.¹ The “Responder” is the partner of the Opener. And the “Advancer” is the partner of the Overcaller.

Many players think that a cue bid by the Advancer is the same as a cue bid by the Responder, showing a limit raise in support of partner’s suit. However, the truth is a bit more complicated than that. Here’s why: when an Opener bids one of a suit, the Responder can – by definition – count on her partner to have an opening hand. If the Responder has a good hand, Responder may bid a new suit which is forcing, whether the opponents have bid or not. Responder can continue to make forcing bids by bidding new suits, including a fourth suit, which may be artificial.

The Advancer, on the other hand, does not know if partner has an opening hand. An overcall has a different purpose than an opening hand. The Overcaller may have an opening hand and hope to become the declarer; however, it is quite common for the opening bidder’s side to end up declaring and for the overcaller to be defending. An overcall therefore may simply show a good suit and request a favorable lead, or an overcall may be a suggestion for a sacrifice.

Since the Overcaller may not have an opener, new suits by Advancer are not forcing. To force partner to bid, the Advancer must make a cue bid.

Cue Bids Provide an Additional Available Bid

When there is no competitive bidding, a variety of bids are available to the partner of the Opener to show a major suit raise. Responder may make a simple raise at the two level; may make a limit raise at the three level; may make a game forcing bid of Jacoby 2NT; or may make a preemptive jump to game with a weak hand, shortness, and a big trump fit.

When an opponent enters the auction, those bids are still available. However, the Responder now has a new bidding option, the cue bid of the opponent’s suit.

¹ The Overcaller is also sometimes referred to as “Intervenor.”

Responder's Cue Bid After the Opponents Overcall

When partner opens and an opponent intervenes, the availability of the cue bid changes the meaning of some of the Responder's bids. A cue bid now shows a limit raise or better in partner's suit. 2NT is not a raise but denies a fit. It shows an invitational hand with an interest in playing no trump – around 10 – 12 hcp's – with a stopper in the opponent's suit. And a raise to the three level is best played as preemptive, not a limit raise. A cue bid by Responder always guarantees support.

For example if partner opens 1H and RHO overcalls 2D, 2H is still a simple raise of around 6-10 points; a 3D cue bid is a limit raise or better in partner's suit; 3H is a preemptive raise; and 4H is a game bid with no extra values. 2NT is not a raise, but denies a fit and shows an invitational desire to play in no trump with a stopper in the opponent's suit. Here are some examples:

After 1H (2D), Responder would bid as follows:

A62
QJ42
KJ4
853

K62
Q842
42
9853

AQ6
42
KJ42
J853

Responder has 11 points and cuebids 3D. This shows a limit raise in hearts.

Responder has only 5 points, and bids 3H. This is a preemptive raise showing four or more hearts.

Responder has 11 points but no fit. With a stopper in diamonds, Responder bids 2NT.

Advancer's Cue Bid in Response to Partner's Overcall

As stated above, an overcall has a different purpose than an opening hand. An Overcaller may have far less than an opening hand and simply be showing a good suit.

The following hand is a very reasonable overcall:

72
AQJ97
K63
842

Few players would consider opening this ten point hand. However, virtually all experts would overcall 1H over an opponent's 1C or 1D opening bid. Overcaller has excellent hearts and wants partner to lead that suit at Trick 1.

Since the Overcaller may not have opening values for the overcall, the bid of a new suit by the Advancer is not forcing. Advancer's only forcing bid is a cue bid of the opponent's suit and the cue bid does not guarantee support for Overcaller's suit. Advancer's cue bid shows one of two kinds of hands: Advancer will either have a limit raise in support of Overcaller's suit or will have an opening hand, with or without support.

A primary purpose of Advancer's cue bid is to find out if the Overcaller has an opening hand or not. Although the cue bid tells partner that the Advancer has at least an invitational hand, it is more of an asking bid than a telling bid. The cue bid asks partner, "How good was your overcall?" With less than a full opening hand, Overcaller rebids her suit at the cheapest level. With an opening hand, the Overcaller makes some other bid, either jumping in the overcall suit, bidding a new suit, or bidding no trump, whichever is most descriptive.

Here are some examples. The bidding proceeds (1C) 1H (P) 2C (P). Overcaller responds as follows:

K6 KQJ952 852 74	A6 KQJ952 AJ2 74	A6 KQJ95 AJ85 74	K106 KQJ95 85 KQ7
Overcaller bids 2H. Overcaller does not have a full opener and rebids her suit at the cheapest level.	Overcaller bids 3H. Overcaller jumps to show a full opener with a long suit.	Overcaller bids 2D. Overcaller has a full opener. 2D is the most descriptive bid.	Overcaller bids 2NT. Overcaller has a full opener and values in the Opener's suit.

Advancer's Rebid After a Cue Bid

When Overcaller makes her second bid, Advancer will know if partner has opening hand values or not. Advancer will now further describe her hand further.

If Overcaller does not have a full opening hand, the Overcaller's rebid of her original suit will often end the auction.

However, if the Overcaller shows an opener, Advancer has a few options. If Advancer also has an opener with support for Overcaller's major, Advancer will bid game. With a limit raise in support of Overcaller's major, Advancer will make an invitational raise of the overcaller's suit. With a full opener and lacking support, the Advancer may bid a new suit or bid no trump. If Overcaller shows a full opener, any bid by the Advancer other than support for partner's suit shows opening hand values, and is forcing to game since both Overcaller and Advancer have opening hands (Opener + Opener = Game).

Here are some examples. After the auction begins (1C) 1H (P) 2C (P) 2D (P), Advancer makes the following bids at her second opportunity:

AQ6 K74 Q652 642	AQ6 Q72 KQ652 42	AQJ1082 7 AQJ6 42	A86 72 AQJ6 QJ42
Advancer bids 2H, not forcing. Advancer has a limit raise. Overcaller may pass, bid game, or make a game try by bidding a side suit.	Advancer bids 4H. Advancer has a full opener and support for partner's major suit.	Advancer bids 2S, forcing, showing an opening hand and an independent suit. The partners will likely play 4S or possibly 3NT.	Advancer bids 2NT, forcing. Advancer has no fit and clubs stopped. 3NT is likely to be the best contract.

1

♠ A53
♥ Q
♦ AK975
♣ 10962

♠ KQ10842
♥ J3
♦ 63
♣ K73

♠ 976
♥ 109872
♦ 1082
♣ A8

Dealer: North
Neither Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	1 ♦	1 ♠	Pass
2 ♦	Pass	2 ♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Opening Lead: ♦ 2

2

♠ 6
♥ K1062
♦ A652
♣ QJ42

♠ 943
♥ Q93
♦ QJ4
♣ 9875

♠ AQJ872
♥ 5
♦ 10973
♣ A10

♠ K105
♥ AJ874
♦ K8
♣ K63

Dealer: East
N-S Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1 ♥
1 ♠	2 ♠	Pass	4 ♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Opening Lead: ♦ 10

3

♠ 10874
♥ 105
♦ 85432
♣ 106

♠ J3
♥ 86
♦ AQJ106
♣ AJ54

♠ AK652
♥ KJ3
♦ 7
♣ K832

♠ Q9
♥ AQ9742
♦ K9
♣ Q97

Dealer: South
E-W Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			1 ♥
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♥	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	3 ♦	Pass
3 NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening Lead: ♥ 10

4

♠ KJ
♥ AJ10732
♦ 63
♣ AJ4

♠ AQ10874
♥ Q6
♦ K85
♣ 86

♠ 95
♥ 98
♦ A109
♣ 1097532

♠ 632
♥ K54
♦ QJ742
♣ KQ

Dealer: West
Both Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
Pass	1 ♥	1 ♠	2 ♠
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Opening Lead: ♣ 8

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Hand Analysis

1. Dealer opens 1D with a thirteen count. Second seat has a nice spade suit and overcalls 1S. Advancer has an opening hand without support for hearts, and bids 2D which asks, "How good is your overcall?" Overcaller responds 2S, stating that she does not have an opening hand. 2S may end the auction. The lead is the D2, low from three in partner's suit. RHO wins the DA and should switch to a club to see if there are any tricks in that suit while still in possession of the trump ace. When declarer gets in, he will play on trumps to prevent defensive ruffs. Declarer is likely losing a spade, two diamonds and a club, for +3, although it is possible for defenders to do better if they can develop defensive ruffs in clubs or hearts.
2. Second seat has a 14 count with five hearts and opens 1H. LHO overcalls one spade and responder bids 2S, showing a limit raise or better in hearts. Opener has a 14 count and should bid game in response to partner's limit raise. Responder has a singleton in the opponent's suit, which gives responder 13 support points, so goes to game if opener did not bid 4H on his own. Declarer should win the opening lead in dummy to lead spades. This keeps a diamond entry to hand to ruff spades. LHO captures the SK with the SA and leads another diamond. Declarer can ruff a spade and play on trumps. If declarer plays A and K of trumps for the drop, declarer will lose a heart to the Queen. Declarer may finesse RHO, however. Since LHO is long in spades, and therefore may be short in hearts. Declarer ruffs the last spade and makes four or five, depending on the play in the trump suit.
3. Dealer opens 1H and second seat overcalls 1S. Advancer cue bids opener's suit, showing either a limit raise or an opening hand and asking overcaller to tell advancer whether she has a full opening hand. Overcaller bids 3C, showing a full opener with values in clubs. Advancer now bids 3D, showing an opening hand with values in diamonds. Overcaller bids 3NT. The lead is the H10, top of a doubleton in partner's suit. Declarer has a double stopper in hearts, two tricks in spades, three eventual tricks in diamonds, and two tricks in clubs. After losing the first heart to the Ace and winning the second heart with the Jack, declarer takes a finesse in diamonds, which loses to RHO's King, as expected. Declarer can win the third heart and then should cash out for nine tricks: two spades, two hearts, three diamonds, and two clubs. Declarer should not take the club finesse into the danger hand or will go down in 3NT.
4. Second seat has six hearts and 14 points, and opens 1H. Third seat overcalls a spade, and responder bids 2S, a limit raise. Opener has a minimum, and the King and Jack of spades are poorly placed in front of the spade overcaller, so they are of questionable value. Opener rebids 3H and partner, with 11 points, including the KQ tight of clubs, should pass. Overcaller should not lead spades since she holds the AQ10 and does not want to give away a trick. Overcaller also should not lead a heart since she holds Qx. On the lead of a diamond or a club, declarer can pull trump and play on diamonds, trying to develop a trick there for a spade discard. However, RHO should win one of the diamonds and return a spade through declarer's KJ of spades. Defenders should take two spades and two diamonds. Hearts are 2-2, so there is no loser there and declarer can make three. If declarer does not follow the "Nine Never" rule, and finesses in hearts, he will lose to the HQ and be set.