

Bidding More Effectively in the Pass-out Seat

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When the opponents look ready to pass out the contract at a relatively low level, it is often right for your side to re-enter the auction. However, certain things change in the pass-out seat. Today's talk will help firm up your ideas about how you should approach things when the opening bid is passed to you.

1. YOU CAN OVERCALL OR DOUBLE WITH LESS THAN THE USUAL STRENGTH

When the opponents subside at a low level, you will find that partner almost always has a fairly reasonable hand opposite. This means two things: a) you should act aggressively to 'protect' partner (hence the sometimes-used term 'protective bidding') and b) you can act without the usual values if the rest of your hand is suitable.

You wouldn't double a 1♥ opening, but after an opening is passed around to you:

♠ K1053 ♥ 7 ♦ K987 ♣ Q984 might bid...

W	N	E	S
1♥	Pass	Pass	Double

Likewise, bidding 2♣ over 1♥ would be a bit too aggressive, but in the pass-out seat:

♠ K3 ♥ 87 ♦ Q98 ♣ A109843 might bid...

W	N	E	S
1♥	Pass	Pass	2♣

2. THE RANGE OF YOUR RE-OPENING 1NT SHOULD BE WEAKER, AND 2NT IS NATURAL

When the opponents open the bidding and we hold 12 points and length in the opponent's suit, normally we should be passing (following the rule that when the opponents bid your longest suit, pass is often right). And when we hold a very strong balanced hand (19+) we will always start with a takeout double then bid notrumps next. Jumping to 2NT is usually reserved for two-suited hands.

In the pass-out seat, however, things change. Now it is often a good idea to bid with a "weak notrump" type hand, and double with that hand will simply confuse matters. So we change our notrump scheme:

- **1NT is now 12-14 (rather than 15-18)**
- **With 15-18, Double then bid Notrumps**
- **With 19-21, Jump to 2NT (no longer “Unusual 2NT” showing a two suiter)**

3. JUMPS SHOULD NOT BE PRE-EMPTIVE

It is common to play that a jump overcall after the opponents open shows a weak hand – like an opening pre-empt. However, this doesn’t make sense in the pass-out seat. With a weak hand, it is usually correct to simply pass out the opponents bid and hope they have missed their best contract.

Whatever your jump overcalls are in ‘direct’ seat (immediately over the opening bidder), in the pass-out seat your jump overcalls should be intermediate: think 12-15 with a decent six card suit, e.g.

♠ AQJ653 ♥ 87 ♦ AQ5 ♣ 94 might bid...

W	N	E	S
1♥	Pass	Pass	2♠

4. PASSING IS STILL AN OPTION

One of the most frequent mistakes that we see in the pass-out seat is failing to pass, even with quite bad hands. The desire to prevent the opponents from playing a very low contract sometimes leads to silly bids being made.

The best types of hands to pass with are where you hold not much of a hand and 3 or 4 cards in the opponent’s suit. This sort of hand often has no sensible bid. Frequently we see a double or 1NT bid made rather than the obvious (too obvious?) pass:

♠ Q985 ♥ K87 ♦ K85 ♣ Q94 might bid...

W	N	E	S
1♠	Pass	Pass	?

Bidding anything here is a mistake. The hand isn’t strong enough for 1NT (and the chances of missing a game are not significant). Doubling will lead to a poor contract if partner doesn’t have a five card suit. Meanwhile, you were quite happy to defend 1♠. Pass is right.