

Pre-emptive Opening Bids

Opening bids at the 2-level of **2D**, **2H**, or **2S**, and at the 3-level or higher are preemptive in nature. They are intentional overbids that are designed (1) to describe a difficult hand that has no other way of being shown (This makes the Partner the “Captain” of the hand and avoids an awkward auction, and (2) to automatically create problems for the Opponents, whose bidding, if any, must begin at an unexpectedly high level.

Basic Conditions for a Pre-emptive Opening Bid

- (1) Typically, in the 1st or 2nd seat, an opening pre-emptive bid at the 2-level shows a 6-card suit, and at the 3-level, a 7-card or longer suit of excellent quality (usually headed by the A, or K, or both). This latter requirement is based upon Partnership agreement whether or not the team is using structured (“disciplined”) or unstructured (“undisciplined”) pre-empts.
- (2) The high-card strength is limited to 5-11 high-card points with very little defensive strength outside of the long suit; i.e., fewer than 2 ½ quick or defensive tricks.
- (3) Most of the HCP’s are located in the long suit.
- (4) Higher level opening bids have similar characteristics but are ordinarily based on longer suits.
- (5) These requirements are somewhat relaxed in the 3rd seat if Partner has already passed.
- (6) Most importantly, the preempt conforms to the “**Rule of 2-3-4**”

The “Rule of 2-3-4”

Well-structured pre-empts use the “**Rule of 2-3-4**” in order to gauge the safety of the overbid. According to the Rule: (1), with *unfavorable vulnerability*, (red against white), the overbid should be by *two* tricks, (2), with *equal vulnerability*, (red against red or white against white), the Pre-Empt should be an overbid by *three* tricks, and (3), with *favorable vulnerability*, (white against red), the overbid should be *four* tricks.

Following this Rule, an opening pre-empt at the 3-level would promise five, six, or seven taking tricks, depending on the relative vulnerabilities.

Responding to Partner’s Pre-empt

When responding to Partner’s Preempt, the Responder automatically becomes the “Captain” of the hand. To determine and guide the Partnership to the denomination and the level of the final contract, the Responder counts tricks, those that can be added from his/her holdings to what the Opener has already promised.

Most of the Responder’s bids actually close out the auction. Raises of the Opener’s suit (“**RONF**”) (**R**aise is the **O**nly **N**on-**F**orce), game bids in a new suit, and 3-NT all command the Pre-Emptying bidder to pass.

Two bids, however, by Responder are unconditionally forcing – (1) any new suit and (2) “**2-NT**” Both bids ask for additional information from the Opener and neither can be passed.