

BALANCING OVERCALLS

A. DEFINITION: - The bidding in the re-opening position, (The so-called "PASS-OUT SEAT," or 4th seat relative to the last previous call or bid other than a "*pass*"), is commonly called "**BALANCING.**" It is the re-opening of the bidding with a **bid** or a "*double*" when the opposition has stopped the bidding at a low level.

Example: (1C/1D/1H/1S) P P ???

In order to balance effectively, however, it is necessary to make and understand adjustments in the meaning of such competitive tools such as Doubles, Overcalls, No-Trump bids, Cue-Bids, and Jump-Overcalls. All such tools all have altered meanings when used in the balancing position, as compared to their use in the direct (2nd seat) bidding position.

The high-cad point count and distributional requirements, normally necessary in the direct (2nd seat) are relaxed in favor of keeping the bidding open, not allowing the Opponents to buy the contract cheaply, and on the assumption that Partner holds some unrevealed strength. The Spade suit is particularly significant: possession of Spades favors balancing action, and the lack of Spades is a mitigating factor against balancing. In more general terms, a shortage in an un-bid suit, especially the Majors, tends to disfavor balancing; a shortage in the Opponent's suit tends to favor it.

B. BALANCING BIDS:

1) A **Balancing Double** does *not* promise the same strength and distribution as does a direct (2nd seat) **Take-Out Double**, which normally requires opening count, or its equivalent. One may make a balancing "*double*" with as few as 8-9 HCP's along with any reasonable holding, and at least 3-card support for the remaining un-bid suits. There is virtually no upper high-card point count limit.

Responses To Balancing Doubles: - The response to a balancing "*double*" requires better judgment than does bidding over Partner's direct **Take-Out Double**. Remember, Partner may have made a balancing "*double*" with a much wider range of hands; i.e., he/she may **not** have full support for all of the un-bid suits, and the strength of his/her hand may be considerably below the values required for a direct (2nd seat) **Take-Out Double**.

- (1) A bid of any un-bid suit at the cheapest level = 0-8 HCP's.
- (2) Any jump response = a hand with 9-11 HCP's
- (3) A jump to **2-NT** = A good 9-11 HCP bid with Opener's suit well stopped.

2) A **Balancing Overcall:** - As with a **Balancing Double**, a **Balancing Overcall** does not require the same strength and suit quality that is necessary for a direct (2nd seat) overcall. In the direct seat it requires 8-15 HCP's at the 1-level, and 10-15 HCP's at the 2-level; 5-cards or longer in both instances. In the balancing seat, however, fewer HCP's are needed, and a **Balancing Overcall** can even be made with any 4-card suit.

3) **A Balancing Jump-Overcall:** - Weak jump-overcalls designed to consume enemy bidding space are no longer needed, since one could simply “*pass*” to accomplish this same objective. Thus, a **Balancing Jump-Overcall** should show a 1-suited hand, with at least a 6-card suit, and the strength of a sound opening bid, or better.

4) **A Balancing 1-No-Trump:** -The requirements for a **Balancing 1-No-Trump** bid differ from a direct (2nd seat) 1-No-Trump overcall as do all other balancing bids. A **Balancing No-Trump** bid should have the following conditions: 10-14 HCP's, a balanced or semi-balanced distribution (two doubletons are even allowed), a stopper in the enemy's bid suit, but *not guaranteed*, and a denial of distributional requirements for a good **Take-Out Double** and/or a biddable 5-card or longer suit.

5) **A Balancing 2-No Trump:** -The requirements for a **Balancing 2-No-Trump** bid also differs from a direct (2nd seat) 2-No Trump overcall, the latter of which is a conventional “*Unusual 2-NT*” showing a very weak (5-10 HCP's) or a very strong (16{+} HCP's), and 5-5 or longer in the two, lower, un-bid suits. A **Balancing 2-No-Trump** bid, however, should have the following conditions: a very strong 18-20 HCP's, a balanced or semi-balanced distribution (two doubletons are even allowed), and at least one stopper in the enemy's bid suit.

6) **A Balancing Cue-Bid (Michaels):** - Shows a highly distributional hand, usually 2-suited, 5-5 or better, the same as it would in the direct (2nd seat); i.e., namely, very weak (5-11 HCP's) or very strong (16 + HCP's).

C. **“PASSING” IN THE BALANCING CHAIR:** - There are only two (2) reasons one should “*pass*” in the balancing (4th) chair. They include: (1) You have both length and strength in the enemy's suit, making it most unlikely that Partner has “*trap-passed*,” and/or (2) you have such a weak hand, that any bid you might make is likely to produce an un-makeable contract, even in the unlikely possibility of finding Partner with reasonable strength.