

“ THE RULE OF 2*3*4 ”

When Pre-Empting

Many duplicate players pre-empt the bidding with a weak 2-, 3-, 4-, or 5-level bid with the enthusiasm of a suicidal maniac playing a game of Russian roulette, oft times with a pistol loaded only with "blanks". For the duplicate player, "blank cylinders" represent probable zeros on the score recap sheet totals; and their use denies added enjoyment to the game for both the user and his/her partner, while enriching the opposition.

Accordingly, it is with a degree of appropriateness that definitive methods of some fashion and logic must be employed so as to determine which suits are appropriate for a weak pre-emptive bid, and what level should be considered as a reasonable one to place the pre-emptive call. Obviously, vulnerability, sizing-up of the opponents, fortitude or lack thereof, whether partner has previously passed or not, position at the table, outside Major suit holdings, and many other factors have some relevance in this matter; but in general, several methods are employed in an attempt to guide one's decision on this matter. They are: (1) suit quality, and (2) suit length, and (3) The Rule of 2-3-4

A. SUIT QUALITY: - The level of any pre-empt should not exceed the level equivalent to the suit quality of the pre-emptive suit holding; i.e., a bidding level equal to the summation of the number of cards held within that suit + the number of honors held within that same pre-emptive suit (only Jack or above are considered). The suit quality test can be utilized singularly as a general rule in establishing a guideline as to the level of reasonableness of any contemplated pre-emptive bid, and is especially useful if one desires a rigid partnership understanding so as to only allow for “**structured**” or “**disciplined pre-empts**”. Some players desiring to have an even more structured framework to their pre-emptive calls insist on having two of the top three honors in any suit holding given a pre-emptive consideration.

B. SUIT LENGTH: - Some superficial attempts to identify the quality of pre-emptive bids based upon the number of cards held within the suit that is bid (at least 6 for a pre-empt at the 2-level, 7 or more at the 3-level; etc.), a high card strength of 5-11 HCP's for a pre-emptive 2-bid and 7-11 HCP's for a 3-bid, or the suit-quality test as described above. These are, at best, too vague in their attempt to qualify the strength of the bid and virtually incapable of providing partner with information leading to the trick-taking capacity of the hand of the preemptive bid, in case partner is interested in pursuing a furtherance of the pre-emptive call to a possible game or slam attempt.

C. POSITION: - One's position at the bridge table is also a big factor. In second seat, one should always be sound, even when not vulnerable. When RHP has passed, there is a good chance that the hand belongs to your side, so pre-empting should be well-defined, and disciplined. On the other hand, in 3rd seat, when Partner has already “passed,” you know it is not your hand, so one can take more liberties. In 1st seat, as Dealer, one should be somewhat “in the middle – normal.” **Summary of position:** 1st seat: normal, 2nd seat: sound, 3rd seat: aggressive.

THE RULE OF 2-3-4

When opting to pre-empt the bidding, either by an opening pre-emptive bid or by a pre-emptive jump overcall, it may become important for your partner to know exactly how strong or

weak your pre-empt bid was. If the hand truly belonged to the opponents, then your partner has little interest other than to experience, with you, the outcome of your blockage attempt upon the opponents. If, on the other hand, your pre-empt bid finds your partner with the balance of the missing high cards, then it would be convenient, and indeed, extremely valuable for your partner to know the exact strength of your pre-emptive call without first seeking further information. By such means, the partner of the pre-emptive call can then gauge whether or not a game try is even justified ***before*** the attempt is even begun.

Conventions like a forcing 2NT bid asking for a feature (Ace or King) outside the pre-emptive suit, or the Ogust Convention (1-2, 1-2-3), and its variations, like “Klinger Ogust”, are better than having no standardization at all, but notice, they are effective over a pre-emptive 2-bid and not one made at a higher bidding level; i.e., at the 3-level, and beyond.

The Rule of 2-3-4 serves to present a standardization, structured, yet somewhat aggressive method upon which to base all pre-emptive calls, **at the 3-level or higher**, and is rooted upon the losing trick count coupled with a variance based upon the relative vulnerabilities of the teams at play. It allows the partnership a standardization basis upon which partner, who happens to have a strong hand opposite the pre-empt, to recover and better estimate the value of the combined partnership holdings in an evaluation as to whether or not to proceed toward a potential game or slam contract.

When contemplating a pre-emptive call, holding 7 pieces, or more, in the suit in which one is prepared to pre-empt, the would-be pre-emptive bidder computes a 2-step process in order to determine the level of his pre-empt. Once made, the pre-emptive call can be understood by the partner as to how strong or how weak the hand chosen for the pre-emptive bid was in all actuality; i.e., just how many tricks the pre-emptive hand can produce, and thus, how many tricks the preemptive bidder anticipates going down in his/her sacrifice attempt. The two steps are as follows:

1. The number of presumed winning tricks is computed by the bidder by subtracting his losing trick count from 13.
2. To this number of winning trick count, the would-be pre-emptive bidder adds either 2-3-or 4 additional tricks he/she is willing to go down based upon the relative vulnerabilities as follows:

Note: This technique is fairly aggressive in that it presumes that one trick will be found in partner’s hand for the sacrifice to give up fewer points than would be given up by simply allowing the opponents to secure their rightfully-presumed game contract.

- a. **Unfavorable Vulnerability** - Red (V) vs. White (NV) = An anticipated 2-Trick Set
- b. **Equal Vulnerability** - Red (V) vs. Red (V) ***or*** White (NV) vs. White (NV) = A 3-Trick Set
- c. **Favorable Vulnerability** - White (NV) vs. Red (V) = A 4-Trick Set

EXAMPLES :

AJXXXXX X KXX XX (Vul. vs. Vul.) = Pre-empt a 3-Bid (Fails by 3 Tricks)
 AJXXXXX XXX KX X (Not Vul. vs. Vul.) = Pre-empt a 4-Bid (Fails by 4 Tricks)
 AJXXXXX XX KXX X (Vul. vs. Not Vul.) = Pre-empt a 2-Bid (Fails by 2 Tricks)

Note: Once a partnership has agreed to utilize this method of determination for the pre-emptive level decision-making process, then partner can utilize this information to either (a) further the pre-emptive attempt, or (b) whether to seek a game-level contract, or (c), seek a slam contract, based upon partner’s losing trick count when combined with that of the pre-emptive bidder's presumed hand and its concomitant losing tricks calculated using “The Rule of 2-3-4.”