

Bridgetoday.com and Bridge Today University Present:
Strategies 150 with Matthew Granovetter

Class One: Walking the Dog

You pick up AKJTx x KJTx xxx

SAMPLE

First 6 pages of 11 pages

The hand on your right opens 1H. What do you bid?

Now suppose RHO opened 2H. What would you bid?

OK, now try a 3H opening on your right.

Let's say that RHO opens 4H. Your call?

Welcome to my Strategies course! As you can see, you'll probably make the "same" equal-level overcall regardless of how many hearts RHO has opened. On the surface, it feels stupid. Is your RHO directing your bids?

The answer to that is, to a great extent, yes. But what can we learn from this? The obvious fact is this: RHO has the hearts and we have the spades, so he can't buy the contract! We outbid him every time.

Now let's switch seats and see if there is, indeed, a way to *buy* the contract with the lower suit.

It's our lucky day and we're dealt:

x AKQJTx xx QJ

We know we want to play this hand in 4H (or more if partner is loaded). But we also know that the spade suit looms out there, and we may never be able to buy this hand. This is where STRATEGIES come in. We need a plan of action to BUY the contract.

There are two Strategies with this type of hand:

1. Bid at the four level, making it difficult for the opponents to get their spade act together.

2. Climb the bidding slowly, hoping the opponents get make their bids early and eventually give up.

#1 is well known as Preempting.

#2 has two names: The Theory of Exhaustion or (more popular) Walking the Dog.

There are many factors in determining which strategy will be more successful:

1. vulnerability
2. your opponents' ability
3. Are you the dealer, second, third or fourth seat?
4. whether you're opening or overcalling
5. your own nature
6. the layout of the cards

The last, layout of the cards, we can do nothing about.

Here are two layouts:

	xxxx
	xx
	Axxx
	Kxx
AKJTx	Qxx
x	xx
KJTx	Qxx
xxx	Axxxx
	x
	AKQJTxxx
	xx
	QJ

South	West	North	East
1H	1S	pass	2S
3H	3S	pass	pass
4H	pass	pass	pass

It's not a sure thing that walking the dog will help you buy it for 4H, but here is one scenario where you have a good chance. They have a down one save, but by the time the auction reaches the four level, they have exhausted themselves in the bidding.

If you opened 4H, surely West will bid 4S and now there's no telling what will happen. One thing is certain: You won't buy it for 4H.

On the other hand, you can't dismiss the strategy of preemption. One of my long-standing partners was the late Sam Stayman, who told me that whenever you have a long suit, 7 or 8 cards, your first strategy should be to preempt. His weak two's were 6-card suits, three-bids were 7 and four-bids were 8. His three-bids were powerful preempts, opening bids with seven-card suits. More on this later. Here's why Sam liked to preempt:

xxx
xx
Axxx
Kxxx

AKJT	Qxxxx
x	xx
QTxx	KJx
xxxx	Axx

x
AKQJTxxx
xx
QJ

Sam would open 4H and buy the contract, while a 1H opening might induce a 1S overcall of a double from West, and now East-West can get their act together.

Let's look at the other factors.

1. The vulnerability

This factor works like this. Look at *their* vulnerability. If their side is not vul, it's preferable to walk the dog, because your preempt is less likely to keep them out.

If their side is vul, the preempt works best, because they are less likely to enter at a high level when vulnerable.

2. Your opponents' ability

This is an important factor. If you think they're not so strong, preempt. Weaker players are afraid to enter at high levels.

3. Are you the dealer, second, third or fourth seat? Second, third and fourth seat gives the preempter an advantage in buying the contract with a preempt, since at least one opponent has already passed.

4. Whether you're opening or overcalling The opening preempt

works better than the overcaller's preempt, since no information has been passed between the opponents yet. The overcaller can almost never steal the hand with a jump. So when overcalling, try to walk the dog.

5. Your own nature

You can't fight your own inclinations. Some players prefer the preempt, others like the psychological battle of walking the dog. Stick to your own nature. If you have no great preference, pick and choose based on the ideas above.

We used to discuss the preempt vs. the theory of exhaustion in Sam Stayman's office, when he had a small investment firm. Ronnie Rubin, one of my favorite partners, worked there for a while and he especially enjoyed the theory of exhaustion. He liked the psychological point of letting the opponents get their bids off their chest early on. I would sometimes visit the office and Sam's brother-in-law business partner, Al Rand, who was also a student of the game, would add his two cents to the discussion. Al would say: "I'm no expert like the three of you, so I don't know when to preempt and when to walk the dog. My strategy is to simply tell my partner what I have and let him decide. I use the Rule of 1, 2, 3, and 4."

Al's strategy was scientific and clever. If his partner was better than him, he would use the Rule for all his 2, 3, and 4 bids and put his partner, who was more qualified, into the driver's seat. The Rule is simple: There are four vulnerabilities, so you preempt to say how many tricks you need from partner to make your contract.

Vul vs. not you need 1 trick from partner to make your contract.

Vul vs. vul you need 2 tricks.

NV vs. NV you need 3 tricks.

NV vs. vul you need 4 tricks.

Al once opened a weak two-bid with me in the Cavendish Calcutta Pairs holding eight spades and two aces: QTxxxxxx Ax x Ax

We were vul vs. not

He counted his hand as 7 tricks. I had one trick and assorted garbage and we made 110 while the entire field was down at 3S and 4S.

My hand was: x QTxx QJxx Kxxx and we won a couple hundred

imps across the field.

I must say, that facing an Al Rand preempt, I almost never had a problem, something I can't say about my other partners. So we should definitely add this to our "how to buy the contract with a long suit" strategy list, which is now up to 3:

1. Preempt
2. Walk the dog
3. Use the rule of 1-2-3-4

All three are valid and the third one doesn't require deep analysis.

Let's try a quiz. In each case you are vul vs. not. Decide your bid and strategy. Good luck!

1. You are in second chair. 1S on your right.

—
KQ754
AKT87642
—

Yes, you hold five hearts and eight diamonds. Your bid?

1b. If you were using the rule of 1, 2, 3, 4, what would you bid?

2. You are in second chair again with:

AKQJTxxxx
x
x
xx

Your bid?

2b. Playing the Rule of 1-2-3-4, what is your bid?

3. This time you are in third chair with:

x
AKQxxx
x
JT9xx

It goes pass, pass, to you. What is your bid?

3b. And according to the Rule?

Solutions

1. You are in second chair. 1S on your right.

—
KQ754
AKT87642
—

Yes, you hold five hearts and eight diamonds. Your bid?

1b. If you were using the rule of 1, 2, 3, 4, what would you bid?

The following "goulash" hand came up in a Grand National match some years ago. The North hand was held by world champion Pam Witte.