25) Partner overcall of 1 in a major on opponents opening bid

When we talk about bidding systems, all too often the subject is actually limited to opening bids and related bidding sequences after such openings. In fact only once out of two our side will open the bidding while in the remaining 50% of the hands we shall be in the defending position. It is therefore equally important to have all the necessary tools in order to be able to respond to our partner overcall in an accurate way, showing a 3 cards fit or a 4 cards fit and promising, at the same time, the narrowest range of HCP. It is intuitive that on our partner 1♠ overcall we cannot respond 2♠ with a 3-5 cards support and a HCP range going from 0 to 11+ or else our poor partner will have no idea whether to pass or to bid again.
When our partner overcalls 1♠, he is generally showing a 5+ cards suit with a couple of honours and values going from 8 to 12-13 HCP according to shape, vulnerability and points quality. We are talking about a situation having a high frequency and we should therefore be prepared to handle it in a proper way.

Let us have a look at viable bidding sequence:

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W    N    E    S
1♣   1♠   X    XX = 0-2♠ fit with 9+ HCP.
               2♣ = (cue bid at 2 level) 3♠ fit and 9+ HCP
               2♦ = 5+♦ , 0-2 ♠ fit with 7-8 HCP.
               2♥ = 5+♥ , 0-2 ♠ fit with 7-8 HCP.
               2♠ = 3♠ fit with 5-8 HCP.
              2NT= 4♠ fit with 11+ HCP
               3♣ = (cue bid at 3 level) 4♠ fit with 7-9 HCP
               3♠ = 4♠ fit with 0-6 HCP
               4♠ = 5♠ fit with 0-7 HCP
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Over South responses, north, depending on his shape and strength, has now at his disposal all necessary information in order to be able to bid at the right level. The concept guiding the above bids is basically the Law of Total Tricks according to which, when we are in a competitive bidding, it is advantageous to go reach the 2 level with an 8 cards fit, the 3 level with a 9 cards fit and finally the 4 level with a 10 cards fit.
We have used the Milton points as the only criteria to define the hand strength but this is only a simplification: shape as well as points quality should also always be taken into account to obtain a proper evaluation. A 4333 hand with 8 HCP made of 3 Queens and 2 Jacks is hardly worth as much as a 5521 hand with 6 HCP made by 2 Kings.

Let us now have a look at a second typical bidding sequence, where opener partner makes a bid at 2 levels:

W	N	E	S
1♣	1♥	2♦	X = 0-3♥ fit with 9+ HCP.

2♥ = 3♥ fit with 5-8 HCP.

2♠ = 5+♠, 0-2♥ fit with 7-8 HCP.

2NT = 4♥ fit with 11+ HCP

3♣ = (cue bid at 3 level) 4♥ fit 7-9 HCP.

3♥ = 4♥ fit with 0-6 HCP

4♥ = 5♥ fit with 0-7 HCP

Unlike the first example, here, due to East bid at 2 level, we lose the cue bid at 2 level and therefore South double includes all hands with 9+ HCP with or without a 3♥ fit.

Let us see now a last example, equally frequent, where the opener partner bids a pass:

W	N	E	S
1♦	1♥	p	1♠ = 5+♠, 0-2♥ fit with 7-8 HCP

2♣ = 5+♣, 0-2♥ fit with 7-8 HCP

2♦ = (cue bid at 2 level) 0-3♥ fit with 9+ HCP.

2♥ = 3♥ fit with 5-8 HCP.

2♠ = 6+♠, 0-2♥ fit with 7-8 HCP

2NT = 4♥ fit with 11+ HCP

3♦ = (cue bid at 3 level) 4♥ fit 7-9 HCP

3♥ = 4♥ fit with 0-6 HCP

4♥ = 5♥ fit with 0-7 HCP

The difference with the 2 previous examples is that we cannot use the double to show a generic 9+ HCP hand. Such meaning is now included in the cue bid at 2 level that now promises either 9+ HCP with 3 cards fit or 9+ HCP with 0-2 cards fit.