

WHEN THE AUCTION BECOMES COMPETITIVE

Take a look at this hand diagram:

		N North			
14	D	♠ 5	♥ KQ10642	♦ 97	♣ QJ43
				W	N
				E	S
				3♠	P
				1♠	2♦
				P	P
				E	East
				♠ AJ984	
				♥ A93	
				♦ 62	
				♣ A95	
				S	South
				♠ 1062	
				♥ J75	
				♦ AKQJ3	
				♣ K10	
				3♠ E	NS: 0 EW: 0

After East opens 1♠, his partner is thinking in terms of raising to 2♠. He has only 5 HCP but he can include dummy points for the short heart suit. This brings his total up to 8 total points.

But when South overcalls 2♦ the auction becomes competitive. The overcall, in spite of denying East/West a smooth auction, it gives them the opportunity to add additional bids to their options. Now, West can jump to 3♠. Without the overcall, 3♠ would be a limit raise showing 4 spades and 10⁺-12 points. After an overcall, West's jump is now considered preemptive, showing exactly 4 spades and a weak hand. West is safe in raising with a known 9-card spade fit. He is following the Law of Total Tricks, which says that in a competitive auction, you are safe in raising to the level of total spades between the partnership. That is, even if 3♠ goes set, the penalty will not be as great as the score North/South will get playing in their suit.

West's preemptive raise to 3♠ has had the desired effect on North's bid. She would like to bid her hearts. She might even have bid 3♥ if West only raised to 2♠. But she couldn't justify a raise to 4♥. She only has 8 HCP and her partner's overcall could have been made with as few as 11 points. In addition, she didn't know if her partner has any hearts – let alone the two that would be required for a heart fit.

East passed. He recognized that the 3♠ was preemptive and he has only a very minimum opening.

Left to play in 3♠, East makes his plan after South leads the ♦A. He has no spades losers, 2 heart losers, 2 diamonds losers and 2 club losers; 6 in total. He

can eliminate the two heart losers by ruffing them in the dummy. He must be careful, however, that he has two spades left in the dummy when the time arrives to ruff those losing hearts.

He should ruff the 3rd diamond and immediately play the ♥A and another heart, ruffing low in the dummy. Then he should perform a *partial trump elimination*, drawing only two rounds of trump with the ♠K and then the ♠A. Now he is back in his hand and can lead the second heart loser, trumping it with the ♠Q. There is one trump left outstanding, so he leads a club to the ♣A in his hand and pulls the last trump with the ♠J. Now he can concede the two club losers and claim 9 tricks to fulfill his contract.

Notice that North can actually make 4♥. He loses only three outstanding aces. The preemptive 3♠ bid had the desired effect of preventing the opponents finding their best contract.

Had they actually bid 4♥, East should have bid 4♠. He will be set 1 trick but the penalty would be much less than the game score that North/South would have received, no matter what the vulnerability.

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link:

<http://tinyurl.com/mrzg5zs>, or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick. Alternatively, by clicking on "Play" you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own.