

- **GAstem two suited overcalls**

Overcalling opponents opening bids is as important as having a nice set of opening bids in our bidding system.

As a whole , our side shall be opening 50% of the times while in the remaining 50% we will be in a position to overcall opponents openings.

In order to be effective our overcalls should be :

- a) As frequent as possible
- b) Reasonably defensible
- c) Combining constructive as well as destructive connotation .

In bridge literature there are various 2 suited overcalls available : Ghestem , Michaels cue bids , CRASH and more. The common draw back of such treatments is the fact that more often than not , partner choosing response is at 3 level thus the requirement for a 5-5 two suited hand.

The bad news are that two suited hands 5-5 or more represent less than 6% of all possible hands and are therefore not very frequent to say the least.

Such treatments jeopardise our original ambition to overcall as frequently as possible.

Can we do better than that ? May be , try GAstem ...

I called it GAstem combining my initials with the second part of the name of Pierre Ghestem who has been one of the first analysts to use 2 suited overcalls.

Let us see how it works .

Over opponents opening of 1 in a suit you bid :

- 2♣ = 2 Lower Ranking Suits ( **LRS** ) except opener suit, minimum 4-4
- 2♦ = 2 Higher Ranking Suits ( **HRS** ) except opening suit, minimum 4-4
- 1NT = 2 Extreme Suits ( **ES** ) except opening suit, minimum 4-4

As you can appreciate , partner's choosing response will always be at 2 level . As far as frequency goes , probability of having a 4-4 or more two suited hand is about 60 % , that is 10 times more than a 5-5. In fact a 4-4 or more two suited hand is , by far, the most frequent hand we can have when we play bridge. These numbers obviously satisfy our ambition to overcall " as frequently as possible " .

Let us now check on the defensibility of such bids, our second objective .

When I hold a 2 suited hand minimum 4-4 , I have 70% probability of having an 8 cards fit with partner in one of my two suits. Since the choosing response will always be at 2 level , that means that 70% of the times , that is 3 hands out of four, I'll be at 2 level with an 8 or more cards fit and that is what I call a reasonably defensible bid.

Detailed bids are :

- | Opps. bid | Overcall.  |
|-----------|--|
| 1♣        | 2♣ = min. 4-4 in LRS that is ♦ - ♥<br>2♦ = min. 4-4 in HRS that is ♥ - ♠<br>1NT = min. 4-4 in ES that is ♦ - ♠ |
| 1♦        | 2♣ = min. 4-4 in LRS that is ♣ - ♥<br>2♦ = min. 4-4 in HRS that is ♥ - ♠<br>1NT = min. 4-4 in ES that is ♣ - ♠ |

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- 1♥            2♣ = min. 4-4 in LRS that is ♣ - ♦  
                  2♦ = min. 4-4 in HRS that is ♦ - ♠  
                  1NT = min. 4-4 in ES that is ♣- ♠
- 1♠            2♣ = min. 4-4 in LRS that is ♣ - ♦  
                  2♦ = min. 4-4 in HRS that is ♦ - ♥  
                  1NT = min. 4-4 in ES that is ♣- ♥

As Mr. de Lapalisse would say , overcalling at 2 level is certainly more of a nuisance to opponents than overcalling at 1 level. But this is not all . When I bid a 2 suiter , it might happen that one of my 2 suits is in fact the best opponents fit . Responder would certainly be reluctant to bid a suit where he knows I hold at least 4 cards but may be more. In case responder would decide to take the bull by the horns and bid such suit , how would opener perceive such bid : a natural call , a strength showing cue bid , a stopper asking cue bid or what else ? If opponents are not well equipped to handle 2 suited overcalls misunderstandings could happen in the opposite camp.

Responses from overcaller partner are usually limited to the choice of the suit. Such choice will be done at 2 level with a 4 cards fit or at 3 level with a 5 cards fit and reasonably good values, just to raise the bar. All such responses have normally to be passed.

Point range necessary for GAstem is normally 7-11. In case overcaller partner is a passed hand it can be done with up to 14-15 HCP. In the latter case , after a choosing response, overcaller can invite partner to game by bidding a suit outside his 2 suiter, where he has a S/V.

It seldom happens , but overcaller partner might have a strong hand and in this case he bids 2NT as a forcing relay over which overcaller uses a string of step responses , the Bic sequence ( Bic stands for *Bicolore* that is = 2 suiter in Italian ) :

- 1<sup>st</sup> step        = No S/V , 70% 4-4
- 2<sup>nd</sup> step        = longer LRS with Low S/V ( 5+ -4 )
- 3<sup>rd</sup> step        = longer LRS with High S/V( 5+ -4 )
- 4<sup>th</sup> step        = longer HRS with Low S/V ( 4 – 5+ )
- 5<sup>th</sup> step        = longer HRS with High S/V( 4 – 5+ )
- 6<sup>th</sup> step        = minimum 5-5 with Low S/V ( 5+ - 5+ )
- 7<sup>th</sup> step        = minimum 5-5 with High S/V( 5+ - 5+ )

Once the overcaller shape is known , overcaller partner can conclude the bidding or ask for controls with slam ambitions. Over a control asking relay , partner shall respond by step :

- 1<sup>st</sup> step = 0-2 controls
- 2<sup>nd</sup> step = 3 K
- 3<sup>rd</sup> step = 1 A + 1 K
- 4<sup>th</sup> step = 4 controls
- 5<sup>th</sup> step = 5 controls and so on .

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Obviously you do not overcall with a 4-4 hand and 7 HCP with unfavourable vulnerability unless you have suicidal instinct , but you can profitably overcall ( Green Vs Red ) with only 5 HCP and 5-5 or longer 2 suiter.

### **GAstem 2 suited overcalls with responses at 3 level in 2<sup>nd</sup> seat .**

As we have seen , partner choosing responses are engineered to be always at 2 level and that allows us to overcall with a minimum 4-4 two suiter.

There are nevertheless cases where a 3 level choosing response is not to be avoided but on the contrary is highly welcome.

Let us suppose to have , with favourable vulnerability , a 6-5 two suiter with only 6 or 7 HCP : in such case we would love partner to bid at 3 level in order to take away as much bidding space as possible from opponents.

In order to force partner to bid at 3 level , instead of bidding 2♣ , 2♦ or 1NT we shall overcall 3♣ , 3♦ or 2NT with the same meaning but with the difference that partner should be forced to make a choice at 3 level.

### **GAstem 2 suited overcalls in 4<sup>th</sup> seat .**

Usually GAstem overcalls are made in 2<sup>nd</sup> seat but , often enough, we are confronted with following bidding sequences :

W	N	E	S
1♣	p	1♦	?

Whenever South would have at least 4 cards in ♥ and ♠ , he could pass this information on to his partner by bidding 1NT . In this case choosing response could be made at 2 level with a strong probability ( over 70 % ) of locating an at least 4-4 fit in any one of the 2 suits. In other words , any time opponents bid 2 suits , both at 1 level, we can overcall 1NT in order to show possession of the 2 unbid suits. Detailed bids would be :

W	N	E	S
1♣	p	1♦	1NT = minimum 4-4 in ♥ -♠ .
1♣	p	1♥	1NT = minimum 4-4 in ♦ -♠
1♣	p	1♠	1NT = minimum 4-4 in ♦ -♥
1♦	p	1♥	1NT = minimum 4-4 in ♣-♠
1♦	p	1♠	1NT = minimum 4-4 in ♣ -♥
1♥	p	1♠	1NT = minimum 4-4 in ♣ -♦

One more bidding sequence that occurs rather frequently is the following one :

W	N	E	S
1♣	p	1NT	?

In such a bidding sequence it is very important to be able to overcall because South is showing no 4 cards major and , furthermore is showing a limited hand.

Also in this case we can use GAstem overcalls to make reference on the opening suit and bid 2♣ = 2 LRS except opening suit , 2♦ = 2 HRS except opening suit and finally X = 2 extreme suits except opening suit. Detailed overcalls shall be :

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W	N	E	S
1♣	p	1NT	2♣ = 2 LRS except ♣ that is ♠-♥ . 2♦ = 2 HRS except ♣ that is ♥ - ♠ . X = 2 extreme suits except ♣ that is ♠-♥ .

W	N	E	S
1♦	p	1NT	2♣ = 2 LRS except ♦ that is ♣-♥ . 2♦ = 2 HRS except ♦ that is ♥ - ♠ . X = 2 extreme suits except ♦ that is ♣-♠ .

W	N	E	S
1♥	p	1NT	2♣ = 2 LRS except ♥ that is ♣-♦ . 2♦ = 2 HRS except ♥ that is ♦ - ♠ . X = 2 extreme suits except ♥ that is ♣-♠ .

W	N	E	S
1♠	p	1NT	2♣ = 2 LRS except ♠ that is ♣-♦ . 2♦ = 2 HRS except ♠ that is ♦ - ♥ . X = 2 extreme suits except ♠ that is ♣-♥ .

### 4<sup>th</sup> seat GAstem overcalls with responses at 3 level

As we have seen with 2<sup>nd</sup> seat GAstem overcalls, there are cases where a choosing response at 3 level is not only not to be avoided but, on the contrary, is desirable. We are obviously talking about violent 2 suiters with few HCP and favourable vulnerability.

In such instances we would welcome a partner choosing response at 3 level.

Bidding sequences are in this cases :

W	N	E	S
1x	p	1y	2NT = minimum 6-5 in the 2 unbid suits and few HCP.

W	N	E	S
1x	p	1NT	3♣ = Minimum 6-5 in 2 LRS except x and few HCP 3♦ = Minimum 6-5 in 2 HRS except x and few HCP 2NT = Minimum 6-5 in 2 extreme suits except x and few HCP

### Examples of GAstem overcalls :

W	N	E	S	
-	p	1♣	2♣	You are South with following hand ( all non vulnerable):
				♠ Q
				♥ A 10 8 5
				♦ K J 10 7 5
				♣ 6 5 2

Without a 2 suited overcall gadget, you would normally bid 1♦ and if West bids anything like 1♠ or 1NT, North holding 4♥ would not dare to bid it at 2 level and you would miss the 4-4 ♥ fit. If instead you bid GAstem 2♣ = minimum 4-4 in 2 LRS that is ♠-♥, your partner

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would certainly be pleased to show his 4 carder by bidding 2♥ . Your side would then happily be at 2 level with an 8 cards fit .

<b>W</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>S</b>	You are South with following hand ( all non vulnerable):
-	p	1♦	1NT	♠ Q 10 7 5
				♥ 10
				♦ 9 6 2
				♣ A K J 7 5

A natural overcall could be 2♣ with the danger of missing a 4-4 fit in♠ .By bidding 1NT = 2 extreme suits except ♦ that is ♣-♠ minimum 4-4 you are giving your partner the choice between 2 suits and he can pick the one is suiting him most and his choice will be only at 2 level. Obviously with a 5 cards fit , partner would make his choice at 3 level sure of having a 9 cards fit.

<b>W</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>S</b>	You are South with following hand ( all non vulnerable):
-	-	1♥	2♦	♠ A Q 10 8 6
p	2NT	p	4♣	♥ 7 3
p	4♦	p	4NT	♦ K J 10 7 5
p	6♠	p	p	♣ 8

It does not happen very often but when it does , you better be prepared. South 2♦ shows a 2 suiter with the HRS except ♥ that is ♦ - ♠ minimum 4-4 . North 2NT bid is a relay showing GF and asking for South shape with 7 step responses ( BIC sequence ) . South bid the 6th step = minimum 5-5 with LR S/V that is singleton or void in♣ . Now South shape is accurately described and North bids the first available step as controls asking relay with step responses. South bids the third step = 1 A + 1 K . In order for North to ask for controls , he must have at least 5-6 controls on his own . Satisfied with the answer North concludes the bidding at 6♠ . It is worth noticing that opponents know nothing at all about North hand and that will certainly complicate their defence play.

<b>W</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>S</b>	You are South with following hand ( all non vulnerable):
1♦	p	1♥	1NT	♠ Q 10 7 5
				♥ 10
				♦ 9 6 2
				♣ A K J 7 5

South 1NT overcall shows a minimum 4-4 in ♣-♠ and North will be able to choose between the 2 suits .

<b>W</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>S</b>	You are South with following hand ( all non vulnerable):
-	p	1♦	3♣	♠ 7 5
				♥ K J 10 9 6 4
				♦ -
				♣ Q J 10 7 5

With only one bid South is able to convey the following message to partner : I am weak but am at least 6-5 in ♣-♥ .

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W	N	E	S
1♦	p	1NT	2NT

You are South with following hand ( all non vulnerable):

♠ K J 10 9 6 4

♥ 8

♦ 5

♣ Q 10 9 7 5

Once more , South by forcing partner choosing response to the 3 level is sending an unmistakable message : I have a black 2 suiter at least 6-5 and very few HCP.