

# **GAstem: Two Suited Overcalls**

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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:

- As frequent as possible,
- Reasonably defensible,
- Combining constructive as well as destructive connotation.

In bridge literature there are various two-suited overcalls available: Ghestem, Michaels cue bids, CRASH and more. The common drawback of such treatments is the fact, more often than not, that the responses by the partner will be at the three level, thus the requirement for a 5-5 two-suited hand.

The bad news is that two-suited hands with 5-5 distribution 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? Maybe, introducing **GAstem** ...

I call it GAstem, combining the first initials of my first two names with the second part of the name of Pierre Ghestem, who has been one of the first analysts to use two-suited overcalls. Let us see how it works.

Over opponent's opening of 1 in a suit you bid:

- 2♣: Shows 2 lower-ranking suits, (**LRS**), except opener's suit, minimum 4-4 distribution.
- 2♦: Shows 2 higher-ranking suits, (**HRS**), except opener's suit, minimum 4-4 distribution.
- 1NT: Shows 2 extreme suits (**ES**) except opener's suit, minimum 4-4 distribution.

As you can appreciate, partner's response will always be on the two level. As far as frequency is concerned, the probability of holding a two-suited hand with a 4-4 distribution is about 60%, which is 10 times more than a 5-5 distribution. In fact a 4-4 distribution 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 two-suited hand of minimum 4-4 distribution, I have a 70% probability of locating a support from partner of at least 4 cards in one of my two suits. Since the response will always be at the two level, this means that 70% of the time, which is about 3 hands out of four, I will be at the two level with an 8-card or more fit, and that is what I call a reasonably defensible bid.

Detailed bids are:

Opponent    Overcall

- 1♣            2♣: Shows a minimum of 4-4 in LRS, or ♦ - ♥.
- 2♦: Shows a minimum of 4-4 in HRS, or ♥ - ♠.
- 1NT: Shows a minimum of 4-4 in ES, or and ♦ - ♠.

Opponent    Overcall

- 1♦            2♣: Shows a minimum of 4-4 in LRS, or ♣ - ♥.
- 2♦: Shows a minimum of 4-4 in HRS, or ♥ - ♠.
- 1NT: Shows a minimum of 4-4 in ES, or ♣ - ♠.

Opponent    Overcall

- 1♥            2♣: Shows a minimum of 4-4 in LRS, or ♣ - ♦.
- 2♦: Shows a minimum of 4-4 in HRS, or ♥ - ♠.
- 1NT: Shows a minimum of 4-4 in ES, or ♣ - ♠.

Opponent    Overcall

- 1♠            2♣: Shows a minimum of 4-4 in LRS, or ♣ - ♦.
- 2♦: Shows a minimum of 4-4 in HRS, or ♦ - ♥.
- 1NT: Shows a minimum of 4-4 in ES, or ♣ - ♥.

As Mr. de Lapalisse would say, overcalling at the 2 level is certainly more of a nuisance to opponents than overcalling at the one level. But this is not all. When I bid a two-suiter, it might happen that one of my two 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, and maybe more. In case the responder would decide to take the bull by the horns and bid such a suit, how would the opener perceive such bid: a natural call, a strength showing cue bid, a stopper asking cue bid, or what else? If the opponents are not well-equipped to handle two-suited overcalls, then misunderstandings could happen in the opposite camp.

Responses from overcaller's partner are usually limited to the choice of the suit. Such choice will be done at the two level with a 4-card fit, or at the three level with a 5-card fit and reasonably good values, just to raise the bar. All such responses should normally be passed.

The point range necessary for GAstem is normally 7-11 points. In case overcaller's partner is a passed hand, then it can be done with up to 14-15 high card points. In the latter case, following a response, the overcaller can invite partner to game by bidding a suit outside his two-suiter, where he has a S/V.

It seldom happens, but overcaller's partner might have a strong hand, and in this case he bids 2NT as a forcing relay over which the overcaller uses a string of step responses, the *Bic sequence*.

(Note: *Bic* stands for *Bicolore*, which translates as a two-suiter in Italian):

1<sup>st</sup> Step Shows no S/V, 70% 4-4 distribution.

2<sup>nd</sup> Step: Shows longer LRS with Low S/V (5+ - 4)

3<sup>rd</sup> Step: Shows longer LRS with High S/V (5+ - 4)

4<sup>th</sup> Step: Shows longer HRS with Low S/V (4 - 5+)

5<sup>th</sup> Step: Shows longer HRS with High S/V (4 - 5+)

6<sup>th</sup> Step: Shows minimum 5-5 with Low S/V (5+ - 5+)

7<sup>th</sup> Step: Shows minimum 5-5 with High S/V (5+ - 5+)

Once the overcaller's shape is known, the overcaller's partner can conclude the bidding or ask for controls with slam ambitions.

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

Note: This article is part of the recently published book *Fiori Colore (The Two Suited Club)* by author Mr. Gian Antonio Castiglioni.

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