

Claim with Colchamiro



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Skull and Crossbones

The skull and crossbones is the universal signal of danger. When it is posted, all know to beware, that danger lurks.

Along with the skull and crossbones, we recognize the xxx symbol as a warning. Then why don't we recognize that same warning sign at the bridge table? Let's look at three of them.

xxx in their suit

A long time ago, my good friend Ronnie Blau alerted me to the danger of bidding with three low cards in the opponent's suit, especially when about to overcall. If you have three low cards in their suit, you should always tread lightly, because you could be in trouble. Let's see why.

Suppose your right-hand opponent opens 1♠ and you have the following hand:

♠863 ♥AQ763 ♦QJ5 ♣K9.

Don't overcall 2♥! If you do, they are going to lead a spade and even if your partner has an honor in spades, or even two honors, too often you are going to have two or even three losers in spades.

What can partner have to save you? Let's look at some possibilities:

♠K 5 2 — three natural losers or two losers and a ruff

♠Q 5 2 — three losers

♠A 5 2 — two losers.

♠K J 5 — probably two losers and a ruff if the opener has something like ♠A Q 9 7 4.

The only thing that can save you, is when partner is short in spades, which is possible, but not so likely. In my experience, I have found the following to be true:

Of the hands that you overcall that don't work out well, an amazing number of them have three low cards in the opponent's bid suit.

So, when you have three low in the suit bid on your right and you are thinking of overcalling, if there is any doubt, don't. "One" may be the loneliest number you'll ever do, but "three" is exactly the wrong number of small cards to have in the opponent's suit. If you have four, you have much more hope that partner will be short, and if you have one or two, well, you're the one who's short.

If there is any doubt, don't.

xxx in your trump suit

When you support partner, be careful about cooperating when you have three low trumps. Partner won't smile when you put down the 7-4-2 of trumps. If partner has A-K-Q of trumps to cover you, she'll have that much less in other suits.

xxx in partner's help suit

In the same way, when partner tries for game or slam by bidding a side suit after agreeing upon trumps, x-x-x in partner's help-suit or x-x-x in partner's control-bid suit should be warning signs. Slow down the auction; bid conservatively.

Skull and Crossbones Quiz

Your right hand opponent opens 1♥. Do you overcall?

- (1) ♠A5 ♥643 ♦AQ742 ♣Q94
- (2) ♠AKJ73 ♥743 ♦74 ♣A42
- (3) ♠Q74 ♥743 ♦AJ643 ♣A4
- (4) ♠A8 ♥743 ♦AK963 ♣K3
- (5) ♠KJ743 ♥876 ♦A54 ♣97

Answers

(1) No, no, a thousand times no. If you're on my team at IMPs and you overcalled 2♦ with this hand, start looking for a new teammate. At matchpoints, you only have to deal with your partner.

(2) 1♠. Ya gotta do what ya gotta do, but I wouldn't be surprised if it went sour.

(3) See answer one. If you overcalled 2♦, see a psychiatrist — one who specializes in self-destructive tendencies.

(4) 2♦. I guess this is okay at matchpoints, but vulnerable at IMPs, I don't know. There is much to lose by bidding and not much to lose by passing.

(5) No. What was the name of that psychiatrist? If the opening bid had been 1♣, then you might venture in. □