

# Defending Against Various No-Trump Ranges

- In the olden days, most players played a natural defense to 1NT
  - X was penalty showing 16+ HCP
  - 2♣, 2♦, 2♥, 2♠ = natural, non forcing
  - 3♣, 3♦, 3♥, 3♠ = natural, preemptive
- As time has gone on, most experts have come to the following conclusions:
  - 1. The penalty double doesn't come up enough when defending against a strong NT for it to be useful
  - 2. Although on a rare day we might have a game when the opponents open 1NT, it is far too rare to worry about it
- Therefore, defenses to a strong NT that use double for something other than penalty have arisen
  - New goal is to show both one and two suited hands, and to use double to do this rather than use double for penalty
- The most common defense used in modern bridge for this is DONT (Disturb Opponents No Trump)

## DONT STRUCTURE

x = any one suited hand (advancer bids 2♣, and opener will pass or correct)

2♣ = clubs and a higher suit (advancer bids 2♦ if clubs is her or her worst suit)

2♦ = diamonds and a major (advancer bids 2♥ if both majors are better than diamonds)

2♥ = majors (pass or correct, depending on length)

2♠ = natural (some play x followed by 2♠ as a strong overcall than a direct 2♠)

I really like the variation called **MECKWELL DONT**. This variation allows you to show all one suiters and two suiters at the two level. I like avoiding the 3 level whenever possible! It also allows overcalls of single suited majors, which is more preemptive than going through the X.

**X** = single suited minor, or the majors (advancer bids 2♣, which intervenor passes with ♣, bids 2♦ with diamonds, or bids 2♥ with both majors)

2♣ = clubs and a higher suit

2♦ = diamonds & a major

2♥, 2♠ = natural

It might be a good idea to experiment with DONT or MECKWELL against strong no-trumps to see if you get better results with one of these defenses.

Advantages over Cappalletti:

1. Natural overcalls of spades (in Meckwell's case, both spades and hearts)
2. Fewer minor suit contracts at the three level
3. Play club one suiters at the two level

Cappalletti advantages:

1. Keep the penalty double
2. Have a bid that shows the majors directly (DONT does, Meckwell does not)

Most of today's experts play Cappalletti against weak and mini no-trumps. **If you play two defenses to NT, it is very important to know which range is strong and which is weak!**

I recommend the agreement that if there is a "15" in the range, it is strong:

1NT 12-15: = strong

1NT 12-14: = weak

A lot of folks playing 13-15 would probably admit they are hoping for the occasional fit of confusion from opponents on which defense they are playing!

## **The Three Main Reasons Playing Against A Weak or Mini No Trump is Much Harder Than a Strong NT.**

1. A lack of experience playing against these players, or understanding how it works. I learned the most about defending a weak or mini NT by playing it myself!
2. You can't give up the penalty double as it will come up more often, and you can't give up on game because (especially at teams), you can't let a ten count steal your game. So, you have fewer ways to show hands, and you need to jump to invite game frequently.
3. Your opponents will have a detailed runout system to escape when you make a penalty double and you have them. It is important to know two things with any partner:
  1. Do we play systems on over the double as if x was a 1NT opening, because x is in that strong NT range?
    - A. (1NT 12-14) - x - p - 2♣
      - a. Is this Stayman (Systems on) or natural and non-forcing (systems off)
      - b. Or (1NT) - x - p - 2♥
        - i. Is this natural and nonforcing (systems off), or a transfer to spades (systems on)?

## 2. If my opponents start a runout (for instance, 1NT-x-xx-??), is the delayed bid weaker or stronger?

I strongly suggest that an immediate bid is very weak (0-5 HCP, a long suit, no interest in penalty), and a pass is ambiguous. Either weak and flat, or perhaps interested in penalty or a contract as high as game.

### Cappalletti Structure

X = penalty. This shows a good 15 to 19 HCP. I recommend showing this range regardless of what your opponents play for a range.

- Some players lower the range for the double against lower ranges, but I don't think this works for a couple reasons.
- Don't alert any penalty doubles over 1NT. This is the standard way to play it.
- There is no such thing as a "takeout" double of 1NT. You can't have all 4 suits! If you come across an opponent who says that, they are probably playing penalty & have a strong no-trump, and are less experienced.

2♣ = any one suited hand (advancer bids 2♦, both bids alertable)

2♦ = majors

2 ♥ = hearts + a minor

2 ♠ = spades + a minor

2NT = minors

Some tips on playing better using Cappalletti:

1. After (1NT)-2♣!-p-, bids other than 2♦ should be natural and nonforcing. If you have 7 spades and 1 diamond, you can usually do better in spades rather than bid 2♦ when your partner is probably going to pass.
2. You're allowed to jump in a major with a good hand for both majors to invite game.

♠ KJ76

♥ 92

♦ AQ632

♣ 72

The opponents open 1NT (10-13); partner bids 2♦ showing the majors, and RHO passes. **Jump to 3♠**. 2♠ is too pessimistic. You'd bid 2♠ with:

♠ T2

♥ 6

♦ KT52

♣ J96432

3. You can pass 2♦ with a disaster hand for the majors and at least 6 diamonds. This may not always work!

4. You can pass 2♣ with at least 6 good clubs or 7 reasonable clubs and a void elsewhere (partner is 90% to bid that suit). Again, this may not always work!

5. Because weak and mini NT are like preempts, you might consider using 3 level bids to show **intermediate hands with good six card suits (13-16 HCP) rather than preemptive hands.**

♠ AQT9742

♥ KJ8

♦ AJ

♣ 8

The problem with Cappalletti is that if you bid 2♣, partner bids 2♦ and you correct to 2♠, you might miss a game with such a good hand. You can jump to 3♠ over 2♦ to show a good hand, or play a direct 3♠ as better than 2♠ if you play some other defense to a weak or mini NT (such as Landy).

6. Even against weak and mini NT, strongly consider using a DONT variation as a passed hand so double doesn't lay idle. Once you pass, you can't have 15-19 balanced!

7. Every once in a while, you have to go after them and double a part score. If they are going through a runout sequence, it is because they don't have enough high card values to sit for 1NT doubled or redoubled. Try to collect a penalty,

especially when they are red. Best to have 4 trumps, or three trumps with a likely trick.

8. When it is feasible, bid 2♠ in the direct seat. We don't like that bid as it will take away all our two suited bids.
9. Be patient! We don't always get good boards playing the weak and mini NT. We often miss 4-4 major fits for example.