

Simple Lebensohl

By Neil H. Timm

When playing in club games, I have noticed that most club players do not play Lebensohl, Transfer Lebensohl, Rubinsohl, or Rumpelsohl; they are too complicated. What I find is that many play the very limited “Stolen Bid” convention.

The purpose of the stolen bid double is to allow Stayman and Jacoby transfer sequences to proceed as if no overcall had been made. Thus, in the sequence

Partner	Opponents	You
1NT	2♣	Dbl

playing “stolen bids”, a double is Stayman. In this following sequence,

Partner	Opponents	You
1NT	2♦	2♥

is a transfer to spades or if the bidding sequence is:

Partner	Opponents	You
1NT	2♥	Dbl

Then double also requests a transfer to spades.

There are two very serious problems with “stolen bids” after 1NT openings.

(1) They do not allow use of a penalty double which is a powerful deterrent to opponents contemplating an overcall after a strong 1NT opening.

(2) It is not always possible to make a stolen bid, especially when the overcall is artificial, as in for example with the Landy and Cappelletti defenses to no trump openers. In Cappelletti, 2♦ shows the majors, so you can hardly want your partner to transfer into hearts with a stack of hearts behind him/her. The same is the case with Landy where now 2♣ shows majors. Now Stayman doesn’t make a lot of sense.

Playing any more sophisticated system like Lebensohl or Transfer Lebensohl, a double of an artificial two-suited hand is for penalty. However, if the bid of 2♣ shows an unknown single suited hand, it remains Stayman. Other bidding sequences are more complicated and most club players will not invest the time to learn either more fully.

If you are not going to learn a more complicated alternative, and would still like to penalize them for interfering, what can you do? Give up “Stolen Bids” and play Simple Lebensohl over a strong 15-17 notrump opening. The Simple Lebensohl system of bids takes bids used in both Lebensohl and Transfer Lebensohl with simplification.

Simple Lebensohl Bids

Over a Double

2♣ Stayman

2♦/2♥ Jacoby transfer to hearts and spades, respectively

2♠ Transfer to clubs with a correction to diamonds

2NT Natural 8-9 HCP

3NT To play

4♣ 5-5 in the majors

4♦/4♥ Texas Transfers

Another option is to play 4-way transfers, but most club members do not use this option so I do not recommend it in “Simple Lebensohl”.

Overcall 2♣ (Natural/Undefined/Two Suited)

Double Penalty

If 2♣ is natural, then 3♣ is Stayman

If 2♣ is undefined, then bid your 5-card suit at the two level (transfers are off)

If 2♣ is a know two suiter, then a cue-bid of the lower ranking know suit is Stayman and a cue bid of the higher ranking suit is game force

2NT is a relay bid to 3♣ (Lebensohl)

3NT to play with stoppers if suits are know

4♣ 5-5 in the majors

4♦/4♥ Texas Transfers

Natural Suit Overcalls (2♦/2♥/2♠)

All Doubles are for penalty

All cheapest two level bids are to play

Three level bids are transfers and a transfer into their suit is Stayman without a stopper.

2NT is a relay bid to 3♣ (Lebensohl) over a suit bid

3NT to play with a stopper

4♣ 5-5 in the majors

4♦/4♥ Texas Transfers

After 2NT Overcall (Strong/Minors)

Double is Stayman (if Strong) and 3♣ is Stayman (if Minors) and 3NT to play with stoppers in Minors

3♦ is transfer to hearts with a correction if needed to spades

3♠ is natural

3NT to play with stoppers

4♣ show 5-5 in the majors

4♦/4♥ Texas Transfers