

2NT in Competition #1

Marc Smith

Some years ago, a wit observed that clubs had disappeared in the 60s, diamonds went in the 70s, and that by the end of the millennium it would presumably be impossible to make a natural bid in either major. However, it seems that we have gotten ahead of ourselves. A look at convention cards at tournaments around the world will reveal numerous variations on the statement "2NT seldom natural in competition."

It is true that by using 2NT as an artificial bid in various competitive situations you can add considerable definition to your competitive bidding, and giving up a natural 2NT call is a small price to pay. BUT, irregular partnerships should beware.

To illustrate, playing with an irregular partner recently:

Game All: IMPs

Partner: S AQJx H Jxx D AQ10x C AK

LHO	Pard	RHO	Me
1H	X	2H	P
P	X	P	2NT
P	?		

The agreement we made at the beginning of the session was that 2NT would not be natural in competition. Over to you....

With his regular partners, this particular expert plays Lebensohl in this type of auction, so he bid 3C. This was not a success as I play this 2NT as "Scramble" (asking partner to pick a minor). I had a weak 2-2-5-4 and we duly went four down for -400 in the inelegant 4-2 fit with nine tricks relatively easy in 3D.

In the other room, the auction began the same way and as they had no "clever" agreements my hand bid 3D and duly scored +110 for an unexpected 11-imp gain.

During the course of this series of articles, we will look at various uses for 2NT in competitive auctions and the myriad of situations in which you might choose to use them.

For example, even most social bridge players use 2NT as a sound raise after partner's opening one-of-a-major has been doubled. It is a recent advance in bidding theory to also use 2NT in similar fashion after an overcall. That is one artificial use for 2NT.

Another is the Lebensohl convention. Many pairs play Lebensohl after partner's 1NT opening has been overcalled, and its use in responding to take-out doubles of Weak Twos is also fairly widespread. However, there are many more situations where it can be used to equal (or greater) effect than these two situations. We will also look at Lebensohl's cousin -- the Good/Bad 2NT.

The use of no-trumps as a "Scramble" type bid (showing two places to play) also has far more practical applications than just 2NT to show the minors over an opening major-suit bid. The use of transfers in competition is also gaining favor amongst top players. Later in this series we shall examine their use in advancing partner's overcall, responding to take-out doubles, and even solving some forcing/non-forcing problems after partner has opened and the opposition have intervened.

For the benefit of those unfamiliar with Lebensohl, we begin with a brief explanation of how the basic convention works in the situation for which it was originally designed. After partner's 1NT opening is overcalled, a bid of 2NT asks partner to bid 3C, over which responder can either pass, sign off in a new suit, invite, or cue-bid (a variation of Stayman). All immediate three-level suit bids are forcing. Later, we will look at the various ways of bidding balanced hands and the use of double, but first let's see the advantages of using Lebensohl when we have a suit to introduce.

Partner opens a 12-14 1NT, your RHO overcalls 2S, and you have one of the following hands....

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C
Jx	x	Ax
Kxx	AQxx	KQx
xx	Ax	KQx
KJ10xxx	QJxxxx	KJxxx

Clearly, with Hand A you do not want to defend 2S, but neither do you want to bid game. Ideally, you want to be able to play in 3C. If you are not playing Lebensohl (or some similar convention) then you have two choices -- passing and defending 2S, or bidding on and hoping you can make 3NT or somehow stop in 4C and make ten tricks. Neither option is very satisfactory.

Using Lebensohl, you would bid 2NT and pass partner's forced 3C response. If your suit was diamonds or hearts, then you would bid your suit over 3C and partner would be expected to produce dummy.

With Hand B, you want to be able to investigate three different game contracts -- 5C, 4H and 3NT. Having established that a 3C bid would be forcing, we have no further problems with this hand. If partner bids 3D then we will introduce our hearts, if partner bids a four-card heart suit we can raise, and if partner bids 3NT then we will pass, content that we have investigated the alternative contracts.

Similarly, we will start with a forcing 3C on Hand C also. Here, we want to look for slam, but at this point 5C, 6C or game in no-trumps could all be preferable to just inviting 6NT with a quantitative 4NT bid. This time we are planning to show our clubs and then continue with 4NT. Now, if partner shows up with something like

S xx **H** AJx **D** J10xxx **C** AQx

we will reach 5C when even the four-level is too high in no-trumps.

That handles the unbalanced hands, both those that wish to compete and those wishing to force to game. For the sake of completion, I should add that if responder introduces a higher-ranking suit after using the 2NT relay -- for example, 1NT-(2H)-2NT-(Pass)-3C-(Pass)-3S -- then that is invitational (since an immediate 2S would be competitive and a direct 3S would be forcing).

So, what do we do with relatively balanced hands that want to bid game but don't know which one? After 1NT-(2H)-? there are four possible sequences and, conveniently, four hand-types to show. The hands you might hold are....

- Four spades and no heart stop
- Less than four spades and no heart stop
- Four spades and a stop in hearts
- Less than four spades and a heart stop

The sequences available are....

	LHO	Pard	RHO	You
A		1NT	2H	3H
B		1NT	2H	3NT
C		1NT	2H	2NT
	P	3C	P	3H
D		1NT	2H	2NT
	P	3C	P	3NT

You can elect to play these sequences in any order you wish relating to any of the four hand types you might hold. The most popular treatment in Britain today is that if you go via 2NT you show a heart stop (remembered by the acronym "SLOW SHOWS"), and that if you cue-bid you have four cards in the other major whereas if you bid 3NT you do not. If you follow this principle, then the four hands listed above will match the four auctions in the same order.

There is another school of thought that says if you bid 3NT you always show a stop in the opponent's suit, and that if you go via 2NT then you show four cards in the other major. There is no reason to choose one method over the other in this particular auction (since partner has already bid no-trumps and will thus be declarer if you play that game), but there are other Lebensohl situations where making the right hand declarer is very relevant. For example, when using Lebensohl in responding to take-out doubles of Weak Two openings....

	LHO	Pard	RHO	You
			2H	P
P	X	P	P	?

Consider that if 3NT shows no heart stop and not four spades, then you have just managed to get partner's Kx of hearts in dummy with the lead coming up to your three small. Not ideal if 3NT by partner was the only making game.

It does not matter which way you play these sequences after a 1NT opening, but bear in mind that you will have fewer "system forget accidents" if you try to establish general rules that apply in all similar situations.

Returning to Lebensohl over an overcall of an opening 1NT, the only matter remaining is the use of "Double". In the original Lebensohl, double was used to show a natural 2NT bid. While this is ideal on some hands (when you have Jxx opposite Kxx in their suit and opener is minimum and thus you cannot make game but collect a +300 penalty) it is not my personal preference.

Playing double as penalties is the easiest option, and although you lose out on some of the competitive battles you will get your pound of flesh more often than not when the opponent's overcall is badly timed.

Playing double as take-out will enable you to compete the partscore most effectively when responder has shortness in the opponent's suit, and you will also catch them for a penalty on the odd occasion when opener's no-trump includes QJ9xx in their suit. The downside is that opener must reopen with a double when he is short in their suit, and thus you will occasionally get one of two very silly results. First, when the hand is a misfit and overcaller's partner has a good hand but shortage in his partner's suit you will find yourself playing 3C-X on a 4-3 fit and a combined 17-count. Ouch! The other stupid result that will occur occasionally is when overcaller's suit is distributed 5-4-0-4 around the table and neither of you has a take-out double. As a result, you defend 2S and collect an inadequate +250.

Next month, we will look at some of the other common situations where Lebensohl is much more effective than conventional methods (or should those be non-conventional methods?).....

2NT in Competition #2

Marc Smith

Last month we looked at the basic concept of Lebensohl, with particular reference to the situation in which most pairs commonly use it -- when the opponents intervene over our 1NT opening.

This month we move on to look at a less-utilized situation in which Lebensohl is equally useful, and in doing so we will identify two variations of Lebensohl. We will also introduce the "Scramble 2NT" and try to establish general ground rules for when 2NT should be "Lebensohl," and when it should be "Scramble."

Let us begin with two similar, but in fact very different auctions:

Auction 1	LHO	Pard	RHO	You
	1S	X	2S	?

Auction 2	LHO	Pard	RHO	You
	2S	X	1S	P
			P	?

In both instances, the opponents have bid to 2S and partner has made a take-out double of their suit. However, and here is the fundamental difference that you can also apply to numerous other situations -- in Auction 1 any action by you is a FREE BID, while in Auction 2 you must make a FORCED BID.

In either of these auctions you can have one of three hand types:

Hand A -- a bad hand that doesn't want to bid at all

Hand B -- an intermediate hand with some values that wants to compete/invite

Hand C -- a good hand that wants to reach the best game contract.

How you evaluate any particular hand will, of course, depend on the soundness of your partnership's two-level or three-level take-out doubles. For example, does your partnership double 2S in the second auction with any hand that would have doubled an opening 1S bid, or do you need extra values?

Let us start with Auction 2, where you must make a FORCED BID. In this instance, Lebensohl can be used to differentiate between Hand A and Hand B. You might have one of the following hands.....

Hand A	Hand B
Qxx	Qxx
xx	Kx
Kxxxx	KJ10xx
xxx	xxx

LHO	Pard	RHO	You
		1S	P
2S	X	P	?

Clearly, with the first hand you want to get to 3D without encouraging partner to do anything except pass unless he has an enormous hand. With the second hand, however, you want to play in 3D opposite a minimum take-out double but you would like partner to bid on if he has a little extra. This is even more relevant if your long suit is hearts, when it is vital to distinguish between a hand that is bidding 3H because it has been forced to do so, and one that is bidding it with some hope that partner might raise.

So, playing Lebensohl in this situation, with Hand A you would bid 2NT and over partner's expected 3C response you convert to diamonds, which partner will probably pass. With Hand B, you can bid an immediate 3D to show a preference for diamonds with invitational values.

Note that with game values, you must either jump to 3NT or 4D, or cue-bid the opponent's suit. Note though, that because you are playing Lebensohl, you now have two ways to cue-bid and two ways to bid 3NT -- either directly or after going through the Lebensohl 2NT relay. Exactly how you play each of these four sequences is a matter for partnership discussion, but as we mentioned last month you should try to be consistent in all Lebensohl situations.

Let us now go back to Auction 1 above. Clearly, here you have an important additional choice -- pass. This means that when you have the bad hand (Hand A) you can wait to see if partner doubles again (showing extra values). We will return to this particular auction later.

Let us first see how we can differentiate between the invitational/competitive hands (Hand B) and game-forcing hands (Hand C).

Hand B	Hand C
Qxx	Ax
Kx	KJxx
KJTxx	xx
xxx	AQxxx

Now, since we are making a FREE BID, all invitational hands such as Hand B above start with the 2NT relay. Of course, partner is no longer expected to blindly respond 3C -- he will only complete the relay if he has a hand that would have passed an invitational 3C bid. If the doubler bids 3D, that suggests he is interested in game opposite an invitational hand with clubs, but not one with diamonds; similarly, if he bids 3H. If he wants to play game opposite any invitational hand, then the doubler must either cue-bid, bid 3NT, or jump.

It is not these intermediate hands on which you reap the largest reward of the Lebensohl convention -- it is the game-going and potential slam hands. Consider Hand C as a bidding problem without Lebensohl. The most likely contracts are 4H or 5C, although 3NT or slam in any of the three denominations are not out of the question. If you have to jump to show your strength though, your chances of fully investigating the best contract while staying at a safe level are severely curtailed. How nice to be able to bid a quiet forcing 3C. Perhaps partner will bid 3D and you can now describe your hand nicely with 3H. Perhaps partner will bid 3H and you can bid 3S (initially asking for a spade stop) and then remove partner's hoped-for 3NT to 4H to show an advanced Cue-Bid in spades in support of hearts.

Once again, how you use immediate and delayed 3NT and 3S bids should be a matter for partnership discussion.

So, by using this particular auction as an example we can establish a GENERAL PRINCIPLE:

1. When the 2NT bidder makes a FORCED BID, going via the Lebensohl relay shows a bad hand and immediate three-level bids are invitational/competitive.
2. When the 2NT bidder makes a FREE BID, going via the Lebensohl relay shows an invitational/competitive hand and immediate three-level bids are game forcing.

Finally, before we leave this auction to go in search of more Lebensohl positions, let us go back to the following auction:

Auction 3	LHO	Pard	RHO	You
	1S	X	2S	P
	P	X	P	?

Now, you can have neither game-going values nor invitational values since you failed to bid immediately over 2S. You do not, therefore, need 2NT to differentiate between hands of various strengths.

In this auction, therefore, 2NT would be a "Scramble." What this means is that when you have support for only one of partner's suits, you bid that suit. Now, 2NT says to partner, "I have two possible places to play."

Hand D

Qxx
xx
Jxxxx
xxx

Hand E

Jxx
xx
Jxxx
Jxxx

On Hand D, you clearly have a preference for diamonds over either of the other two unbid suits, and you would thus bid 3D. On Hand E though, you really want partner to choose one of the minors, and thus you bid 2NT and he will do exactly that.

We can thus add a further GENERAL PRINCIPLE:

3. When level is not an issue (i.e. it is not a question of how HIGH we bid) and it is merely a question of choosing the CORRECT SUIT, a bid of 2NT shows two places to play.

As a final note on this particular auction, you might consider whether you should treat the situation (1M)-Pass-(2M)-? the same as when a Weak Two is opened on your right. For example, if you play bids of four-of-a-minor as showing a strong two-suiter with the bid minor and the other major (Leaping Michaels) over a Weak Two opening, why not do the same after this auction? Similarly, if 3M asks for a stop and 4M shows both minors over a Weak Two, then perhaps it should after (1M)-Pass-(2M)-? also....

Next month, we will continue our search for more Lebensohl-suitable situations and introduce Lebensohl's cousin, the Good/Bad 2NT.

2NT in Competition #3

Marc Smith

Last month we began looking at Lebensohl-suitable situations not currently utilised by most pairs, and we continue that quest here with an introduction to Lebensohl's close cousin -- the so-called "Good/Bad 2NT." This is a phrase that you will hear (and see on convention cards) regularly at tournaments these days. Some partnerships (my own included) use variations on this basic concept in a wide range of situations, so we begin our investigation of this mysterious weapon with a situation well suited to the underlying concept of Lebensohl. The best way to explain is to illustrate via some bidding problems...

Hand A

J82
K
AKJ9863
52

Hand B

J82
A
AKJ986
A52

LHO Pard RHO You

1S X 2S 1D
1S X 2S ?

Partner's double is negative, showing some values and four hearts (if, in your partnership, Double shows both clubs and hearts, then you will need to adjust your continuations to allow for that).

If this auction had begun with the opponents passing and partner responding 1H to your opening bid, you would have no problem with either of these hands. With Hand A you would have rebid a simple 2D and on Hand B you probably would have jumped to 3D to show your good suit and extra strength.

However, the opponents have denied you sufficient space to describe your hand so easily. Without any clever little gadgets to help, you are now left with four choices -- bidding 3D, jumping to 4D, passing, or doubling.

Clearly, you do not want to defend 2S with Hand A. If 4D would be pre-emptive in your methods you might try that, although that obviously has the major drawback that 3NT may easily be the right contract. So, are we then left with bidding 3D on Hand A?

Before deciding, let us consider what we would like to do with Hand B. This time, 4D is an option if you play it as strong, but it has the same flaw in that it bypasses 3NT. Again, pass is not a sensible option, so we are left with 3D or double (after which it will be next to impossible to describe your hand below 3NT and you will have to guess later in the auction).

Of course, it cannot be right to have to bid 3D on both of these hands and the solution as you will have guessed is to use 2NT to show one of these hand types.

Using this auction, we can establish two GENERAL PRINCIPLES that can be applied to all similar situations:

1. 2NT says to partner, "I have a hand with good distribution that wants to compete but I am not interested in game unless you have significant extra values."
2. 3D says, "This is what I would have bid if the opponents had passed and you had responded at the one level."

Okay, that seems relatively straightforward, but now consider the following hands.

Hand C	Hand D
2	2
Q4	A4
AK986	AKJ98
KQ952	AQ952

LHO	Pard	RHO	You
			1D
1S	X	2S	?

Once again, you have an all-too-familiar problem. This time you want to be able to bid a competitive but non-forcing 3C on Hand C, and a game forcing 3C with hand D.

If you look at the general principles established above though, you can see that they can be applied equally effectively here also. This time you will compete via 2NT with Hand C, and on Hand D you can bid a game-forcing 3C (i.e. the three level bid means exactly what it would have meant without the competition).

On the next pair of hands you want to support partner....

Hand E	Hand F
J82	J82
QJ82	AQJ8
AKJ93	AKJ93
9	9

LHO	Pard	RHO	You
			1D
1S	X	2S	?

Now you want to bid 3H with both hands. On Hand E you would like to be able to compete to the three-level in your known eight-card (or bigger) fit but you cannot do so if partner will bid game with little more than a minimum response. With Hand F you would have bid an invitational 3H in an uncontested auction, and thus the general principles again apply.

Have you spotted the major difference between this situation and one when you use Lebensohl after partner's 1NT opening is overcalled?

Correct -- this time partner is unlimited, so he cannot simply respond 3C every time you bid 2NT since you intend to pass that with Hand C above. The partner of the 2NT bidder must either make the lowest bid that he would have passed or he must jump, cue-bid or bid 3NT.

For example, if responder would have passed a competitive 3C rebid then he bids 3C over 2NT and opener will either pass (Hand C), correct to 3D (Hand A), or bid 3H (Hand E). If responder would have given preference to diamonds over a competitive 3C rebid, then he bids 3D over 2NT and opener can either pass (Hand A or Hand C) or correct to 3H (Hand E).

Obviously, with a good hand responder must do something more. Exactly what each bid should mean is a matter for partnership agreement. Perhaps he can cue-bid to show game values and ask for a stop, or bid 3NT with a stop (over which opener will correct to 4H with Hand E). Jumps to 4C or 4D should be forcing, showing game values and asking opener to describe his hand further.

Obviously, the opponents might also bid again, and if they compete to 3S you must agree on the meaning of double by either opener or responder. You should also know what an immediate cue-bid means and what it means if opener first bids 2NT and then cue-bids. Also, what are immediate jumps to four-of-a-minor (instead of bidding 2NT or three-of-a-minor) -- are they cue-bids agreeing responder's hearts?

As you can see, playing a "Good/Bad 2NT" does enable you to bid many more hands accurately, but it also requires significant extra work as a partnership. I also guarantee that you will have misunderstandings and "forgets" while you become familiar with

exactly when the method applies and what some of the more obscure bids mean. Having said that, serious partnerships will find enormous benefits in competitive auctions and the extra work will be well worthwhile.

To return briefly to the definition of Good/Bad I mentioned at the beginning of this article, I suspect that if the partner of the 2NT bidder has to bid 3 then that situation should be designated as Lebensohl, and when he doesn't it becomes "Good/Bad." Not that it matters what you call it so long as you give the opponents a full explanation.

Next month we will look at some more Good/Bad situations, including some when the good hands start with 2NT and the bad hands bid immediately at the three level.....

2NT in Competition #4

Marc Smith

Last month I introduced the so-called "Good/Bad 2NT", and in this article we will look at another situation in which it allows us to compete more effectively. Let us start with some bidding problems:

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C	Hand D
8	8	53	J3
A8642	AQ642	AJ986432	AKJ976
Q83	A3	3	Q3
KQ52	AQ52	AQ2	AQ2

LHO	Pard	RHO	You
			1H
1S	X	P	?

Partner's double is negative, showing some values and suggesting both minors.

Well, this is easy -- with Hand A we have a minimum opening bid and four-card support for one of partner's suits and thus 2C is clearly the correct bid. With Hand B, we have extras and a limit bid of 3C seems to describe it well. On Hand C, we may be tempted to rebid more than 2H, but game is unlikely opposite the likely 4-1-4-4 or 3-2-4-4 eight or nine count. Hand D, on the other hand, is well worth a strength-showing jump to 3H.

Let's make things a little tougher now...

LHO	Pard	RHO	You
			1H
1S	X	2S	?

Suddenly, we have all kinds of problems.

With Hand A, we have excellent fitting cards for partner's suits so we cannot afford to sell out to 2S, but we do not want partner bidding game without significant extra values. What we would like to do is bid a competitive 3C. With Hand B, however, we also want to bid 3C, but this time we want it to be invitational.

Those of you who have followed this series of articles will realize that we intend to use the Good/Bad (or Lebensohl-style) 2NT to achieve both objectives.

Last month we established some general principles that are worth repeating here. They were:

1. 2NT says to partner, "I have a hand with good distribution that wants to compete but I am not interested in game unless you have significant extra values."
2. A three-level bid says, "This is what I would have bid if my RHO had passed."

Thus, with Hand A we bid 2NT and pass partner's 3C response, and with Hand B we can bid a direct 3C.

If our minors were reversed on Hand A then we would still bid 2NT, intending to convert 3C to 3D (which partner would pass without extras).

Note that we are assuming partner is minimal for his bidding thus far. If responder has game-going values facing our likely minimum then he must bid something other than 3C over our 2NT.

With Hand C, we would again bid 2NT and this time we intend to convert 3C to 3H, while with Hand D we can bid 3H directly to show our good suit and extra strength.

What, you may wonder, are you now supposed to do with hands that would previously have bid a natural 2NT. The answer is to double, showing a relatively balanced hand with extra values (but not enough to force to game opposite a minimum negative double). Over this, responder will be able to describe his hand further -- Three-of-a-minor would show a weak hand with at least 5-4 in the minors, 2NT would be "Scramble" (suggesting a minimum with only 4-4 in the minors), 3NT would be to play (extra values and at least one stop in the enemy suit) and a cue-bid would show game values but no stop in the opponents' suit. On a good day responder will have a balanced hand with some trumps and he will pass and collect a nice penalty rather than bidding a questionable game.

At this point it is also worth looking at how we can use the other additional sequences created by the Good/Bad 2NT. Try these hands as bidding problems:

Hand E	Hand F	Hand G	Hand H
82	Q2	K2	AQ2
AQJ73	AQJ73	AQJ73	KQJ73
AQ3	A73	AQ3	KJ3
KQ5	KQ5	KQ5	Q5

LHO	Pard	RHO	You
			1H
1S	X	2S	?

Exactly how you and your regular partner decide to play the following sequences must be a matter for partnership discussion. Here is one way of playing them.

Hand E is the only one that has nothing in the opponents' suit, so it makes sense to dedicate to it the only one of the four available sequences that allows responder to declare no-trumps. With this we would bid a direct 3S, showing game values but nothing in the opponents' suit.

Hand F has only a partial stopper in the opponents' suit (but if responder has some help there it will usually play as well or better with opener as declarer). With this we bid 2NT and then cue-bid 3S over partner's presumed 3C response.

Hand G has a single stopper in the opponents' suit, and to show this we can bid 2NT and continue with 3NT on the next round.

With Hand H, we are fairly certain that 3NT is the right contract opposite a minimum negative double (assuming that partner would have raised to 2H if he had three-card support and minimal values). We therefore bid 3NT immediately with this hand.

Next month we will look at another situation in which Good/Bad 2NT allows you to compete more effectively.

2NT in Competition #5

Marc Smith

Over the last two months, we have looked at situations in which we can use the so-called "Good/Bad 2NT." In both of the auctions thus far discussed, I have recommended employing 2NT as a Lebensohl-type bid (to show a competitive hand) while using direct three-level action to show a stronger hand.

This month, we examine some situations where this order is best reversed. As usual, we kick off with some bidding problems:

Hand A	Hand B
83	8
A7	A7
K4	AQ4
KQJ9864	AKJ9863

LHO	Pard	RHO	You
			1C
P	P	1S	?

If your regular partner bid 3C in the auction shown, which of the above hands would you expect him to hold? There are sound reasons for agreeing to play a 3C bid as showing either of these hand types. Perhaps your partnership has decided that with all strong hands you have to double first, and thus you would play 3C as pre-emptive -- something like Hand A. That is not an

unreasonable treatment, but if you double with hand B and the auction continues 2H on your left, pass from partner, 3H on your right, you are very poorly placed. Not only have you allowed the opponents to find their fit cheaply, but you have endplayed yourself into making a decision since partner still has no idea what kind of strong hand you have.

Regular readers of this column will have realized that the answer is to use 2NT to show one of these hand types. Clearly, 2NT cannot be natural in this auction, and thus it is a wasted bid. Usual practice suggests that you should bid 2NT intending to pass 3C with Hand A, leaving the direct 3C bid to show the stronger hand, but there is a good reason for reversing these in this situation.

Consider LHO's problem when he holds a 10-14 point hand without primary spade support. If 2NT is Lebensohl-style (showing a weak 3C bid) then he can double to show values and then either double your subsequent 3C for penalties when he has trump length, or pass to invite his partner to double or to bid on. Basically, 2NT on this type of hand gives the opponents fielder's choice of doubling you when that is their most profitable action, or bidding on when that is better. However, if an immediate 3C bid shows the pre-emptive hand, then now the opponents must either play double as suggesting a penalty OR as some kind of take-out maneuver with both red suits and spade tolerance. Just as an aside, do you KNOW what your regular partner thinks double shows in this auction?

Although after a 1C opening, the opening bidder is most likely to want to take three-level action with a one-suited hand, this is not always the case after other openings. Consider....

Hand C	Hand D
AJ9752	AKJ108
KQJ83	AJ1074
83	A4
None	6

Assuming that you do not play strong twos in the majors (or that you do not consider Hand D good enough for one), either of the following auctions might occur:

LHO	Pard	RHO	You
			1S
P	P	2D	?

or

LHO	Pard	RHO	You
			1S
2D	P	P	?

I feel that a 2H bid should be reserved for a 6-4 hand with both majors (or perhaps a very good 5-4 with short clubs), and that double should show a hand with some support for both of the unbid suits. In a competitive auction, it is essential that you get across the fifth heart, and 2H does not do that.

So, without the use of a 2NT "toy" we are once again left with a choice between 3H and double. Clearly, you want to be able to pre-empt without partner expecting you to have defensive values, so you would like to be able to bid 3H on Hand C.

That leaves Hand D. If you have to double on this type of hand, you will achieve a number of silly results. For a start, partner may bid some number of clubs, thinking you have a fit with his six-card suit. Not expecting you to have such extreme distribution, partner might also pass your double (particularly in the second auction above), and the resulting penalty (if 2D even goes down) is likely to be poor recompense for your game or even slam. Consider also if your hearts and clubs are reversed -- do you really want to double with a 6-0-2-5 shape? If you do, which suit do you think partner will bid too many of?

In this situation, it is again more difficult for the opponents if we use the direct three-level bid as pre-emptive, since LHO now only gets one chance to express his values and shape. You will realize, though, that when we bid 2NT it just shows a strong distributional hand. Partner is expected to cater for all possibilities when responding. For example, if he bids 3C, that says that he would have passed a strong 3C bid showing both black suits. If he would have corrected a natural 3C to 3S but passed 3D, then that is the bid he makes over 2NT, and so on.

I actually held Hand D recently at the table. These were our combined hands:

AKJ108	Q3
AJ1074	Q86
A4	9753
6	9852

Our auction was:

1S	2D	P	P
2NT	P	3C	P
3H	P	4H	All Pass

Perhaps we would have reached this cold game via a more natural auction, but few pairs did and our methods enabled us to get there with little or no guesswork.

Note also that if the opponents do pre-empt after the 2NT bid, then at least partner knows two things about opener's hand -- strong and distributional -- and he will thus be much better placed to either bid or double. If the opponents bid game after we have made a pre-emptive three-level bid, responder will also be well placed to sacrifice when that is the right thing to do.

So, just when does 2NT show the weak version (like normal Lebensohl) and when does it show the strong hand as discussed here?

This is our partnership rule: If opener must jump to bid three of his original suit, then 2NT shows the strong hand and direct three-level bids are pre-emptive (as in the auctions above). If a rebid of three of opener's suit would not be a jump (as in the situations discussed in the last two issues) then 2NT shows the competitive hands and direct three-level actions are strong.

Next month we investigate how we can use a variation of the Lebensohl idea as a competitive tool in some common situations in which the opponents have bid two suits.

2NT in Competition #6

Marc Smith

This month we get away from standard Lebensohl and Good/Bad situations to look at another competitive auction in which some conventional methods are badly needed. As we shall see though, it is not only 2NT that can be used as Lebensohl. Indeed, we begin at a somewhat higher level.

As in most discussions of competitive auctions, exactly how you and your regular partner use a bid is far less important than that you have an agreement as to what it means. So, let us begin with a test of your current partnership agreements. Are you sure that you and your ox would know (and agree on) what the various bids would mean if the following fairly common situations came up at the table?

Auction 1a **LHO** **Pard** **RHO** **You**
 1H P 4S ?

or

Auction 1b **LHO** **Pard** **RHO** **You**
 1H X 4S ?

What are double and 4NT? Are they the same in the two auctions? How good will partner expect you to be if you bid five-of-a-minor? Is partner invited to raise? Would the vulnerability make a difference?

Auction 2a **LHO** **Pard** **RHO** **You**
 1S P 4H ?

or

Auction 2b **LHO** **Pard** **RHO** **You**
 1S X 4H ?

Assuming that 4H is natural and to play, do double and 4NT still have the same meanings as in the first example? What would 4S mean? Does the meaning of double change if the 4H bid is a splinter? What about if it is a cue-bid? What about a fit-bid?

These are all questions that serious partnerships will have addressed. Of course, in this type of auction it is almost impossible to expect to describe our hand accurately since the few available bids must cover a fairly wide range. However, an agreed partnership style will help you get more of these nasty high-level decisions right than you will if you have no idea what partner might have when he bids.

In Auction 1a, I suspect that most pairs play double as a strong hand that is happy for partner to bid five-of-a-minor if he expects to make it opposite a strong no-trump type of hand. With a poor hand, you would usually pass and expect (hope?) to beat 4S-X. In Auction 1b, double is presumably for penalties.

That leaves us with 4NT to handle all minor two-suiters. Perhaps your partnership style is that the bid shows a good hand vulnerable, but could be either bidding to make or as a sacrifice non-vulnerable. Of course, such a method means that partner can never bid a slam confidently, and will often do the wrong thing if the opponents push on to 5S. The same arguments also hold true

for five-of-a-minor bids. The extremely cramped auction means that we cannot do everything though, and perhaps this is as good as we can hope for.

Auction 3a	LHO	Pard	RHO	You
	1H	P	2S	?

or

Auction 3b	LHO	Pard	RHO	You
	1H	X	2S	?

So, how does the above discussion help us solve these similar but more common problems? Do the meanings of our bids depend on what the opponents' 2S means? The most likely meanings for 2S in are either natural and strong (most likely in the U.K.), or natural and weak (a common method in the U.S.), or perhaps fit-showing with both majors.

On the basis of consistency, perhaps double should still show a good hand (with both minors) and 2NT should be a marked minor two-suiter, but how strong the latter bid should be is something you have to decide with your regular partner. In coming to a decision, consider also what 3NT and 4NT should show. Consider also whether these meanings are consistent in both Auctions 3a and 1b.

It seems right that three-of-a-major should be used to show a stop in the major you bid, probably with a decent minor suit and suggesting that partner bids 3NT with the other major stopped. You also need to agree what kind of hand would bid three- and four-of-a-minor. Perhaps the three-level overcall should be strong and the jump pre-emptive if the opposition's 2S is strong, but the other way around if 2S is weak? Perhaps three of a minor should always show a good hand, leaving open the possibility of 3NT?

You might also consider how these meanings change if 2S is artificial - such as a variation of a Jacoby strong heart raise. Now, presumably, double will show spades, but what kind of strength can partner expect?

Having decided that we are fairly poorly placed after the opponents have pushed us even this high, let us look at the variations of Auction 2 and see what an enormous difference that one extra bid makes. Let us first assume that 4H is natural.

It seems that double should have the same meaning as it does after auctions 1a and 1b, but we have a number of ways in which we can use our extra bid. We could decide that the five-of-a-minor overcall retains its same wide range as before, but use 4NT as a weakish (sacrifice-oriented) minor two-suiter and 4S as a strong hand with both minors. Another option is to use 4S to show all minor two-suiters (as with 4NT after Auction 1), leaving 4NT as a kind of high-level Lebensohl, intending to either pass partner's 5C or convert to 5D. That would mean that a direct five-level bid can now be highly invitational.

Both methods are certainly an improvement on what we could do after Auction 1a or 1b, but we can do even better. After both Auction 2a and 2b, the third (and most fun) option is to play 4NT (both minors) and five-of-a-minor as strong and highly invitational, and to use 4S as a variation of Lebensohl!

Thus 4S will always show a competitive hand, either with both minors or with a single-suited hand. In response, partner bids 5C with preference for that suit facing both minors (which we would either pass, or convert to 5D with the diamond single-suiter), or 4NT with preference for diamonds (we would then bid 5C with just that suit and 5D with either just diamonds or with both minors).

Having planted a seed, I will leave you to discuss with your regular partner what the various bids should mean if 4H is either a splinter, a cue-bid, or a fit-jump.

Let us now see if we can use something similar at a lower level also?

Auction 4a	LHO	Pard	RHO	You
	1S	P	2H	?

or

Auction 4b	LHO	Pard	RHO	You
	1S	X	2H	?

This is a very common auction, and one that we can translate the above methods into almost verbatim. Thus, 2NT will be strong with both minors and 3C and 3D natural and strong. That allows us to start with 2S (Lebensohl) on competitive hands with either one or two minors.

Note that at this lower level, the opponents are almost certain to bid again, so it is even more important that you tell partner immediately whether you have a good hand or just one that wants to compete. Having made this Lebensohl-type 2S bid, if the opener raises to 3H and that is passed back to the overcaller, you can push on with four-of-a-minor or 3NT (both minors) with no

risk that partner will expect a better hand than you have and undo your good work by bidding a hopeless game when all you were doing was competing the partscore.

Space constraints mean that I have barely scratched the surface of a subject that could produce a whole book, but if you have made it this far, I suspect I have achieved the objective, which is to make you think about the possibilities. No irate letters from partners who don't want to think this hard please - I get enough of those from my own oxen!

Next month we will look at situations in which 2NT can be used as a sound raise of partner's suit, thus freeing jumps for pre-emptive duties.