
Defensive Bidding

Release 7.0

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PRELIMINARIES

This book is written for the advanced-intermediate to advanced bridge player. It is a supplement to my book, *Bidding Notes*.

Please note the rant in that book about not playing too many conventions. To which, we must now add:

Warning: Some of these conventions are mutually exclusive!

This volume was split from the *Advanced Bidding* book in order to keep the size of each more manageable. This volume contains the defensive conventions while the offensive conventions are in the other book.

These books do *not* get you to “expert” in bidding. Some of the conventions have many variations or followups not covered here. But this set will go a long way to making you the best non-expert bidder in your club.

- Descriptions of some miscellaneous *gadgets*.

Note: Some of these conventions are mutually exclusive!

Every technical book should have an index, and this one does.

In electronic manifestations of this book, there are many operable links in the text. This book is available as a PDF, as a book for electronic readers, and can be rendered into web pages.

Please see *Bidding Notes* for intermediate bidding, information on how to contribute, resources, acknowledgements, and a glossary.

Please see *Advanced Bidding* for a large number of offensive conventions.

Please see *Imprecise Precision* for my version of the Precision System.

1.1 Topics Covered

- Defenses to their opening 1N
- Escape strategies for when our 1N opener is doubled.
- Lebensohl and Rubensohl, two related conventions for dealing with interference over our 1N opener, and which also can be used in some other competitive situations.

These systems are much more difficult, and much more useful, than some of the more prosaic conventions. Learning them is independent from everything else.

NOTRUMP DEFENSES

This section explains some more defenses after your opponents open or overcall 1N. Some can also be used in balancing a passing-out 1N. (See Balancing in *Bidding Notes*.)

Two-suited hands are often more powerful than their HCP count alone would indicate. We've already learned the basic Unusual 2N and Michael's Cuebid. For interfering with their 1N opening, we have Cappelletti and D.O.N.T.

In all these methods, the two-suited bids promise at least 5-4 in the suits. Vulnerability should be considered. Any bid which may force to the three level requires extra points or shape, comparatively.

In case you want to get creative and invent your own, a note on ACBL regulations:

- X or 2♣ can show 0 specified suits. In that sense they are privileged. It is ok if 2♣ shows an unspecified suit or 2♣ shows clubs and a higher suit or X shows an unspecified suit.
- 2♦ can show "a one-suited hand with an unspecified major suit", or any specific suit with an unknown or known companion such as "both majors" or "diamonds and a higher suit."
- Other bids must show at least one definite suit. E.g., 2♥ can be hearts and a minor, or hearts and a four card minor, but not any major and a minor.

2.1 Landy

Landy is simple: 2♣ shows both majors, at least 5-4. According to the Bridge Guys website, Landy can claim to be the very first conventional method. Many variations have evolved with respect to the replies by advancer, but for a simple agreement, the advancer

just chooses his best major, or (rarely) bids a minor suit with very poor majors but a good long minor. *Woolsey* (page 3) below is an up-gunned Landy.

2.2 Meckwell

In this modification of D.O.N.T., the double works harder in order to make 2♥ and 2♠ natural. After opponents open 1N, either in direct seat, or after two passes by partnership agreement,

- X! A long minor or both majors

Response: 2♣! Forced; then the doubler passes, corrects to 2♦, or bids 2♥ to show both majors.

- 2♣! Clubs and a major suit
- 2♦! Diamonds and a major suit
- 2♥ Shows long hearts
- 2♠ Shows long spades
- 2N Shows both minors

You may enjoy combining Meckwell with the *Meckwell Escapes* (page 4) runout.

2.3 Modified Cappelletti

In this modification of Cappelletti, the 2♣ bid works harder in order to make 2♥ and 2♠ natural. After opponents open 1N, either in direct seat, or after two passes by partnership agreement,

- X Equal hand, penalty-oriented
- 2♣! A long minor or, a minor and a major.

Advancer bids 2♦!(relay), and intervenor then bids pass, 3♣, or his major. Advancer can then ask for the minor with 2N! (good hand) or 3♣ (pass or correct).

- 2♦! Both majors
- 2♥ Shows long hearts
- 2♠ Shows long spades
- 2N Shows both minors

2.4 Bloomen

Bloomen is related to Cappelletti. All 2-level suit bids are natural long suits. A double is a relay to 2♣, and then intervenor bids one of the Capp two-suited bids: 2♦ for both majors, or 2M for a major and a minor. As usual, 2N asks for the minor. Doubling and then bidding a suit at the three level is a strong six-carder, while bidding directly at the three level a normal preempt.

2.5 Woolsey

Woolsey, sometimes called Multi-Landy, became legal under the ABCL GCC in May, 2015. After a 1N opening or overcall:

- X Shows an equal hand, penalty-oriented
- 2♣! Shows both majors, as in Landy.
- 2♦! Shows a single-suited hand in an unspecified major suit. Advancer relays with 2♥!(forced), pass or correct.
- 2♥! Shows long hearts and an unspecified four-card minor. 2N asks for the minor.
- 2♠! Shows long spades and an unspecified four-card minor. 2N asks for the minor.
- 2N Shows both minors.

2.5.1 Defenses to Woolsey

How should you defend against the Woolsey 2♦?

Experts concede that Woolsey is difficult to defend against, which is why there was resistance to putting it into the GCC. However, at the club level most players will survive pretty well with stolen bids and common sense.

One problem here is that you don't have a Stayman bid unless you agree to use 3♣.

Responder can always pass first, of course, and see what their major is. Passing first and then bidding should be stronger than immediate action. A second double should be penalty oriented.

More sophisticated defenses are based on *Lebensohl* (page 12).

RUNOUTS

3.1 Introduction to Runouts

When partner opens 1N and your RHO doubles for penalty, and you have a weak hand, you want to help partner out of playing 1NX with power on his right. Almost any suit fit is going to be an improvement. This problem occurs more often with a Weak NT opening, but it can happen even with a strong one.

An agreement about how to get out of this dilemma is called a “runout”.

The standard runout is that double asks opener to bid his best minor. That lets you pass or correct to some 5-card suit that you have. The problem is that this is not cooperative and applies to only a fraction of the hands you might have.

This chapter shows you some better runouts. The goal is to find some 7+ card or better fit. Naturally, all of the schemes have a problem when responder’s hand is 4333. A responder who is 4333 can decide that the four-carder is a five-carder, or that one of the 3-card suits is his other four-carder.

3.1.1 Use The Runout Over Conventional Doubles?

If the opponent’s double does not show strength, but rather is something like D.O.N.T.’s double showing a single-suited hand, you have two choices:

- Ignore it – systems are “on”.
- Play your runout regardless of what kind of double it is.

The case for playing the runout is that opener’s RHO might be strong and pass. Also, if it is responder who has some points, and the runout has Pass as forcing, it keeps things going.

For intermediate players, there is a more practical reason, especially when playing the weak 1N: the opponents will frequently be confused about what the double means, so that the explanation you get may be wrong. I’ve heard:

- “I thought we were playing natural over weak notrump!” – It isn’t on their card, of course.
- “We switch to Cappelletti over a weak notrump.” – But the doubler forgot and is still playing D.O.N.T.
- “That was for takeout, partner!”

Or explanations when we inquire:

- “I have no idea.” – at least he’s honest.
- “I presume it is penalty.” – and half the time he’s right.

You can call the director after you discover misinformation, but you need to show you were damaged by the misinformation to get relief, and that is hard to think out at the table, and hard for the director.

My conclusion is that it is best to play the runout on after any double, as long as responder’s Pass is forcing.

3.2 Meckwell Escapes

Meckwell Escapes are similar to the Meckwell bids over interference with our 1N opener. A great combination is to play *Meckwell* (page 2) and Meckwell Escapes.

- Pass!(forcing, shows either clubs, diamonds, or both majors).

Opener bids 2♣!(forced).

Next, responder passes or bids 2♦ with 5 cards in the minor, or 2♥! shows 4-4 majors.

- 2♣ promises clubs and a higher suit, 4-4 at least.
- 2♦ promises diamonds and a higher suit, 4-4 at least.
- 2♥ and 2♠ are natural five-card suits.
- Redouble is natural, not forcing.

3.3 The Handy Runout

Handy Runout is named for Howard Schutzman and Andy Stark, who developed it with encouragement from Ally Whiteneck. It works properly only when the 1N opener does not have two doubletons. Over a strong 1N you can probably afford to fudge this requirement because the strength will help you if you land in a bad fit.

3.3.1 Direct Seat Doubles

After 1N (X), responder bids:

- Pass! – shows near-invitational or better values and a willingness to play 1N doubled.
- Redouble! – Shows a five card suit; opener bids 2♣!(relay), pass or correct.
- 2x!(pass or correct) – denies a five-card suit, shows lowest 4-card suit, beginning a relay until a 7 card fit is found.
- 3♣, 3♦, 3♥, 3♠: Preemptive, usually a seven card suit.
- 3NT to play.
- 4♦, 4♥: Texas Transfer.

Worst case: you have a bad, flat hand. Bid the 4 card suit and hope.

Examples, assuming responder is not 4333:

- After 1N (X) - Pass! - 2♣, suppose responder is 2434 or 4432. He will bid 2♥. If opener has a heart doubleton, he must have at least three in

all the other suits because he does not have two doubletons. Therefore he can bid 3♠, and if that is not responder's "other suit", responder can end the auction at 3♣.

- 1N - (X) - 2♦!, responder shows diamonds and a higher suit. If opener has only a doubleton in diamonds he will bid 2♥. Otherwise he passes. If hearts is not responder's second suit he bids his second suit, knowing opener must have three of them.

After the redouble, if RHO bids a suit, opener is off the hook if he wants to be.

If they bid after responder's pass, we will not let them play undoubled in any contract less than two spades. A pass is therefore forcing partner to double or bid on.

The first double by a partner who must bid due to a forcing pass, is for takeout. Example:

1N (X) P! 2♦
P! (P) X

shows diamond shortness and at least 3 card support for the other suits. The takeout double does not show extras. But:

1N (X) P! (2♣)
X (2♦) X

This second double is penalty.

If in a forcing auction, we bid a suit or 2N, it is not forcing. It is constructive and shows 10-12 HCP. If you bid a suit at the three level or cue bid the opponent's suit, it is forcing.

3.3.2 Fourth Seat Doubles

When RHO doubles after two passes, we know responder is not invitational since he passed, but he could have up to near-invitational values.

After 1N - (P) - P - (X), opener:

- Opener should bid a five card suit if they have one. Otherwise opener should pass and let responder bid if LHO is silent.

- Responder should bid a five card suit or redouble to start the relay, or pass if willing to sit for the double.
- If LHO bids, you are now back in your 1N overcall treatment, such as *Lebensohl* (page 12).

3.4 Guoba

Thanks to David Sterling for this explanation.

A redouble starts a relay to show a 5-card suit. An immediate suit bid shows non-touching four-card suits, the suit bid and one higher. Or, responder can pass and show touching suits on his next turn, or pass a redouble for penalty.

3.4.1 Direct Seat Doubles

After 1N - CX), responder bids:

- Pass!(not necessarily for penalty)

Opener must redouble or bid a five-card minor. If the redouble comes back to responder, he bids:

- Pass. If they bid all doubles are for penalty.
- 2♣! shows clubs and diamonds;
- 2♦! shows diamonds and hearts;
- 2♥! shows hearts and spades.

- 2♣ shows clubs and a major.

Opener passes with 3+ clubs, bids 2♦ with four diamonds, or 2♥ with four hearts. Responder passes with 3 in the suit bid by opener, or bids his other suit.

- 2♦ shows diamonds and spades. Over 2♦ opener passes with more diamonds than spades, otherwise bids 2♠. With equal length he can bid either one.
- Redouble forces 2♣, and responder can pass or correct to a 5-card suit.

3.4.2 Fourth Seat Doubles

After 1N - (P) - P - (X), opener:

- Redoubles to show a five-card minor. Responder relays to 2♣ or bids 2♦ to show 5 diamonds and not 3 clubs.
- Passes to show non-touching suits. Responder passes to play, bids 2♣ with 3+ clubs, or 2♦ otherwise. Opener bids 2♦ over 2♣ with diamonds and spades, otherwise passes. Responder can correct the 2♦ to spades.
- Bids 2♣, 2♦, or 2♥ with touching suits. Responder will choose.
- Opener passes with a flat hand. Responder passes or bids his best suit.

3.5 Escape From Moscow, or D.O.N.T.

Escape from Moscow wins the prize for best name. It is one of a family of D.O.N.T - like runouts.

Descriptions of this convention differ, but the one that seems most understandable to me is that Redouble is a relay to 2♣, pass or correct showing a five-card suit. Otherwise suit bids are D.O.N.T, with 2♣, 2♦, 2♥ showing the bid suit and a higher, 4-4 at least; and 2♠ shows five spades (or maybe you're 4=3=3=3?). Like D.O.N.T., you can decide that Redouble followed by 2♠ is stronger.

An original Pass is to play, hoping to make it. I would assume we wouldn't let them play undoubled below 2♠.

UNUSUAL VS. UNUSUAL

Unusual vs. Unusual is a convention for handling two-suited interference bids, such as Michaels or Unusual 2NT. This may include cases where one suit is unknown. It is also our “General Defense To Two-Suited Bids”, to be used over opponents two-suited bids for which we have not agreed on something else.

Be aware that when an opponent makes a two-suited overcall, if we do have a fit, the trump break may be poor. Length in your partner’s suit is important. Be conservative with only an eight-card fit. The same factors face your opponents, so your eagerness to defend should be correspondingly higher. Pass rather than do something marginal.

What we present here is called the “lower-lower” version of Unusual vs. Unusual. The other version fixes the lowest available cue bid as showing support.

4.1 Two Suits Are Known

Some of the bids that show two specific suits are Unusual 2N, and Michaels Cue Bid of a minor suit.

If they make an overcall that shows two specific suits, there are two possible cue bids available, and two other suits.

Call the two suits implied by their bid “their suits” and the other two “our suits”. Among their two suits, the one which would be cheapest to bid next is called the “lower” suit and the other one the “higher” suit. Usually but not always the “lower” is the lower-ranked suit.

We set up a correspondence between the implied cue bids and our two suits:

- A cue bid of the “lower” of their suits shows length in the lower of our two suits. Remem-

ber, lower means cheapest to bid here, not rank.

- A cue bid of the “higher” of their suits shows length in the higher of our two suits.

Responder’s bids are:

- A double shows you have a penalty double of at least one of their suits, and another bid. Typically this is 10+ HCP. Assuming advancer bids, partner should usually pass to give you the option of making a penalty double.
- Bidding notrump shows stoppers in BOTH their suits.
- A simple raise of partner shows trump support and 7-10 support points. This is the kind of hand where would have made a simple raise if there had been no interference.
- The implied cue bid corresponding to partner’s suit is a limit raise or better.
- A raise to game in partner’s suit shows long trumps, and good playing strength with less than limit raise values (usually a singleton somewhere).
- A jump cue-bid is a splinter, slam try in partner’s suit.
- A free bid of our other suit is competitive and non-forcing. Typically this hand might look like a weak-two opener in the other suit, 7-10 points.
- The cue bid corresponding to our other suit shows 5+ cards and at invitational values.

Pass if you cannot make one of these bids.

4.2 Second Suit Is Unknown

Some of the bids that show one specific suit and an unknown second suit are a Michaels Cue Bid of a major suit, and certain defenses to 1N openers such as 1N (2♥) showing hearts and a minor suit.

- A bid of their known suit is a limit raise or better in partner's suit. For example, after 1♥ - (2♥(Michaels)), 2♠ is a limit raise or better in hearts.
- A jump cue-bid is a splinter and a slam try. For example, after 1♥ - (2♥(Michaels)), 3♠! shows spade shortness and is a slam try in hearts.
- Bidding notrump would show stoppers in the bid suit and in possible unknown suits.
- All other bids are not forcing. For example, after a Michaels bid in hearts, 3♣ would be a preemptive hand in clubs.
- With values but no clear action, a double will let the opponents tell you where they have their best fit. With this information you can choose a rebid to describe your hand. Opener will usually pass but with a solely offensive hand such as a solid one-suiter or strong two-suiter, may bid to show this.

The meaning of the responder's rebids after an initial double and pass by opener over advancer's bid are:

- Double is for penalty
- Pass suggests a tolerance for defending.
- New suit is 5+ cards, game forcing.
- 3N is game strength with a stopper in the suit the opponents have chosen.
- Delayed cuebid of overcaller's originally known suit is Western cue, forcing to game and denying a stopper in the suit opponent's have chosen and asking partner to bid 3N if he holds one.

Pass if you cannot make one of these bids.

OTHER TWO-SUITED COMPETITIVE BIDS

5.1 Sandwich 1N

After (1x) - P - (1y), a double is for takeout and shows the other two suits; the suits are at least 5-4 and you have an opening hand.

The Sandwich 1N convention is a bid of 1N rather than double, showing the other two suits but less than an opening hand:

(1x) - P - (1y) - 1N!(other two suits, less than opener)

5.2 Extended Michaels

Extended Michaels changes the meaning of the Michaels cue bid over a minor, promising spades and another suit (which could be hearts, but no longer definitely is hearts). There are other such systems, e.g. Ghestem, and minor variants. We keep it simple here.

Note that 2♣ over the opponents 1♣ is not alerted (in general, cue bids are not alerted) but must be alerted if their 1♣ was announced as “could be short” and your cue bid is not natural. I recommend always playing the cue bid as Michaels.

As before, 2N asks for the other suit. However, it is also possible to bid the cheapest of the possible other suits as “pass or correct”. Therefore, 2N can be reserved to show constructive values, or to start game tries, using “pass or correct” with weak hands.

Here’s an example. (1♦) 2♦ shows spades and either hearts or clubs. So:

- (1♦) 2♦ - 2♥ I do not like spades. I have 3 hearts. If hearts isn’t your other suit, bid your minor.

- (1♦) 2♦ - 2N!(Asks for the other suit, constructive)

Asking for the other suit with 2N and then going back to spades is a game try:

- (1♣) 2♣ - 2N - 3♦ - 3♠ is a game try in spades.

“Super” pass and correct bids can be made if a fit is certain and the hand is weak, as preemptive:

- (1♣) 2♣ - 3♦!(support for diamonds and hearts, weak)

Using extended Michaels and U2NT together, we cover all the bases:

RHO	You	Bid
1♣	♦&♥	2N
1♣	♦&♠	2♣! Extended Michaels
1♣	♥&♠	2♣ Michaels
1♦	♣&♥	2N
1♦	♣&♠	2♦! Extended Michaels
1♦	♥&♠	2♦ Michaels
1♥	♣&♦	2N
1♥	♣&♠	2♥ Michaels
1♥	♦&♠	2♥ Michaels
1♠	♣&♦	2N
1♠	♣&♥	2♠ Michaels
1♠	♦&♥	2♠ Michaels

5.3 Top and Bottom Cue Bid

Top and Bottom is another replacement for Michael’s Cue Bid. The cue bid shows the highest and lowest unbid suits. For example, 1♥ - (2♥) shows spades and clubs. Knowing both suits right away can be helpful, but you can’t use it as often.

SPECIAL DOUBLES

These three special doubles have their own area on your convention card. Be sure to mark it appropriately. You have to decide at what level the double stops being conventional and turns to penalty. The usual agreement is conventional through 2♠.

6.1 Support Doubles and Redoubles

Some times opponents interfere after the responder has shown a new suit, and the opener does not know if this is a four-card or five-card suit. Support Doubles give us a way to show exactly 3 card support. If RHO makes a takeout double, we can use Redouble for the same purpose. For example:

- 1♦ (P) 1♥ (1♠) X! Shows 3 hearts exactly.
- 1♣ (P) 1♠ (2♦) X! Shows 3 spades exactly.
- 1♣ (P) 1♠ (X) XX! Shows 3 spades exactly.

With four or more in partner's suit, opener raises.

Note: Only the opener can make a support double. When you first start to play support doubles, you will see them behind every tree. Realizing that only the opener makes this bid helped me sort them out.

6.2 Responsive Doubles

When partner makes a takeout double of an opener and RHO raises his partner, a double shows scattered values with at least 6 points and interest in locating a fit.

- If the opponents are bidding a minor suit, a responsive double asks partner to pick a major suit. We know partner has at least 4-3 in the majors so with equally good majors ourselves we want partner to choose.
- If the opponents are bidding a major suit, a responsive double requests partner to choose a minor suit, because if we had the other major we would bid it as partner has promised it with his takeout double.

<p>Warning: If the opponents bid two <i>different</i> suits, a double is not a responsive double. The opponents have to have <i>raised</i>.</p>
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Examples

- (1♠) X (2♠) X! Has both minors, partner to choose.
- (1♦) X (2♦) X! Has both majors, partner to choose.

6.3 Maximal Doubles

If interventor overcalls our major, partner makes a simple raise, and the advancer raises his partner, the opener has a dilemma if their suit is one below our suit. For example, 1♠ - (2♥) - 2♠ - (3♥) -? or 1♥ - (2♦) - 2♥ - (3♦) - ?.

If opener now bids 3M, is he inviting or just competing? A “maximal double” means that we agree opener doubles to show the invitational hand, while just bidding the suit to compete.

Note that if we cue-bid here there is no room to stop in 3M. If their suit was not the one just under ours (or

“the maximal suit”) we’d have room to bid the suit below ours as a convention to invite. There is some controversy on this point. Partners should agree if the double is a maximal double, hence a limit raise or better in that case, or is penalty. I personally like to keep it uniform and have the double be the invite, not the mysterious other suit.

INTERESTING GADGETS

This chapter describes a variety of interesting *gadgets* you might see, or wish to adopt.

7.1 Mathe Defense To A Big Club

After a strong $1\clubsuit$ opener, Mathe is the simplest commonly-used defense. In the simplest version, double is the majors, 1N is the minors, and suits are natural. A slight improvement is:

- Double shows the majors
- $1\diamond$ is a transfer to hearts
- $1\heartsuit$ is a transfer to spades
- 1N shows the minors
- $2\clubsuit$ shows clubs
- $2\diamond$ shows diamonds

The added transfers force the big hand to lead.

Some also use this defense over a standard strong $2\clubsuit$ opening.

7.2 Lead-directing Raise of Partner's Preempt

When partner opens a weak two-level bid, you generally want to raise to the three level if you have three-card support and a few values, in order to be as obstructive as possible. This is called reinforcing the preempt.

However, it often happens that the auction goes something like:

$2\heartsuit - (3\diamond) - 3\heartsuit(\text{you}) - 3N$
--

Now your partner is on lead and unless he has a great suit he's leading into stoppers. Meantime you're sitting there with the Ace of spades. If only partner knew to lead spades so you could return a heart.

We change the agreement about what a new suit by you means; it shows a lead-directing raise. Partner is authorized to raise to $3\heartsuit$ for you if necessary. So in this case you bid $2\spadesuit$!(heart raise, lead-directing). You also might do this for example if you had three hearts and $\spadesuit KQ52$. 2N remains feature-asking but can also be used to keep the bidding open for your next bid when you really do have a good hand.

LEBENSOHL

The Lebensohl convention is applicable in a wide variety of competitive situations, but most begin by learning it as a way of dealing with interference over a 1N opener. It can also be used after partner doubles a 2-level preempt or opponents interfere over a 2♣ opener, or after an opener's reverse, and other competitive situations. We will begin with the defense to 1N overcalls, and cover the other situations later.

A transfer-based variant of Lebensohl, Transfer Lebensohl, is discussed in a separate chapter. This is sometimes called Rubensohl.

In this chapter we use the terms weak, competitive, invitational, and game forcing to describe hand strength. For a 12-14 point notrump, these are 0-7, 8-10, 11-12, and 13+ respectively. For a strong notrump, subtract three from these values. Shape may of course contribute to your classification – a five card suit is always a plus.

Lebensohl and *transfer Lebensohl* (page 17) can be used in a variety of situations. What these seemingly different situations have in common is that a bidder has to make a bid in a situation with reduced bidding room, and needs to have a way to differentiate different hands but is running out of room to do so at a reasonable level.

8.1 Lebensohl After We Open 1N

Since life will usually be easy for us after we open 1N, opponents are motivated to interfere. That uses up the room we need to decide our strain and level. Lebensohl gives up one natural reply in order to effectively double the remaining space.

8.1.1 Introduction

Suppose we open 1N and this is overcalled at the two-level. Natural bids have a marked weakness when responder has a suit lower than the overcalled suit. For example, suppose responder has a good club suit and enough values that he wishes to compete for a part-score. Consider this bidding sequence:

1N (2♥) 3♣

Responder has shown opener his club suit but not his strength. With just this one bid, we cannot distinguish whether responder has a competitive, invitational, or game-forcing hand. This is a matter upon which the partnership must agree. If it is game forcing, opener does not know yet if responder has a heart stopper.

On the other hand, life is easier if responder's suit is above the overcall, say spades here. Then 2♠ is available as a bid. Assuming we take that to be competitive, we still have an ambiguity in the 3♠ bid: is it invitational or game forcing? And what about stoppers?

Assume the bidding has begun 1N (2x), where x is diamonds, hearts, or spades.

Note: After 1N (2♣), Lebensohl has a potential complication, so we will assume a double is Stayman, and that otherwise systems are "on", so 2♦ is a transfer, etc. See below if 2♣ is artificial.

Responder now must distinguish both what kind of hand he has, and if interested in 3N, whether or not he has a stopper in the opponent's suit.

8.1.2 The 2N Relay

The signature bid in Lebensohl is 2N!(relay). This is an artificial bid over the overcall, and demands that opener bid 3♣!(forced). This 2N bid says nothing about responder's suit, and does not show or deny that he has a suit or a four-card major.

Note: Do not fall into the trap of calling this bid by itself "Lebensohl". Lebensohl is the entire system described in this chapter. This bid is its signature, but it isn't the only thing to know.

The presence or absence of the relay is used to show strength and clarify the stopper situation.

- If responder can bid his suit at the two-level, it is to play.
- If responder bids his suit after a relay, it is weaker than if he bids it immediately.
- If responder bids the opponent's suit after a relay, he has game-forcing values and a stopper.
- If responder bids the opponent's suit directly, he has game-forcing values but no stopper.
- If responder bids 3N after a relay, he has a stopper.
- If responder bids 3N immediately, he does not have a stopper.

When the responder's suit is above the overcall, there are three possible bids: the two-level bid is competitive; the slow three-level bid is invitational; and the fast three-level bid is game-forcing.

- 1N (2♦) 2♥ is to play
- 1N (2♦) 2N! - 3♣! - 3♥ is invitational
- 1N (2♦) 3♥ is game-forcing.

When the two-level bid is not possible, we have no invitational bid. Using the relay is to play, a direct three-level bid is game-forcing.

Lebensohl players call a bid after the relay "slow", and a direct 3-level bid "fast".

The responder wishing to be in notrump typically denies a stopper with an immediate 3N, and affirms one with the slow 2N – 3♣ – 3N relay ("slow shows"), but some reverse these two meanings ("slow denies").

- 1N (2♦) 2N! - 3♣ - 3N is to play, diamonds are stopped – slow shows.
- 1N (2♦) 3N wants to play 3N but does not have a diamond stopper. Opener will pass if he has one, or start suggesting suits to play in with 4♣.

8.1.3 Stayman

The slow and fast cue bids are used for game-forcing Stayman, which show or deny a stopper. Note that regular Stayman is invitational or better; in the Lebensohl context we just don't have the room to make an invitational Stayman. Again, slow shows.

- 1N (2♦) 3♦ is GF Stayman, but denies a diamond stopper.
- 1N (2♦) 2N! - 3♣! - 3♦ is GF Stayman and promises a diamond stopper.

After this the Stayman dance is modified in obvious ways. For example, in these auctions, opener lacking a four-card major will have to bid

- 3N if he has no four-card major and either has a diamond stopper or was promised one by responder, or
- 4♣ to show responder that we lack a major fit or a diamond stopper.

8.1.4 About Doubles

Lebensohl per se does not say what a double of the overcall means. Two choices are:

- A double is penalty-oriented, game-forcing values, or,
- A double initially shows competitive values and while takeout-oriented it promises 2 (or more cards) in their suit. This allows opener to

pass if appropriate. Responder may bid again with a stronger hand.

A reopening double by opener of an overcall in fourth seat is for takeout.

Generally, playing a weak 1N, we play the second alternative.

8.1.5 Lebensohl's Weaknesses

Lebensohl has two weaknesses in this situation.

First, it is not possible to invite in a suit below the overcall because only two bids, "slow" and "fast" are available.

Second, if the RHO of the opener bids, opener does not yet know responder's suit. For example:

1N (2♦) 2N!(relay) (3♦)

Now opener does not know what suit, if any, responder holds. If it is hearts or spades, responder has invitational strength. If it is clubs, responder is simply trying to compete; or, it is possible responder is game-forcing and intended his next bid to be a cue bid showing a major with a stopper in diamonds. The 2N bid has left opener with little useful information.

I believe it is not possible to solve both of these problems simultaneously. Rubensohl has variants that emphasize one or the other of these two facets, but none of them solve both problems completely.

8.1.6 Lebensohl Details

Here are the available bids after we open 1N and they overcall two of a suit. Some bids require more detailed explanation in the following sections. Let O be the their suit (either the suit they bid naturally or one they showed artificially.)

Here are the bids after 1N (2O) or 1N (P) P (2O) P (P)

- A double initially shows competitive values and while takeout-oriented it promises 2 or more in their suit. This allows opener to pass if appropriate. Responder may bid again with a stronger hand.

- (Alternative) A double is penalty-oriented.
- A double by opener of an overcall in fourth seat is for takeout.
- 2 level suit bids are to play. Example: 1N (2♥) 2♠ is to play. These bids show a five or more card suit.
- 2N!(relay) starts a "slow" sequence; opener must bid 3♣. A subsequent 3N is to play; a cuebid of 3O is game-forcing Stayman; 3 of a suit below O is to play; and 3 of a suit above O is game forcing.
- 3 of a suit other than O is game forcing.
- 3O is Stayman but denies a stopper in O.
- 3N is to play, and denies any unbid major or a stopper.
- 4♣ is Gerber.
- 4♦! and 4♥! are Texas Transfers to hearts and spades, showing six card suits and values for game only. With a strong hand and a six-card major game-force at the three level first.
- 4♠! (rare) invites opener to pick a minor game.
- 4N is invitational to 6N and of course promises a stopper.

8.1.7 Lebensohl Over Artificial Overcalls

If an overcall shows a definite suit plus an unspecified suit, bid as if the specified suit were overcalled unless and until the second suit becomes specified.

If an overcall shows two definite suits, proceed as normal except that both of the opponents suits are available as cue bids. In that case,

- A slow 3N promises stops in both suits.
- A fast 3N denies stops in both suits.
- A cue bid therefore shows a stop in that suit but at most a half-stop in the other.

When we speak of the overcalled suit or suits, we mean the ones the bid *meant*, not the artificial one ac-

tually bid. For example, 1N (2N) shows the minors, so a response of 3♦ would show a stop in diamonds, no stop in clubs, and game-going values.

8.1.8 Three-level Overcalls

Over three-level overcalls:

- A double is for takeout, showing support for the other three suits.
- Bids at the three level are natural, one-round forcing, and
- 3N, 4♥, 4♠, 5♣, and 5♦ are to play.

If the overcall is in a minor, a cue bid is Stayman, or may show slam interest lacking a four-card major.

- 1N (3♦) 4♦ – 4♥ – 4N (to play)
- 1N (3♦) 4♦ – 4N(no major) - Pass
- 1N (3♦) 4♦ – 4? – 5♣ (slam interest in clubs)

8.2 Answering Takeout Doubles Of Weak Two Bids

When an opponent opens a weak two bid, and we double it, that shows a decent opening hand with shortness in their suit. The double is for takeout. But we run into a familiar dilemma. Consider an auction that begins (2♥) X (P) ? where the advancer holds a very weak hand with six diamonds. Advancer definitely wants to bid three diamonds and have that be that.

But if he has a much stronger hand with diamonds that wants to go to game, then he wishes he could ask partner whether he has hearts stopped.

The solution is to realize that (2♥) X (P) ? is not that different from 1N (2♥) ?. We can just play Lebensohl. The opener can refuse a 2N – 3♣ relay to show a hand with slam interest.

8.3 When They Overcall Our Two Club Opener

The auction 2♣ (2♥) is similar to 1N (2♥). We have the same dilemma of wanting to compete but not wanting to confuse partner as to our hand strength. Lebensohl can be used in these situations. If opponents play 2♣ (X) as showing the majors we would treat that as a two-suited bid in hearts and spades.

8.4 Lebensohl Over Reverses

Imagine this headache: partner opens 1♣, you bid 1♠ with a minimal four-card holding, and partner reverses with 2♥. This is forcing for one round. What to do? If you had five spades you could just bid 2♠. But let's say you don't, but you do prefer clubs or have five diamonds you by-passed in order to show your four-card major.

If you just bid 3♣ as a preference, that's ok – until the next time when you have a better hand and can't bid 3♣ because the partnership has decided it is weak. Hmm. This sounds familiar – it is the same dichotomy as 1N (2♥) 3♣ – what does it mean? And it has the same solution – Lebensohl.

So, for example, a direct bid of 3♣ over 2♥ is game-forcing. A “slow” trip to 3♣ via 2N, shows you want to stop there.

8.5 Simplified Lebensohl

If you do not feel comfortable with full Lebensohl, use this simpler version of it. It covers most responder hand types.

The opposition has bid a suit 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠ over our 2♣!(11-15, six clubs) opener.

- Double is penalty-oriented with at least two of their suit.
- Two-level suit bids are to play
- Three-level suit bids are game forcing

- 2N! is a relay to 3♣!(forced), pass or correct. If responder corrects to a suit he could have bid at the two-level, it is invitational; otherwise, to play.
- 3N is to play with a stopper.
- A cue bid is game-forcing Stayman. Opener should show a major if he has one.

When you've been bitten enough times by the holes in the simplification, you can learn the rest of it.

You can get super-simplified by just remembering the 2-level is to play, and 2N is a relay to 3♣, pass or correct. Ordinary bridge logic should kick in from there.

8.6 Good - Bad 2N

This Lebensohl variant is explained most fully in Larry Cohen's "To Bid Or Not To Bid" and in Marty Bergen's "Better Bidding With Bergen". There is a good explanation at www.bridgeguys.com.

In a competitive auction, it is your turn to bid and RHO has just bid 2x, whether as a raise of his partner or a new suit, after your partner doubled or made an overcall. For example, let's suppose the auction went (1♥) - 1♠ - (2♥). Suppose you have a good diamond suit but no spade support. Then what does your 3♦ bid show? Most of the time of course you're just trying to compete but other times you have extras and partner may wish to go higher knowing that.

Enter the Good - Bad 2N, created by Larry Cohen in his book "To Bid Or Not To Bid". Whenever we are in a competitive suit auction and our RHO has made a 2-level bid, 2N! is a relay to 3♣, pass or correct. Bidding directly on the three level shows extras.

Take for example this auction:

(1♠) 2♦ (2♠) ?

Without an agreement, a 3♦ bid here is hard to read. With Good - Bad 2N, 3♦ might be a good four-card diamond suit with 9 points, while 2N!(relay) - 3♣!(forced) - 3♦ might be only six points and partner will know not to compete further.

This convention also applies when you opened:

1♥(you) (2♣) Pass (2♠)

If you have a two-suiter in hearts and diamonds, you want to distinguish 3♦ giving partner a choice vs. 3♦ showing something like an 18-point 5-5 hand.

You must draw inferences when partner does not use the relay when he could have.

With some experience, you can use the Good - Bad distinction in many other competitive auctions. According to "Better Bidding With Bergen", it is important that this convention be off in situations such as:

- where 2N is clearly Unusual 2N
- when either side has opened 1N
- when the opponents opened a strong 1♣!
- when the opponents have made a penalty double
- when we have already found a fit
- when we are already in a game-forcing auction.

RUBENSOHL AND TRANSFER LEBENSOHL

9.1 Transfer Defenses to Overcalls Over 1N

This chapter covers the situation where we have opened 1N, and opener's LHO has made an interfering bid: double, or an overcall; or, after two passes, opener's RHO has interfered and it has been passed back to opener's partner.

If the interference shows two suits specifically we would use our defense against two-suited bids such as the version of Unusual vs. Unusual explained in *Bidding Notes*, "General Defense Against Two-Suited Bids".

An overcall of 2♣ or 2♦ may also show two definite suits and we again defend it as a two-suited bit.

After a penalty double, we play a *runout* (page 4). For a double with a different meaning you have some choices, discussed later.

Over 2♣ that is natural, shows a long suit, or shows clubs and an unknown suit, it is easiest just to ignore it and play "systems on". Double is Stayman, and other transfers are on. Many players already play this "systems on, stolen doubles" method on all overcalls.

In the previous chapter, we learned Lebensohl as a better alternative. However, it has a particular weakness. If responder bids 2N!(relay), and then advancer intervenes, such as raising his partner, opener does not know responder's suit or strength yet, or even if he has a suit.

If, on the other hand, responder with a suit can show which one it is immediately, that is a big advantage. A transfer bid can do that, and the transfer opener can complete the transfer or not in some cases, which gives us more useful choices of meanings. The methods covered in this chapter, variously called Ruben-

sohl or Rubinsohl or Transfer Lebensohl, merge the ideas of Lebensohl with the idea of using transfers, gaining the best of both worlds. And, like Lebensohl, they can be applied in other competitive situations.

The main idea of this class of methods is that two-level suit bids are competitive only, while 2N! and the three-level suit bids are transfers. They define the bids up through 3N over overcalls of 2♦, 2♠, and 2♣, as long as the bid shows one definite suit and possibly another undefined suit. The definite suit is referred to as the "overcalled suit". For example, a 2♦! bid showing diamonds and a higher suit will be treated as a diamond overcall.

So, to sum up, we cover only overcalls of 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠, except those that specify no suits or two suits.

In the case of an artificial bid showing an unspecified suit or suits (such as a *Woolsey* (page 3) 2♦! which shows a long unspecified major), responder may make a bid from our normal system or responder may pass and await his next turn, at which point if the opponents specified a suit, that is not clubs, the transfer system will apply.

As with Lebensohl, you can play this system over a natural club overcall, and if you want to do so just apply methods similar to those over a diamond overcall, with appropriate modifications.

9.2 Transfer Lebensohl versus Rubensohl

Many different versions of this idea exist. Rubensohl and Transfer Lebensohl (TL) are the two main branches. Assume that we have opened 1N and they have made a suit overcall. If the overcall was itself a transfer or artificial, then of course it is the target of

bid that we consider the “overcalled” suit.

My method, playable by advanced intermediates, is given in the next chapter.

In all these variants:

- Two-level suit bids are to play. A two-level bid is only possible if responder’s suit is higher-ranked than the overcall. Therefore, the availability or not of such a bid changes what the other bids mean.
- 2N! is a relay to clubs or a transfer to clubs:
 - In TL, 2N! does not show an intermediate or better hand, and is just a relay to clubs, pass or correct, as in Lebensohl.
 - In Rubensohl, 2N! is a real transfer to clubs.
- 3♣!(diamonds), and 3♦!(hearts), and 3♥!(spades) are transfers show invitational or better hands when the two-level bid was available.
- 3♠!(balanced hand, gf) either shows or denies a stopper, while 3N is the opposite.

Variations are created by the following decisions, which are inter-related:

- Is this system on over clubs?
- The meaning of a double: is it takeout, or penalty oriented?
- The meaning of a transfer to their suit (a “transfer-cue”).
- The meaning of a “slow” cue bid if 2N is just a relay.
- How we bid toward a notrump game with or without stoppers.
- How we bid Stayman and continue if there is no major fit.

When I first wrote up Rubensohl several years ago, there was a real paucity of explanations available. Now you can get more information on these methods on the web. Larry Cohen has a description of TL. An article by Michael Donnelly, “Handling Interference”, in the Nov. 2016 Bridge Bulletin has a one-page description of an idea more similar to what follows.

MY RUBENSOHL: R

The presentation below is, in the spirit of these writings, an attempt to construct a learnable yet effective method. It is in the Rubensohl school. We'll call it "R" just to emphasize that there are other versions.

Note: This defense requires considerable experience and a regular partner.

10.1 When Does R Apply?

Bid using R if the opponents' bid over our 1N opener shows:

- one specified suit that is not clubs, or
- one specified suit that is not clubs, and an unspecified second suit.

Treat the bid as if it is a natural overcall in the specified suit.

In cases where the bid does not specify any suit, so requires action on the part of the advancer, responder may pass and wait to see a specified suit, and if at that point R bids would have been used with the direct bid, they are now on. If responder bids immediately, then R does not apply and we're "systems on".

10.1.1 Examples

If we wait until we know a suit, and R would apply to that suit, it applies after the delay:

1N - (2♣! long suit) - P - (2♦!(required))
P - (2♥) - ?

1N - (2♦! unspecified major) - P - (2♥! required)
P (P) ?

In both cases, at responder's second turn, R now applies as if the auction had been a simple 1N - (2♥).

Of course, if the suit is clubs, R doesn't apply:

1N - (X! long suit) - P - (2♣! pass or correct)
P - (P) - ?

A bid here of any sort is "systems on"; for example, 2♦! would be a transfer to hearts.

Acting immediately before the suit is known, R does not apply yet, so this is a Stolen Bid double, Stayman:

1N - (2♣! long suit) - X

A fourth seat overcall passed back to responder is treated as if immediate:

1N - (P) - P - (2♥)
P - (P) - ?

R applies as over an immediate heart overcall

Otherwise the R bids are off. In particular any immediate bid showing two suits, such as both majors or both minors, is dealt with as a two-suited bid.

10.2 The R Bids

If the opponents overcall a natural 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠, possibly showing an additional unknown suit, we can show competitive or game-forcing hands, and some invitational hands. Details follow.

- Pass with a weak hand.
- Two-level suit bids, when available, are competitive only, with 5+ cards in the suit.
- Double is for takeout.
- 2N! transfers to clubs.
- 3♣! transfers to diamonds.
- 3♦! transfers to hearts.
- 3♥! transfers to spades.
- 3♠! shows game values with a stopper (“slow shows”).
- 3N! shows game values but denies a stopper (“fast denies”).

The sub-sections below discuss the continuations.

10.2.1 Transfers to Suits

The bids of 2N! through 3♥! are suit transfers to the next higher strain.

- If the two-level bid of the target suit was not available, opener must complete the transfer. Responder may pass with a competitive hand, or bid again, game forcing.
- If a two-level bid of the target suit was available, the transfer shows invitational or better values. Opener will treat it as invitational at first, completing the transfer to decline the invitation, or making a descriptive bid to force to game.

If the opener completes the transfer, responder gets a turn to make the auction game forcing by proceeding. If available, 3♠! shows no stopper for notrump. For example, after a heart overcall, a transfer to diamonds followed by

3♠! is a game force, denying a heart stopper but showing game values with 5+ diamonds.

- A cue bid after a transfer to a minor shows a six-card suit and exactly one stopper, game forcing. Does not apply if the overcalled suit is spades, as the 3♠! bid will be needed to ask for a stopper for notrump.

Game sequences involving minor suit transfers tend to show no four-card major, or a Stayman takeout-double would be preferable.

10.2.2 Trying For Notrump

With balanced hands and game-forcing values, responder can affirm or deny a stopper in the overcalled suit:

- 3♠! “transfers” to 3N, showing a stopper in the overcalled suit. (“Slow shows”)
- 3N! shows game values but denies a stopper. (“Fast denies”). If Opener is lacking a stopper as well, he may bid a five card suit or bid suits up the line looking for a fit.

10.2.3 Takeout Doubles

The takeout double serves as Stayman as well. The double requires invitational values; responder bids again with more. The double promises four cards in an unbid major, and usually two or fewer cards in the overcalled suit. It is nice to have two cards in the overcalled suit, in case opener wishes to convert the double to penalty.

If opener replies 3♣, responder’s 3♦ does not show extras but can be passed. This allows one to make the takeout double with only two clubs. Responder may continue otherwise to force to game. A cue bid can be used as a second bid if nothing else suits.

Opener’s replies when the overcalled suit is a major, in priority:

- the unbid major suit, with four+ cards; jump if you would accept an invitation.

- 2N to decline the invitation, or 3N to accept, showing a stopper.
- 3♣! if no stopper and no major.
- Pass to convert to penalty.

Opener's replies when the overcalled suit is diamonds are similar. In priority:

- a four-card major; hearts if both are held. If responder had spades but not hearts he must now bid 2♠. Opener would again revert to 3♣! with no stopper and no spades.
- 2N to decline the invitation, or 3N to accept, showing a stopper, but no major.
- 3♣! with no stopper and no major, or pass to convert to penalty.

Since responder has presumably at most doubleton in their suit, opener would be lucky to find him with more than a half-stopper and should not reckon on it.

10.2.4 Transfer-Cue Bids

A bid that transfers to the overcalled suit (a "transfer-cue") is a game-forcing 4441 or 4450 hand with the shortness in the overcalled suit.

The opener can bid a game in a major suit, bid notrump with a stopper, bid 3♣! to deny either.

10.2.5 Four-Level Bids

Replies to a 1N opener at or above the four-level are whatever you play now, such as:

- 4♣ is Gerber.
- 4♦! and 4♥! are Texas Transfers to hearts and spades, showing six card suits and values for game only. With a strong hand and a six-card major, transfer first and then bid the suit at the four level to show slam interest.
- 4♠! (rare) invites opener to pick a minor game.
- 4N is invitational to 6N. One note, however: If the responder could have made a bid showing

a stopper but did not, then a later 4N that is quantitative would show at most a poor stopper or a half-stopper. So that is the case with 1N-(2x) - 4N, as with a stopper responder could bid 1N - (2x) - 3♠! - 3N - 4N (quantitative).

10.2.6 Three-Level Overcalls

Over three-level overcalls, use your normal system, such as:

- A double is for takeout, showing support for the other three suits.
- Bids at the three level are natural, one-round forcing, and,
- 3N, 4♥, 4♠, 5♣, and 5♦ are to play.

10.3 Why R is Hard

The R convention is hard.

It requires calm thinking to be sure to use it when, and only when, it applies, (If you just skimmed it, re-read *When Does R Apply?* (page 20) carefully.)

After you get past that issue, the system seems deceptively simple. The difficulty is in the amount of inference required. To illustrate, consider the sequence:

1N (2♦) 3♦!(hearts)
3♠!.

We know that:

- Responder has at least an invitational hand. Responder had a 2♥ bid available to just compete. He transferred.
- Opener must be max because he has accepted the invitation when he did not complete the transfer, so the auction is now game forcing.

- Opener's 3♠! has asked responder to bid 3N, rather than bidding 3N himself, so opener does not have a diamond stopper.
- Opener does not have three hearts, or he would have bid 4♥.

That's a pretty good information haul with just two bids! Unfortunately deductive reasoning is required – considering what partner did not bid as much as what he did bid.

10.4 Show A Minor Or Just Go?

Suppose as responder you have a game-forcing hand with a decent minor suit, say diamonds, but lack a stopper in the overcalled suit, say hearts, and do not have a four card major. Both these approaches seem plausible:

- Transfer to diamonds, then bid 3♠! next to ask for a stopper.
- Bid 3N immediately, denying a stopper, looking to play there if opener has a stopper.

Answer: You should transfer and then continue with 3♠! asking for a stopper. If your partner also lacks a stopper, you may be looking for a fit and so you should show your diamonds on the way.

On the other hand, if you do have a stopper, your normal bid is 3♠!, not the transfer; So if you do make a transfer and then bid 3N, opener would wonder why you bothered to show the diamonds if you could have just bid for a notrump game without his help. Therefore, he should conclude that you have slam interest with diamonds.

Another strategy is to make the transfer and bid 3♠! when you have a less than premium hand and worry that you really need a stopper from partner to help. If he goes back to your diamonds, perhaps it will be for the best.

Don't forget the funny end-case of a transfer to a minor followed by a cue bid, showing six cards and a single stopper, but that it doesn't apply for spade overcalls.

10.5 Examples

10.5.1 Examples When Our Suit Is Lower

When responder's suit cannot be bid at the two-level, his values may be just competitive. Opener must therefore always complete the transfer. It is up to responder to continue when he is game forcing.

Say responder has a club suit, lower than the overcalled suit, diamonds:

1N (2♦) 2N! Transfer to clubs, competitive or game forcing

3♣!(forced) - 3♦!(six clubs, exactly one stop, gf)

The transfer to a minor, followed by the cue bid, means six plus of the minor and exactly one stopper. The opener should be able to judge where to place the contract.

Responder asks for a stopper and opener doesn't have one:

1N (2♦) 2N!(clubs)

3♣!(forced) 3♠!(stopper ask)

It is safe for opener, if he is lacking a stopper, to bid 4♣ since responder has five of them. Responder can bid 5♣ with sufficient values.

In the next two examples, the overcall is in spades. Suppose responder has a game-forcing hand with five hearts:

1N (2♠) 3♦!(hearts) 3♥!(forced)

With a spade stopper responder can now bid 3N, or bid 4♥ with six cards, which suggests slam interest because he didn't use Texas Transfers. Opener will of course correct to 4♥ when appropriate.

Without a stopper, responder can cue-bid 3♠ to force to game.

In that case there is a possibility of playing in a 5-2 fit, worst case, when opener has just two hearts and no stopper. Note that in this process responder will know that if opener does not have three hearts, he must have at least three of everything else, because we do not open 1N with two doubletons.

10.5.2 Examples When Our Suit Is Higher

In the next set of examples, our suit is higher than the overcalled suit (and therefore is a major).

The two-level bids are to play:

1N (2♦) 2♥ is to play, as is
1N (2♦ or 2♥) 2♠.

A transfer is at least invitational; the opener can decline the invitation by just accepting the transfer. He can accept with 3N if he has a stopper, or bid 4 of the major.

In this example, responder is invitational with hearts:

1N (2♦) 3♦!(hearts, invitational or better)
3♥ - Pass

Opener declined the invitation by completing the transfer.

Getting to game is easy when responder has a stopper:

1N (2♦) 3♦!
3♥ - 3N

Responder has a diamond stopper, and game forcing values. Opener can pass or correct to 4♥.

This is the same idea as an ordinary transfer without interference: you transfer to the major and then bid 3N. If the opener has 3 in the major he corrects to 4M.

The 3♠! bid can be used when responder does not have a stopper:

1N (2♦) 3♦!
3♥ 3♠!

Responder has game-forcing values but is asking for a stopper.

A 2♥ bid was possible for responder, so opener had a choice. Completing the transfer showed no interest in accepting an invitation in hearts. However, responder bid on, using the artificial 3♠ bid to ask for a stopper. Opener must now bid 3N with a stopper, or bid 4♥ with three hearts, or look for a minor fit on the way with 4♣ or 4♦. Worst case we're in a 5-2 heart fit.

When responder's suit is spades there is not a lot of room. If an opener does not have a stopper and does not have three spades, things will get awkward:

1N (2♥) 3♥!(spades)

A 3♠! bid does not show a game force, no stopper and two spades – because that's accepting the transfer and therefore declining the invitation! However, accepting the invitation may be a bad idea anyway. A responder continuing to game without a stopper should show their best minor or cue-bid, praying for opener to correct to 4♠.

Super-accepting is possible (but not when our suit is lower):

1N (2♦) 3♦!
4♥

Opener has accepted an invitation in hearts to game.
Remember, our four-level bids do not change:

1N (2♦) 4♦!(six hearts)

This Texas Transfer shows six hearts, no slam interest.

In the next example, responder has slam interest in hearts:

1N (2♦) 3♦!
3♥ - 4♥ (six hearts, game-forcing values)

Responder has slam interest and six hearts, because without extras he could have just used a Texas transfer, and he wouldn't bid 4♥ on his own without a six-card suit.

10.5.3 Examples When Our Suit Is Diamonds

Say the bidding has gone:

1N (2♠) 3♣!(transfer to diamonds)
3♦

Opener had to complete the transfer, as a 2♦ bid by responder was not available. If responder has game-forcing values,

- 3♥! game forcing, probably a hand with long diamonds and some values in hearts but no stopper. Note that 3♥ is not promising four hearts.
- 3♠! game forcing, asking for a bid of 3N if opener has stopper.
- 3N to play, has stopper.

10.5.4 Example Of A Takeout Double

After a 2♥ overcall, holding ♠KT93 ♥J3 ♦AK9 ♣T987, responder doubles for takeout, and if opener bids 3♣!, passes. Recall 3♣! showed no spades and no stopper in hearts. While there is a possibility of a 4-2 fit, opener did not leave the double in so figures not to have too many hearts, and with less than four spades, figures to have some clubs in most cases.

Upgrade the hand to ♠KT93 ♥Q3 ♦AK9 ♣AJ87, and responder will want to go on, and might try 3♥ to show no stopper and a desire to hear opener's further description, such as 3♠ showing three in the suit, or a preferred minor, or even 3N to show a partial stopper.

10.5.5 Example of A Transfer-Cue

After a 2♦ overcall, holding ♠KT93 ♥3 ♦AK95 ♣AJ87, responder bids 3♣!(4414 or 4405, gf). Opener should be able to place the contract. With only ♠KT93 ♥3 ♦K954 ♣AJ87, not enough to force to game, the takeout double would be preferred.

10.6 Problems

Here are some problems using R. I have gotten some of these problems from other sources on Lebensohl systems.

In these problems, the 1N bids will show 12-14 and the responder will treat 11-12 points as invitational, but often game forcing if it is a balanced 12 with good intermediates.

1. Partner opens 1N, and your RHO overcalls 2♥. You hold:

♠5 ♥QJ7 ♦KJ742 ♣AQ52 (13 HCP, gf)

What is the bidding from here?

2. You hold, as responder:

♠A ♥K9743 ♦A93 ♣8643 (11 HCP, inv)

The bidding starts with 1N (2♦). You bid 3♦!, a transfer to hearts.

- What do you bid after your partner answers 3♥?
- This time your transfer is super-accepted with 4♥. Your call?
- Suppose your transfer sparks a 3♠ call. What now?

3. Your partner opens 1N, which your RHO overcalls with a natural 2♣. What do you bid?:

♠AJT ♥Kx ♦KQJxxx ♣xx (14 HCP, gf)

Suppose instead the overcall was 2♥. What then?

4. Partner opens 1N, RHO overcalls 2♥. What's your plan?:

♠KTxx ♥x ♦ATxx ♣KQJx (13 HCP, gf)

5. The bidding goes 1N (2♥) to you. What next?:

♠Kxxx ♥xx ♦AQJxxx ♣void (10 HCP)

10.6.1 Answers

1. Partner opens 1N, and your RHO overcalls 2♥. You hold:

♠5 ♥QJ7 ♦KJ742 ♣AQ52 (13 HCP, gf)

What is the bidding from here?

Answer: Bid 3♠!, relaying to 3N with a stopper. You have a game forcing hand and you have a heart stopper. You have no interest in slam and no particular reason to show the

diamonds. Without the interference, bidding would depend on the meaning of 3♦, whether you were playing Minor Suit Stayman, etc.

2. You hold, as responder:

♠A ♥K9743 ♦A93 ♣8643 (11 HCP, inv)

The bidding starts with 1N (2♦). You bid 3♦!, a transfer to hearts.

- What do you bid after your partner answers 3♥?
- This time your transfer is super-accepted with 4♥. Your call?
- Suppose your transfer sparks a 3♠ call. What now?

Answers:

- After 3♥, Pass. Partner declines your invitation.
- After 4♥, Pass. You have no extras.
- After 3♠!, (which you alerted, right?) your partner is looking for 3N. You have a stopper, so bid the 3N game.

3. Your partner opens 1N, which your RHO overcalls with a natural 2♣. What do you bid?:

♠AJT ♥Kx ♦KQJxxx ♣xx (14 HCP, gf)

Suppose instead the overcall was 2♥. What then?

Answers: Trick question. R is off over clubs.

After 1N - (2♥), transfer to diamonds with 3♣!; after partner performs bids 3♦, your 3♥ shows six diamonds and a single stopper in hearts. Perfect!

If the overcalled suit was spades, and you had ♠Kx ♥AJT ♦KQJxxx ♣xx, you could consider the transfer to diamonds followed by 3♥,

this time game-forcing with some heart values but not feeling great about spades.

4. Partner opens 1N, RHO overcalls 2♥. What's your plan?:

♠KTxx ♥x ♦ATxx ♣KQJx (13 HCP, gf)

Answer: The bid of 3♦! is a transfer to hearts, their suit, and hence is a transfer-cue showing a 4=1=4=4 or 4=0=5=4 or 4=0=4=5 game-forcing hand.

- If partner has four spades he will bid 3♠, or with a minimum, 4♠.
- If he has a stopper but not four spades he will bid 2N, or with a minimum, 3N.
- If partner bids 3♣, he does not have four spades, and does not have a stopper.

If you want to keep going, bidding diamonds would allow opener to show three spades for your consideration, or leave it there if his clubs are shorter, or confirm clubs. Cue bidding is your strongest option, of course.

In the first two cases, opener bids the game directly to show a minimum. Otherwise, we'd like to leave more room for slam exploration.

5. The bidding goes 1N (2♥) to you. What next?:

♠Kxxx ♥xx ♦AQJxxx ♣void (10 HCP)

This hand is a rule of 20 opener. Since diamonds is lower than the overcalled suit, there is a stark choice of playing this hand as game forcing or just competitive.

- If you transfer to diamonds with 3♣, partner must accept it with 3♦, and you could pass.
- If partner has spades, your chances of game are great. Unfortunately a take-

out double here would get really painful if partner replies 3♣. Bidding diamonds at that point would be passable as an Equal-Level Conversion, however, so this works. This case is the reason for that part of the system.

Transferring to diamonds followed by 3♠! doesn't show spades, and you don't really have the points for notrump.

- If you Pass, partner might reopen with a double if he has four spades, or just bid 2♠ if he had five. Or, defending might be pleasant.

The moral of the story: interference works. This particular hand is an advertisement for the version of Rubensohl in which the transfer-cue is Stayman and the takeout double is penalty-oriented (See below). But, change the hand to:

♠Kxxx ♥x ♦AQJx ♣Kxxx (10 HCP)

and the takeout double shines, or (perhaps with a little more HCP) your transfer-cue would be perfect, showing a game-going 4=1=4=4 or 4=1=(54).

10.7 The Path Not Taken: Ask and Stayman

For those who find not having a penalty double available too annoying, or who prefer a more Stayman-oriented approach, one can give up the transfer-cue as showing unusual shapes and have it be Stayman.

If double is for penalty rather than takeout, the transfer-cue is used to ask for stoppers and majors. The language, "Ask and Stayman" with the "Ask" first, emphasizes that the first duty of the opener is to show a stopper.

Completing the transfer-cue denies a stopper, and if the overcall was a major, completing the transfer-cue

denies that other major as well. Over diamonds, it denies the stopper but not an unbid major.

Conversely, not completing the transfer shows a stopper. If opener has an unbid major, he bids that, or bids 3N, instead of completing.

I leave it to the reader to fill in the blanks on all the cases. Obviously, one can end up in the “no stopper no major fit” hunt for a place to play.

GLOSSARY

Conventions and concepts described as “advanced” are in the *Advanced Bidding* notes.

2/1 Stands for the advanced system Two Over One Game Force, or the signature meaning of a non-jump bid of two of a new suit over partner’s one bid in a suit.

advancer The partner of the *overcaller*.

alert To give a required notification to the opponents. The need for an alert is shown by an exclamation point following the bid. If the opponents ask what the bid means, the proper explanation is shown following the exclamation point.

announce To say aloud certain explanations, such as notrump ranges.

attitude When signaling on defense, refers to showing if you want a suit continued or not.

balanced A hand with an even distribution of suit lengths, 5-3-3-2, 4-4-3-2, or 4-3-3-3.

balancing To make a bid in *passout seat* when your partner has passed. For example, (1♥) - P - (P) - 1♠ and (1♥) - P- (2♥) - P; (P) 2♠ are balancing bids.

business double A synonym for *penalty double*

bust A hand with very few points; no Aces or Kings, and at most one Queen.

captain Refers to the partner who knows the other’s strength and shape within sufficient limits that he must decide the correct path to the final contract, after possibly gathering more information. Switches of captain later may occur, but generally the captain is in charge.

competitive A hand, or a bid indicating a hand, strong enough to bid but not strong enough for

bidding game.

control bid A bid showing an Ace or void; or in the Italian system, first or second round control of that suit.

controls Refers to the number of control points in a hand, counting an Ace as 2 and a King as 1. Also refers to a certain advanced system for responding to a 2♣ opener.

convention A bid which changes the standard meaning of that bid to serve another purpose, together with its followups.

cooperative double A double that is nominally for takeout but which seeks partner’s opinion on the best action to take.

count When signaling on defense, refers to showing number of cards in a suit.

cue bid A bid of a suit already bid by the opponents. Cue bid is also an older term for *control bid*.

current count When signaling on defense, refers to showing the number of cards in a suit that one holds at the moment, as opposed to originally.

doubleton A suit of exactly two cards. Called *worthless* if it does not contain an Ace or King.

Drury A convention played after a major opening in third or fourth seat when the responder is a passed hand, to show a limit raise or better. Reverse Drury and Two-Way Reverse Drury are two variants; the original version is almost never played today.

gadgets A gadget is a convention that is usually applicable in a small niche bidding situation, or which is considered a minor tweak on another convention. Gadgets are often inappropriate for intermediates or casual partnerships.

- game forcing** A hand, or bid indicating a hand, strong enough to require bidding that leads to a game or four of a minor suit. Abbreviated “gf”.
- Gerber** A bid of 4 clubs that asks responder how many Aces he holds.
- gf** An abbreviation of *game forcing*.
- good suit** A “good suit” is one with 2 of the top 3 honors or 3 of the top 5, but not QJ10, and usually five or more cards.
- grand** Short for *grand slam*.
- HCP** High-card points. See Hand Evaluation.
- intervenor** Another word for *overcaller*.
- inv** An abbreviation of *invitational*.
- invitational** A hand, or a bid indicating a hand, within 2 points of being game forcing. Abbreviated INV.
- jump-shift** A bid of a new suit (a shift) one level higher than it needs to be (a jump).
- Law of Total Tricks** A guideline used to help determine how high to bid in a competitive auction. With a trump fit of 8 cards or more, and the *HCP* fairly evenly divided, the number of tricks the partnership can expect to win is approximately the total number of trump held by the partners.
- leave it in** To pass partner’s *takeout double*.
- Lebensohl** An advanced convention for distinguishing strengths of responder’s hand in difficult circumstances, especially after an overcall of a 1N opener.
- LHO** Left hand opponent; the player to the left of the player
- major** Spades or hearts; frequently abbreviated M.
- minimax** A style of making two-suited bids, in which the bid is not used for intermediate hands.
- minor** Diamonds or clubs; frequently abbreviated M.
- Minorwood** An ace-asking bid of four of the minor, played with inverted minors.
- negative double** A double that shows strength in unbid suits is called a negative double. The most common example is partner opens a suit and is overcalled in another suit; then a double by responder is a negative double.
- overcaller** The player that overcalled; the partner of the *advancer*. We also call him the *intervenor*.
- pass or correct** A bid intended to either be passed or corrected to another suit. See Minor Relay for an example.
- passout seat** A bidder about to make the third consecutive pass, ending the auction. After an opening bid and two passes, to bid in passout seat is called *balancing*.
- penalty double** A double made with the intent of having partner pass, to collect penalties.
- preempt** Short for *preemptive bid*.
- preemptive** Describes a bid intended to interfere in the opponents auction, usually by or opening or jumping in a long suit.
- pull** To pull a double means to bid over partner’s *penalty double*.
- quantitative** A bid that invites partner to bid slam if on the top of his known range. In conversation, often abbreviated as *quant*.
- rattlesnake** Describes a hand with a 4441 shape (or 5440, if the five-card suit is a minor).
- relay** A bid which requires partner to bid a certain suit, but does not imply possession of that suit by the bidder. Compare to *transfer*.
- responder** The partner of the opener
- responsive double** An advanced convention used to compete after partner makes a takeout double.
- reverse** (1) a bid in a suit higher than the suit you first bid, showing a stronger hand than you’ve shown so far; or (2) an adjective applied to the name of a convention indicating a variant in which two of the bids are interchanged, as in Reverse Bergen or Reverse Drury.

RHO Right hand opponent; the player to the right of the player

Rubensohl A *transfer* version of *Lebensohl*; Rubensohl is the hardest convention in this book. See *Rubensohl* (page 17).

Rule of 17 A guideline used to help determine whether or not to raise a preemptive major bid by partner to game. The rule says to add your *HCP* and number of trumps, and bid game if the total is 17 or more.

Rule of 20 A hand is said to satisfy the Rule of 20 if its number of high card points plus the sum of the lengths of its two longest suits adds up to 20 or more.

runout A method of escaping from a penalty double, such as a double of a

Sandwich 1N After opponents have bid 1x - 1y, a 1N conventional bid to show the other two suits with a sub-opening hand.

semi-balanced A hand with a 5-4-2-2 or 6-3-2-2 shape, the longest being a minor.

short A suit is *short* if it contains 2 or fewer cards.

singleton A suit containing just one card.

slamish A hand, or a bid showing a hand, that possibly but not definitively might contribute to a slam.

SOS redouble A redouble in the passout seat after an opening bid has been doubled for takeout or for balancing.

splinter A triple-jump bid showing a stiff or a void in the suit bid and agreeing to partner's last-bid suit as trump. Examples are 1♠ - 4♥!, 1♥ - 4♣!, and the tricky one, 1♥ - 3♠!.

Stayman The Stayman Convention is classically a bid of the lowest number of clubs after a notrump opening; it inquires about the opener's major suit holdings. The term is also used to refer other bids with the same purpose.

stiff Slang for *singleton*.

super-accept A jump agreement in response to a *transfer*.

support double An advanced convention used to show exactly 3-card support for responder's suit.

takeout double A double that asks partner to bid, usually with an emphasis on getting partner to reveal an unbid major suit.

tenace A holding that includes two cards separated by one missing one, such as AQ or KJ. Such a holding is strong if behind the missing card, but weak if the stronger card(s) are behind it. The missing card is said to be *onside* if ahead of the tenace, and *offside* otherwise.

thirteen The most important number in bridge.

transfer A bid which requests partner to bid a certain suit which is held by the bidder; the intent is usually to cause partner to be the declarer if that suit is trump. Usually the suit bid is one denomination less than the suit requested, known as the *target suit*.

If partner bids the target suit as requested it is called *accepting* the transfer. If he bids it but one level higher than necessary it is called a *super-accept*; and if he bids something else it is called *breaking* the transfer.

Compare to *relay*.

Two Over One An advanced version of Standard American. Also written 2/1.

UDA Short for "upside down attitude, right-side up count". A low card is encouraging or from an even number.

UDCA Short for "upside-down count and upside-down attitude" card signals. A low card is encouraging or from an odd number.

underlead To lead a small card from a suit containing an honor; for example to lead the 5 from K985.

unpassed hand A hand that has not yet had a chance to bid, or did have a chance but did not pass.

void A suit containing no cards.

W W is our notation for the “other” major in an auction where a major M has been bid.

w w is our notation for the “other” minor in an auction where the a minor m has been bid.

weak A hand, or a bid indicating a hand, too weak for any but obstructive action.

X Double

XX Redouble

yarborough A hand containing no honors; a real *bust*.

Symbols

1N

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1N opener

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1N opening or overcall

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Mathe

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Mathe Defense

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maximal double

convention, 10

Meckwell

convention, 2

Meckwell Escapes

convention, 4

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Minorwood, **30**

modified Cappelletti

convention, 2

modified D.O.N.T (Meckwell)

convention, 2

Multi-Landy

convention, 3

N

negative double, **30**

notrump openings

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