

DEFENCES TO A 1NT OPENING BID

LANDY

The Landy defence to 1NT is a method which recognises the value of the major suits in a competitive situation. It is extremely easy, using just an overcall of 2C (either in 2nd or 4th position) to show a minimum of four cards in both majors. The more distributional values held, the less the requirement for high card strength; the following are all suitable for a Landy 2C bid:

S AK104 H QJ64 D A53 C 75	S AQ762 H K10542 D 9 C 72
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S Q10953 H AQ75 D 6 C KJ7	S KJ104 H A8753 D KQ C 64
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Following is one method of responding to the 2C bid.

- (i) 3C is a forcing bid, bearing no relation to clubs, and asks for further information from the overcaller. This is the only forcing response
- (ii) 3H and 3S are game invitations, although possibly based only on a three-card holding in the suit bid.
- (iii) 2NT and 3D are natural and encouraging, but not forcing.
- (iv) 2D shows a weak hand with diamond length.
- (v) No Bid shows a weak hand with club length.

Let us now consider some hands for the partner of the Landy overcaller, and see what he should bid after: 1NT - 2C - Pass:

S 5 H AQ652 D 762 C 8732	Jump to 3H. The hand is limited in high card strength, but with an excellent fit assured, ten tricks may well be available on a cross-ruff.
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S 65 **Bid just 2H. Although this hand is much stronger in**
H Q6532 **high cards than above, they are, with the exception**
D KQ3 **of the queen of hearts, in the wrong places.**
C KJ4

S 6 **Bid 2D. Partner will almost always respect the weak**
H 65 **nature of the bid and pass (even with a singleton**
D KJ107542 **or void diamond) so do not abuse the bid.**
C 762

S 872 **Bid 2S. The hand may play better in spades, with**
H 8 **heart ruffs being taken in the short trump hand,**
D KJ10542 **even if partner can tolerate diamonds.**
C 872

Once partner has shown simple preference at the two-level by bidding 2H or 2S, the Landy bidder should only try for game with good distributional values. For example, after: 1NT - 2C - Pass - 2S - Pass, he should try 3S with:

S KJ654	but pass with:	S KQ654
H AQ7632		H AQ76
D 8		D 98
C 9		C K7

ASTRO

To use Astro you need a two-suited hand (at least 5-4) with at least one of the major suits. The 2D overcall promises four or five spades, together with another, as yet unspecified suit - the bid has nothing to do with the diamond holding. Similarly, the 2C overcall promises four or five hearts, together with a minor suit (not spades since the overcall was not 2D). The following are typical 2D overcalls of 1NT:

S AQ76	S K1042	S QJ872
H 6	H KQ762	H 8
D 54	D 87	D AKJ8
C AQ8732	C A6	C 982

A 2C overcall could be made on:

S 76	S 7	S 762
H KJ53	H AQ1032	H AK87
D AKJ76	D Q76	D ----
C 87	C KJ104	C AQJ872

The distributional requirements for an Astro overcall are:

(i) A four- or five-card major suit (with a six-card major suit an overcall in the major suit will probably better);

(ii) A four-, five-, or six-card side suit;

(iii) At least nine cards in the two suits.

The strength requirements vary somewhat, depending on vulnerability and position, but are not affected greatly by the size of the opponents 1NT. To bid directly over 1NT (i.e. in second position), you will normally have close to an opening bid (although hands with good distribution may be slightly weaker). In the protective position (i.e. fourth in hand), particularly non-vulnerable, you may shade down your strength a lot since partner will be marked with some high card strength.

Responding To Astro

There are two likely responses to partner's Astro bid. One is the bid of the major suit he has promised, his 'anchor' suit - hearts if he has overcalled 2C, spades if the bid was 2D. You should respond in the anchor suit whenever you hold four cards in it and no game ambitions.

With:

S J873 Respond 2H to a 2C overcall, 2S to a 2D overcall.
 H J762
 D K106
 C Q6

You may support partner's anchor suit even with only a three-card holding if you have some values to play there. Thus with:

S AJ5 Bid 2S in response to 2D, or 2H over 2C.
 H Q54
 D 6
 C 1076432

Notice that the bid is logical: had partner, as dealer, opened the bidding with 1H or 1S then the best response is a simple raise in the suit, even if the opening bid promises only a four-card suit.

If you cannot support the anchor major, your bid on a limited hand is the next suit up over partner's overcall - 2H over 2D, 2D over 2C. This may be done with only two or three cards in this 'relay' suit - partner will not pass unless this is his five-card suit. For example with:

S 763 You should bid 2D over 2C, or 2H over 2D (you could
 H 87 bid 2S over 2D, since at least a 4-3 fit has been
 D J76 located, but in general it is preferable to avoid
 C K10642 false support with scanty values and distribution.

There are other responses available on limited hands. If you hold six cards or more in the suit bid, with no support for the anchor suit you may pass. And you may bid the 'fourth' suit, (2S over 2C, 3C over 2D) with a strong, almost self-supporting suit but no other values. This should generally be avoided unless the suit is of good quality as the auction may get uncomfortably high with no guarantee of a worthwhile fit being established. Holding:

S 76 Pass if partner bids 2C, but over 2D respond 2H -
 H 86 do not bid 3C with such a weak hand.
 D Q5
 C J1096543

When you hold a strong hand with game ambitions - more likely when the opening 1NT is weak - you may proceed in various ways. A jump to game in the anchor suit would show four-card support (or longer) in a hand of opening strength. With a slightly weaker hand and four-card support, jump to three of the major - comparable with a limit raise of one to three of a major. A bid of 2NT should be invitational, based probably on three-card support for the anchor suit. With a five-card major, the overcaller should be ready to jump to game with more than a minimum hand, otherwise he shows his other suit. An example:

S A1054 Bid 3S in response to an Astro 2D overcall, but 2NT
 H K65 over 2C.
 D KJ65
 C 87

A raise of the Astro bid (2C to 3C, or 2D to 3D) is artificial and forcing.

Further Developments Of Astro

Having made an Astro 2C or 2D overcall, how do you proceed after partner's reply? If he has bid two of your anchor suit, you should pass unless holding substantial extra values. With a maximum you can raise to three in the major (with a five-card suit, since partner may only have three) or bid your long side suit. Suppose you have bid 2C over 1NT by the opponents, and partner has responded 2H; you hold:

(a)	S 65	(b)	S 5	(c)	S A6
	H AQ76		H KJ762		H AJ106
	D AQ872		D AK1074		D KQ10763
	C 76		C K9		C 7

With hand (a), pass. Game is inconceivable if partner cannot bid 3H, and even 2H may be in danger.

With hand (b), raise to 3H showing a five-card suit and inviting game.

With hand (c), try for game by bidding 3D - this denies a five-card heart suit.

When partner's response to the Astro bid is the relay suit - 2D over 2C, 2H over 2D, show your longer suit. If this is the relay suit, pass; if the anchor suit, 'rebid' it; if another suit bid it now. Observe that if you hold:

S 65	You would be compelled to go to the three-level to show your long suit if partner responds 2D to your Astro 2C. With such a poor suit, 3C is unattractive and it may have been better to pass 1NT initially.
H KQ65	
D K6	
C KJ983	

However, if we reverse the minor suits, i.e.

S 65	Then the hand becomes well suited to an Astro bid of 2C; for now, over a relay of 2D, the second suit is shown economically by passing.
H KQ65	
D KJ983	
C K6	

There are two other comparatively rare rebids which you may make after an Astro bid. One is to bid spades after you have denied them by choosing 2C as the overcall. If you hold:

S AQ6	Bid 2C over 1NT; if partner bids the 2D relay, bid 2S.
H KJ87	
D 7	
C A10965	

Partner will know that:

- (i) you have only four hearts, since you did not bid 2H;
- (ii) that you have a five-card (or longer) club suit, since with diamonds as the long suit you would have passed his 2D bid;
- (iii) you have good tolerance for spades (but not four-card length) if he is long in the suit.

With such an accurate picture of your hand, partner should be able to select the best available contract.

The other unusual rebid by the overcaller is 2NT, to show a three-suited hand - the other major and both minors. For example:

S K1064	Start with an Astro 2D and, over a 2H relay, rebid
H -----	2NT. Partner will know that you have only four
D A10964	spades and tolerance for both minor suits.
C AK105	

This 2NT bid is usually forcing, whichever partner uses it, but does not necessarily show game ambitions. The bid asks partner for further clarification of his strength and distribution: its most frequent use is when responder bids 2NT when he wants to play in the overcaller's second suit. For example;

W	E	S	W	N	E
S 76	S J743	1NT	2C	No	2D
H AK765	H 3	No	2H	No	2NT
D AJ92	D Q1053				
C Q6	C K873				

Here you bid 2NT, secure in the knowledge that partner has, in addition to his five-card heart suit, a four-card minor. Partner will bid 3D which you will pass.

The great advantage of Astro is that it allows relatively safe and accurate competition against a 1NT opening with any two-suited pattern. Landy can only be used with both major suits, while Astro can be used with one major and a minor or both majors. It is irritating to say the least, to hear an opening bid of 1NT on your right when you hold:

S 7	Unless you use Astro (or one of its variations) you
H Q1064	can't enter the auction intelligently. Yet the hand
D A10854	may well belong to your side, and a game is
C AKJ	possible opposite quite a limited hand if the fit
	is good, for example:

S J1062	Playing Astro, a reasonable sequence would be:
H AJ53	
D 3	1NT 2C No 3H
C Q863	No 4H

It is hard to imagine reaching the good game playing, say, Landy or simply natural overcalls.

However, there are theoretical objections to Astro. On many hands where the balance of strength is fairly even, either both sides have a good fit or neither has. On a misfit hand you may do better to let the opposition play in 1NT; and where both sides have a fit you may find yourselves outbid if you compete. The argument for Landy is that this disadvantage is mitigated when you hold both majors. On the fitting hands the enemy suit will be a minor, allowing you to compete effectively. And if your competition jostles them out of no-trumps into a suit, it is a low scoring club or diamond contract - an important consideration at pairs scoring.

What is more, the major two-suiter - clearly an important hand pattern - is the hand which Astro is worst-equipped to deal with. For example, you hold:

- | | | | |
|-----|---------|-----|---------|
| (a) | S KQ65 | (b) | S KQ652 |
| | H AJ853 | | H AJ85 |
| | D 5 | | D 5 |
| | C K64 | | C K64 |

Over an opening 1NT you bid an Astro 2D. Partner now responds 2H - unfortunately this tells you nothing about his heart holding: he may hold two small or KQxxx. With hand (a) you will pass the 2H relay, and miss the good game when partner holds:

S 74 H KQ962 D 9732 C Q7

With hand (b) you will bid 2S over the 2H relay, and partner with the hand above will pass, fearing that your side suit is clubs and the hands are a misfit. Thus, it is sometimes difficult to find the heart fit just when it is most rewarding to do so - when you hold the spades and cannot easily be outbid.

Despite the flaws pointed out above, there seems little doubt that the convention works well on hands which other defences find almost impossible to handle with any accuracy.