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It's Just MayHem with Bergen

I love gimmicks — part 3

Are you always looking for new bids or conventions to experiment with? I know I am. There are often better bidding methods if you're willing to do the memory work. This is a continuation of our series on gimmicks.

Useful conventions after an opponent overcalls 1NT

Do you have any partnership agreements as to what bids mean when partner has opened the bidding and your right-hand opponent overcalls 1NT? It's a good idea to have a method in your arsenal that enables you to compete effectively. I have found that it works best to play some convention, possibly the same one you would have played had your RHO opened 1NT; it works just the same. You don't need many values (but shape is nice) because partner has opened the bidding. Let's take an example using a modified version of the Cappelletti convention (although other conventions can be used as well).

1. After one of a minor followed by a 1NT overcall:

- Double = penalty
- 2♣ = any one-suited hand
- 2♦ = both majors
- 2♥ = hearts and a minor
- 2♠ = spades and a minor

- 2. After 1♥ – 1NT:
Double = penalty
- 2♣ = any one-suited hand
- 2♦ = a heart raise with longer spades than hearts
- 2♥ = heart raise with a minor on the side (or this can be played as a simple heart raise)
- 2♠ = spades and a minor

- 3. After 1♠ – 1NT:
Double = penalty
- 2♣ = any one-suited hand
- 2♦ = spade raise with longer hearts than spades
- 2♥ = hearts and a minor
- 2♠ = spade raise with a minor on the side (or this can be played as a simple spade raise)

- 4. You can also use the Cappelletti convention when partner opens 1NT and right-hand opponent makes a penalty double:
2♣ = any one-suited hand
- 2♦ = both majors
- 2♥ = hearts and a minor
- 2♠ = spades and a minor

Equal-level conversion doubles

Sometimes you hold a decent hand and are planning on opening the bidding when your right-hand opponent opens before you with 1♥ or 1♠. Now suppose, unfortunately, your hand has the values for a takeout double but doesn't have the right shape. If you are 5-5 or 6-5, you can use a Michaels cuebid, but what if you have a 6-4 or 5-4 hand, such as:

♠AQ74 ♥4 ♦AQJ763 ♣73?

After a 1♥ opening bid by your right-hand opponent, you have a problem. Of course you can overcall 2♦, but then you may miss a spade fit. What's the solution?

The answer is what's called an equal-level conversion double. With the above hand after your RHO opens

1♥ you make a takeout double. If partner responds by bidding spades, everything is great. But what if partner responds by bidding 2♣ (as my partners always seem to do)? Playing ELC doubles you can *convert* to diamonds and you're at the same point you would have had you just overcalled 2♦ in the first place. The ELC double shows no more values than a 2♦ overall would have. You have just *converted* partner's response to a more playable contract — hence the term, "equal level conversion." The ELC double is an exception to the rule that when you double and bid your own suit, you show extra values.

Another case in which a takeout double would appear to be less appealing — but actually works just as well — would be something like:

♠K873 ♥AK3 ♦K109732 ♣—

Now it's quite obvious that the partnership needs to have an understanding about ELC doubles. To reiterate, doubling the opponent's opening bid of a major suit, and then bidding diamonds (after his partner responds with clubs), *does not* show any extra values. It's just a correction. Since this is clearly a partnership agreement an Alert of the 2♦ bid is required.

If you decide to try ELC doubles, here are two warnings:

1. It's probably best to keep these ELC doubles as fairly limited bids. If you hold a strong hand with diamonds and spades and your RHO opens 1♥, it may be best to simply overcall 2♦ with the intent of bidding your spade suit later.

2. If you hold the other major and five or more clubs this ELC agreement does *not* apply. For example, over a 1♥ opener, with:

♦AK73 ♥73 ♦2 ♣AJ8763,
you should simply overcall your club suit. □