

Meckwell defense against No Trump Opening.

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Wikipedia lists more than 65 different systems of defense against a no-trump bid. If you are an average club player (as am I), this is about 64 more systems than you need.

You'll find lots of lively debate in your bridge club about what the best system of defense is. Expert players use more than one system, tailoring their choice to position at the table (different systems in the direct and balancing seat) and to the point range that the opening 1NT bidder has shown (different systems for a weak no trump and a strong no trump) and to adjust for vulnerability, method of scoring, and aggressiveness of opponents.

For the typical club player, however, it's best to settle on one system that you and your partner can agree on and that you can use in all situations.

The two systems that seem to be most in favor these days are DONT (Disturb Opponents' No Trump) and Cappelletti. Both are great systems. DONT is very simple to learn and remember. Cappelletti is a bit more complicated, but it's also more flexible and can be used in most positions and against a wide range of no-trump bids.

At our club, many players favor a third alternative, Meckwell. Designed by world champions Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell, Meckwell is as easy to use as DONT and offers an advantage that other common systems don't have. Meckwell allows you to bid hearts or spades naturally to show a six-card suit. Being able to bid your long major suit naturally allows you to compete without getting in over your head.

Playing Meckwell, you have six choices for interfering with an opening one-no-trump bid:

1. X promises a long minor suit (at least six cards) or both majors (usually five cards in each major suit).
2. 2♣ tells partner you have clubs and a major suit (at least four cards in each suit).
3. 2♦ tells partner you have diamonds and a major suit (at least four cards in each suit).
4. 2♥ is a natural bid, promising a six-card heart suit.
5. 2♠ is a natural bid, promising a six-card spade suit.
6. 2NT promises both minors (usually five cards in each minor), or a big hand.

Following your X of one no trump (choice #1), your partner must bid two clubs (with a self-sustaining 6+ card suit, partner may alternatively bid his own suit). If clubs is your long minor suit, you will almost always pass. If your suit was diamonds, you will correct to diamonds and your partner will pass. If you have both majors, you will bid hearts and your partner will pass or correct to spades.

Following your 2♣ or 2♦ bid (choices #2 and #3), your partner can either pass, and let you play in the minor suit, or bid hearts. If hearts was your major suit, you will pass. Otherwise, correct to spades.

Following your natural 2♥ or 2♠ bid (choices #4 and #5), your partner can pass or, with support, compete.

Following your 2NT bid showing both minors or a big hand (choice #6), your partner should choose a minor and bid it. This is to play. If your 2NT bid was intended to show a big hand, simply bid your hand naturally and trust your partner to understand that you are strong.

Meckwell caught on quickly at the St. Petersburg Bridge Club, where I play. There are many bridge players in the area and two of them happen to be Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell. We are very

fortunate to have them play occasionally at our club and share their bridge know-how with us. If Meckwell works for these guys, it will work for you! Last year, our club published two Quick Reference Decks of index cards each illustrating key bridge concepts. One deck dealt with Basic Bridge and one with Intermediate Bridge. Below is the card from the intermediate deck that compares the two top systems of defense against no trump with Meckwell.

CAPPELLETTI, DONT & MECKWELL

These three systems are in common use to interfere with your opponent's one no-trump bid.

Bid	Cappelletti	DONT (Disturb Opponent's No Trump)	Meckwell
X	penalty or equal hand	one-suiter, usually 6+ cards ①	long minor or both majors (5/4+)
2♣	one-suiter ①	clubs + 2nd suit, 5/4 or better ③	clubs + major, 5/4 or better ③
2♦	both majors	diamonds + major, 5/4 or better ③	diamonds + major, 5/4 or better ③
2♥	hearts + minor ②	both majors, 5/4 or better	natural hearts, usually 6 cards
2♠	spades + minor ②	weak 6+ spades	natural spades, usually 6 cards
2NT	both minors, 5/5	both minors, 5/5, or big hand	both minors, 5/5, or big hand

① To find out what your partner's unbid suit is, bid one suit higher than your partner's bid.

② To find out what your partner's other suit is, bid 2NT.

③ To find out what your partner's other suit is, bid the next higher suit.

④ To get clarification of overcaller's bid, bid 2♣.

If making a two-suit bid, it's best if the longer suit is the lower-ranking suit. Also, establish partnership agreement in advance on length of suits required for bids showing more than one suit and whether to use these bids in balancing seat or in both direct and balancing seats.

Meckwell is easy to add to your game. But even the best system of defense against no trump won't do you any good when you shouldn't have been bidding at all. Deciding whether to interfere or not is complicated and highly situational. Bear in mind that you are probably aiming for a part score or an acceptable sacrifice. Don't even think of interfering with a balanced hand. You need some shape if you're going to have any chance at all.

What is your vulnerability? If you are vulnerable, you're exposed to some real risk when you bid against a strong no trump opener. Down one, doubled and vulnerable, will result in a nasty -200 and down two doubled and vulnerable is an ugly -500.

What scoring system are you using? If you're playing for matchpoints, going down 500 points might be okay when the opponents have a guaranteed vulnerable game worth 600 points. If you're playing at IMPs, though, going down 500 could really hurt.

Are you in the balancing seat or the pass-out seat? You're much better off if the strong hand is on your right instead of your left. And if the partner of the no-trump opener has passed, your opponents might not be able to make the contract. At IMPs, you're probably better off defending. At matchpoints, you might want to grab a makeable part score