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This Week in Bridge

(417) Lebensohl over Reverses

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Level: 8 of 10 (4 of 6)

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General

When Opener makes a reverse at the 2-level, showing a strong distributional hand, it is extremely unlikely that 2NT will be the right place to play. Strong distributional hands are likely to want to play a game or play in one of their suits. So 2NT is not a good contact with this type of hand (in fact, a reverse is forcing to 3-minor, so 2NT is not a possible contract after a reverse). This means that if we use 2NT by Responder after a reverse as a conventional bid, we will not be giving up much. We like to use bids as conventions that are not good final contracts. We use this 2NT bid as a relay and will use our same general Lebensohl (or Simple-sohl) structure, where 2NT shows a bad hand and a desire to stop the auction below game. Let's look at how to recycle or Lebensohl tool in these reverse auctions.

Lebensohl 2NT over Reverses

The best way to explain how we can use 2NT and define our agreements after a reverse by Opener is to start with a common example.

Example 1

1♦ 1♠
2♥ __?

In this auction, we use 2NT to show a bad hand, usually 5 to 7- points – not enough to game force if Opener has a minimum reverse. This 2NT bid by Responder asks Opener to bid 3♣, a relay. After using this 2NT bid, Responder can now show where they would like to play the hand:

- With long ♣, Responder can pass 3♣.
- With a couple of ♦ (2+cards) Responder can relay and then bid 3♦ to sign off in 3♦.
- With a bad hand with a ♥ fit (4-card) Responder can relay and then bid 3♥.



Responder's Bids Above 2NT

Since 2NT is used to show all bad hands that want to play at the 3-level, then any bid above 2NT is natural and forcing.

Example 2

- 1♦ 1♠
2♥ ___?
- 3♦ 3+♦, Game Forcing, 7+ points
 - 3♥ 4+♥, Game Forcing (Stronger than 4♥ - Fast Arrival)
 - 3♠ Good 6+♠, Game Forcing, 7+ points

Other Bids by Responder

Responder can also choose to rebid their suit at the 2-level (in our example 2♠). This shows a decent 5-card or any 6-card suit (if only 5-cards it is good enough to play opposite Hx – Opener will raise on Hx or better). This 2-level rebid is forcing for one round (1F) and shows not a good enough hand or suit to jump to 3♠.

Example 3

♠ AJT76
♥ J5
♦ Q98
♣ 532

Responder could also bid the fourth suit. This is game forcing and a “catch all” bid. It is artificial, but frequently natural – since Responder has forcing bids available in all the other suits.

Ingbergman (Cheaper of 2NT and 4th Suit)

Some players choose to try to optimize their bidding further. They do so by using the cheaper of 2NT or the 4th suit as the “bad hand” bid. This allows for a more space-saving auction in certain situations.

Example 4

1♣ 1♠
2♦ 2♥*

Instead of 2NT, we can use this 2♥ bid to show a bust hand (to stop the auction below game). This agreement is both difficult on memory and adds some complexity for only a small gain. It is best left to experienced players in regular partnerships.



Conclusion

When Opener makes a reverse, then as Responder we are forced to make a second bid, no matter how weak of a hand we hold. Lebensohl 2NT (2NT as a relay) is a useful agreement in these situations. It continues the modern theme of 2NT as a “convention not a contract.” Specifically, Lebensohl is valuable over a reverse in that it allows us to show many different suits in both forcing and non-forcing manners, as Lebensohl generally does after a 1NT opening bid. This is an excellent gadget that can greatly improve our bidding for both game and slam in these strong distributional hand auctions.