

System Manual

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General Description of The System

Five Card Majors

Weak No Trump

Short, Non-Forcing Club

Green Sticker

Last Update: 22/12/2012

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Opening Balanced Hands

Definitions

As in every system, all 4333 and 4432 shaped hands are treated as balanced at all levels. In this system all 5332 shaped hands are also treated as balanced even where the five card suit is a major. At the 2NT level and above, 5422 shaped hands *may* be opened as balanced if there is no better way to describe them. Such shaped hands at and below 19HCPs are never treated as balanced nor are any hands with singletons or 6 card suits at *any* level. Therefore, all balanced openings absolutely guarantee at least 2 cards in every suit and absolutely deny the possibility of any suit being longer than 5 cards.

High Card Points (HCPs)	Open	System On?
12-14	1NT***	Yes
15-17	1 suit & reverse into 1NT*	No
18-19	1 suit & reverse into 1NT**	No
20-22	2NT	Yes
23-24	Multi 2D-2NT	Yes
25+	Game Forcing 2C-2NT	Yes

**If you have 15-17 points and partner's intervention prevents you from reversing into 1NT, go ahead and bid 2NT. If your opponents intervention prevents you from reversing into 1NT, you must pass unless partner has bid in which case you can double to show your hands shape and strength.*

***If you have 18-19 and partner bids at the 2 level, your 2NT is game forcing.*

****In third seat, the 1NT opening can be 11-14. This must be announced.*

System of Responses to 1NT

2C is Stayman.

2D is a Transfer to 2H.

2H is a Transfer to 2S.

2S is a minor suit runoff. Opener bids 3C. Responder passes or corrects to 3D.

2NT is invitational to 3NT (11-12 points).

3C/D/H/S are slam tries.

3NT is to play.

4C in Gerber.

4NT is Quantitative to 6NT (19-20 points).

5NT is Quantitative to 7NT (23-24 points)

System of Responses to 2NT, 2D-2NT or 2C-2NT

3C is Puppet Stayman.

3D is a Transfer to 3H.

3H is a Transfer to 3S.

3S is Minor Suit Stayman (see below)

3NT is to play.

4C/D/H/S are slam tries (N.B. 4C is not Gerber)

4NT is Quantitative to 6NT.

5NT is Quantitative to 7NT.

Effect of Interference

A penalty double of 1NT switches the system off and activates Helvic. However, a double which merely shows a long suit does not switch the system off.

An overcall of 1NT switched the system off and activates Rubensohl with one exception which is that a 2C overcall showing an unspecified long suit does not interfere with the system.

Note that at any given time one, and only one, of the system of responses to NT or Helvic or Rubensohl must be active.

Stayman (Standard)

In this system, Stayman is played over 1NT openings and overcalls. Higher level openings and overcalls use Puppet Stayman.

When partner opens 1NT, and assuming no interference, 2C shows;

- Invitational (11-12) or game going (13+) HCPs and;
- A 4 card major.
- Because we use transfers, it denies a 5 card major except in one specific circumstance (see below).

Opener's Responses

- 2D denies a 4 card major.
- 2H shows a 4 card heart suit and says nothing about spades.
- 2S shows a 4 card spade suit and denies a 4 card heart suit.

Responders rebid

- 2NT is invitational and denies support for opener's bid major (if he bid one).
- 3 of opener's bid major shows support and invitational points.
- 4 of opener's bid major shows support and game going points.
- 3NT shows game going points and denies support for any major shown by opener.

Note that if opener is 4-4 in the majors, he bids hearts and rebids spades if responder bids 2NT or 3NT.

What if responder is 5-4 in the majors?

In general, he transfers to his 5 card major but there is one exception. If responder has invitational points, 5 spades and 4 hearts, he has no way of showing that using transfers (he can show that shape but in the process sets up a game force!). So with 5 spades and 4 hearts and 11-12 points, responder should bid 2C (Stayman). If opener bids either major, all is well but if opener bids 2D (doesn't he always!), bid 2S showing this shape and strength. Opener should now know precisely what to do.

Garbage Stayman

Suppose partner opens a weak 1NT and you are sat there looking at little or nothing (Garbage). You know 1NT is going down rather spectacularly and at this point you are rather hoping that your RHO doubles so you can “wriggle” into Helvic! No such luck. Is there anything you can do? Unfortunately, the usual answer is no but have a look at the shape of your worthless hand. On a very good day, it will be 4450 i.e. four of each major, 5 diamonds and a club void. If that is so, bid 2C and pass whatever partner bids! Initially he won't be impressed but have a think about it. If he bids a major, you have a 4-4 fit - happy days! The worst that can happen is a 5-2 diamond fit which is still a lot better than 1NT with 12-14 points between the partnership! Even with 4441 (singleton club) you are probably better off and it's still worth the risk with something like 3352. It doesn't come up often but when it does, it's most gratifying!

Puppet Stayman

This is designed to find a 5-3 major fit after a balanced opening. In principle, it can be played over a 1NT opening but the benefits are marginal and the cost is high in that it gives away a lot of information and also deprives us of the 3C slam hunting bid. So in this system, Puppet Stayman is played only after 2NT and higher balanced opening sequences i.e. 2D-2H/S-2NT or 2C-2D-2NT and over genuine (as opposed to unusual) 2NT overcalls (i.e. in the balancing position).

Responder, who *must have game going points*, initiates the sequence by bidding 3C over opener's 2NT (or higher sequence). Responder is in effect saying to opener do you have a 5 or 4 card major(s)?

- Opener with a 5 card major bids it.
- Opener with one or both 4 card majors bids 3D.
- Opener with neither a 5 or 4 card major signs off in 3NT.
- Responder with only a 3 card major either bids game in it if partner has shown 5 of his suit or else sign off in 3NT.
- Responder with a 4 card major, on hearing partner bid 3D, bids the major he *has not* got at the 3 level, allowing partner to bid game in the *real major* and *right siding the contract*.
- Responder with both 4 card majors and no slam interest, on hearing his partner bid 3D, bids 4D and lets opener pick his game.
- Responder with both 4 card majors and slam interest, on hearing partner bid 3D, bids 4C.

This is all lovely but remember that the partnership is painting a pretty vivid picture of its card distribution and in the process, may provide information which will allow competent opponents to find a killing defense they might otherwise have missed - so be careful.

Checkback Stayman

This applies to two very specific auctions as follows;

1m-(pass)-1M-(pass)-1NT- pass-2C or
1m-(pass)-1M-(pass)-2NT- pass-3C

The club bid is Checkback Stayman. Opener has denied a 5 card major but could have a 3 or 4 card major. Responder has promised a four card major but could be longer. Opener has reversed into NT. Responder now bids checkback. By doing so, he promises *either* that his major is a 5 card suit *or* that he holds 4 of the other major. He is “checking back” with opener to see if a major fit exists, either 5-3 with responder’s bid major or 4-4 with the other major.

Opener’s responses over 2C are as follows;

- 2D says sorry partner, I have neither 3 of your bid major nor 4 of the other major and I’m minimum for my 1NT reverse (15 or “bad” 16).
- 2NT Ditto but I’m maximum (17 or “good” 16).
- 2 of responder’s major shows support (3 cards).
- 2 of the other major shows 4 cards and **denies 3 of responder’s major**.

Over 3C the options are obviously more limited;

- 3NT to play (no fit for either major).
- 3 of responder’s major promises 3 cards.
- 3 of the other major shows 4 cards and denies 3 of responder’s bid major.

Bidding the other major denies 3 card support for responder’s major so with both 3 of responder’s major and 4 of the other, give priority to supporting responder’s major and show the second major on the next round e.g. opener has 17 points, 2C, 4D, 3H & 4S. The auction goes;

1D-1H-1NT-2C-2H-3NT-4S

- Opener’s 1D shows 4+ diamonds and denies a 5 card major,
- Responder shows 4+ hearts,
- Opener reverses into 1NT 15-17 points,
- Responder’s 2C is Checkback promising either 5 hearts or 4 spades,
- Opener’s 2H promises 3 hearts,
- Responder’s 3NT shows that he does not have 5 hearts so he must have 4 spades
- Opener can now correct to 4S.

Minor Suit Stayman

This is a 3S bid over a 2NT opening. It asks opener if he has a 4+ card minor. If he does not, opener bids 3NT, otherwise he bids his minor. With both minors, he bids 4C. In order to use this gadget, you need 4-5 in the minors (or better) and slam interest.

Transfers (aka Jacoby Transfers or Red Suit Transfers)

This system is tremendously useful after a 1NT opening allowing the partnership to exchange information very accurately while right siding the contract. It is also used over 2NT openings, 2D-2H/S-2NT and 2C-2D-2NT sequences, 1NT overcalls and genuine (i.e. not unusual) 2NT overcalls.

When partner opens 1NT, and assuming there is no intervention, 2D shows 5+ hearts and instructs partner to bid 2H while 2H shows 5+ spades and instructs partner to bid 2S. Opener does as he is told and at this point has absolutely no clue as to partner's strength.

Responder's continuations (1NT-2D-2H used as example, 1NT-2H-2S analogous)

- Pass - A weak takeout
- 2NT - Invitational (11-12) points, nothing more to say. Opener can pass, bid 3NT, 3M or 4M.
- 2S - Invitational with 4+ spades as well as 5 hearts. (Analogous sequence is 1NT-2H-2S-3H except this is game forcing).
- 3C - Game forcing with a 4+ club side suit.
- 3D - Game forcing with a 4+ diamond side suit.
- 3H - Invitational with extra heart length (6+).
- 3S - Game forcing with 4+ spades as well as 5 hearts.
- 3NT - Pass or correct to 4H.
- 4H - Sign-off promising 6+ hearts.

Bouncing & Breaking

- If opener has 4 cards in the major he is being transferred into and 14 points, he can convey this piece of good news by bouncing (aka super-accepting) the transfer e.g. 1NT-2D-3H.
- If opener has 4 cards in the major he is being transferred into, 14 points and a small doubleton, he can convey this piece of even better news by breaking the transfer, bidding his small doubleton as cheaply as possible e.g. 1NT-2D-3C shows 4 hearts, 14 points and an xx club doubleton.

Gerber & Quantitative Bidding

These are slam hunting bids employed by responder to a balanced opener. They can cause great confusion so in this system, the rules governing their use are clearcut and strict.

Gerber

Gerber can cause great confusion and the advantages of using it in modern systems are very small. Historically, Blackwood was the first ace asking bid but problems arose with the introduction of the 4NT quantitative raise, necessitating the invention of an alternative ace asking bid over NT. When John Gerber described the bid, he advocated that all 4C bids should be regarded as ace asking. In the past, Gerber was promoted by some as an alternative to Blackwood, with the advantage of keeping the auction lower. That was all well and good then but bidding now is more accurate and of necessity, more complex and Gerber is incompatible with many modern uses of 4C including cue-bids and splinters. Moreover, gadgets such as Redwood, Kickback and Italian Cue Bids combined with Roman Keycard Blackwood have addressed most of the issues around aborted slam hunting sequences ending too high. With modern bidding techniques, the need for Gerber is vanishing and it is becoming increasingly difficult to justify the loss of a natural 4C bid, especially over high level NT openings e.g. partner opens 2NT and you have 11 points and a beautiful 6 card club suit. How do you investigate a club slam if 3C is some sort of Stayman and 4C is Gerber? Ultimately, there is no right or wrong answer to this and it comes down to partnership agreement. One modern approach is to take the line that if a 4C bid can be anything else, it's not Gerber. That's fine but it's too ambiguous for my liking. An alternative extreme is to completely abandon Gerber. For now, I propose that we restrict the use of Gerber to one situation and one only which is that *a direct 4C response to a 1NT opening is Gerber and nothing else is*. The response to the 4C Gerber ace ask is stepped;

- Step 1 (4D) - None or all 4 aces
- Step 2 (4H) - 1 ace
- Step 3 (4S) - 2 aces
- Step 3 (4N) - 3 aces

A 5NT bid now asks for kings and the responses are the same albeit 1 level higher.

Quantitative Raises

So called because they simply show HCP ranges while agreeing NT. So strictly speaking, 1NT-2NT and 1NT-3NT are examples of quantitative raises. However, the usual meaning is applied to slam hunting situations where 4NT is an invitation to 6NT and 5NT an invitation to 7NT. Note that while 4NT can be passed, 5NT cannot; you must bid either 6NT or 7NT. It is critical to be able to discern when 4NT is quantitative and when it is Blackwood. The logical test to apply when partner bids 4NT is to ask yourself "Has my bidding to date unequivocally indicated that I am balanced?" If the answer is yes, then 4NT is quantitative. The alternative question is "Have we agreed a suit or have either of us insisted upon a suit (e.g. 2C-2D-3H)". If the answer to that is yes, then 4NT is unequivocally RKCB. In cases where there is real doubt (this should be rare), go

with RKCB if for no other reason that partner will immediately know what you are doing and may be able to rescue the situation. For clarity, I am listing auctions where 4NT bid is unequivocally Quantitative;

- 1NT-4NT (opener is 12-14 balanced)
- 2NT-4NT (opener is 20-22 balanced)
- 2D-2x-2NT-4NT (opener starts off as a Multi and then reveals that he is a 23-24 balanced type)
- 2C-2D-2NT-4NT (opener starts off as a non-specific strong hand and then reveals he is a balanced 25+)
- 1x-1y-1NT-4NT (opener starts off promising 2+ clubs if x=C, 4+ diamonds if x=D or 5+ of the major if x=H/S and then reverses into 1NT showing a balanced shape and 15-17 HCPs)
- 1x-1y-2NT-4NT (as above but 18-19 HCPs)
- 1NT-2C-2D-4NT (responder looks for a major and on failing to find one makes a quantitative raise. Note that there is no genuine suit bid here but in any event, the 1NT opening guarantees a balanced hand)

Other Opening Bids

1 Level Openings

1C - 12+ points, 2+ Clubs	11
1D - 12+ points, 4+ Diamonds	11
1H/S - 12+ points, 5+ of the bid major	12

Light openings at the 1 level

Should have 7 or fewer losers in first seat.

8 losers are acceptable in third seat. Must have a rebid.

2 Level openings

2C - Unconditional Game Force	16
2D - Multi	17
2H/S - Muiderberg	19

3 Level openings

3C/D/H/S - Pre-emptive	21
3NT - Gambling	23

4 Level openings

4C/D - Namyats	24
4H/S - Pre-emptive	22
4NT - Acol	33

5 Level openings

5C/D - Pre-emptive	22
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One Level Minor Openings

1D Promises opening points and 4+ diamonds.

1C Promises opening points but could be short (as short as 2 cards) and should be announced as such.

Responses

- 1NT is 6-9 HCPs with nothing better to say. Denies 4 of a major. Not necessarily balanced. Does not necessarily deny support (see inverted minor raises below)
- 2NT balanced, no 4 card major, no support, 10-12 HCPs (Jacoby 2NT is not used over minor openings).
- 3NT ditto but 13-15.
- Change of suit is forcing, 6+ at 1 level, 10+ at 2 level.
- Single Jump Shift is weak.
- Double Jump Shifts are splinters. These show a singleton or void in the bid suit, game going points to the 5 level so probably 15+ and 4+ support for diamonds or 6+ for spades. Remember, the first port of call for game in a partnership with a minor fit is 3NT, not 5C/D. Bidding should always respect this so bids that consume space required to find 3NT are expensive, none more so than splinters. In reality, a splinter is rarely the correct response to a minor opening.
- Raises are inverted - see below.
- 4D over 1C or 4H over 1D is Redwood.

Inverted Minor Raises

The idea here is to sniff out 3NT games, falling back on minor games only when that proves impossible. Over 1D, 2D promises 10+ points and 4+ diamonds. It absolutely denies a 4 card major. 2C over 1C is the same but you need 5+ clubs because partner "could be short". Ideally you have 6+ but we don't live in an ideal world!

Responses to 1D-2D (1C-2C analogous)

- 3D says "I'm minimum so unless you are very strong, please pass!". This is the only non-forcing response.
- 2H/2S/3C all show stoppers in the bid suit and deny stoppers in any suit skipped.
- 2NT is 15-17 balanced.
- 3NT is 18-19 balanced.

If opener shows a stopper, responder can show (or deny) his stoppers or bid NT. The conversation continues until either partner bids either 3NT or a minor game.

1D-3D shows 5+ diamonds and 0-5 points. Responder is saying to opener "I'm not interested in 3NT even if you have 19 points" so opener is expected to pass. 1C-3C is similar but promises 6+ clubs. Where responder has 6-9 points and support he bids 1NT. So if you hear that bid after you open 1 of a minor, remember that partner is not necessarily denying support, as he would be doing after a major opening.

Interference switches all of this off and bidding reverts to its natural meaning.

1 Level Major Openings

Promise 5+ cards in the bid Major and 7 or fewer losers.

Responses Available (assuming opener's LHO passes)

- Pass - 0-5 points i.e. 11+ losers. Does not deny support. With support and 10 losers, upgrade and make a single raise.

Bids Denying Secondary (i.e. 3 Card) Support

- 1NT - Denies 3 card support, denies 4+ spades over 1H, promises 6-9 points, does not necessarily promise a balanced hand nor does it promise a stopper if they have bid. It is not therefore a true NT bid but rather a dustbin bid showing 6-9 points with nothing better to say. It is a limit bid and therefore non-forcing. • Change Suit at the 1 level i.e. 1S over 1H. Promises 4+ spades and 6+ points. Unlimited so forcing.
- Change Suit at the 2 level i.e. 2 over 1 response. Promises 4+ of the bid suit and 10+ points. Unlimited so forcing. Note that uniquely, a bid of 2H over 1S promises 5+ hearts as well as 10+ points because it uses up so much bidding space.
- Single Jump Shift is weak.
- 3NT is natural, promising; 13-15 points, balanced shape, denying 3 card support except possibly with a 4333 shape. Limited so non-forcing.

Bids Showing Secondary Support (Hearts used in examples, Spades analogous)

- Single Raise (1H-2H) – 3+ hearts and 9-10 losers
- Jump Raise (1H-3H) – 3+ hearts and 8 losers
- Delayed Game Raise (1H-2x-2/3y-4H) – 3 hearts exactly and game values. Slam possible.

Bids Showing Primary Support (i.e. 4+ card support)

- Pre-emptive Raise (1H-4H) – 4+ hearts but weak. Denies slam interest. Non-forcing and opener is expected to pass.
- Jacoby 2NT (1H-2NT) – 4+ hearts, game values and possible slam. Game-forcing.
- Splinters (double jump shift i.e. 1H-3S or 1H-4C/D) – Usually 4+ hearts (but could be 3 with 2 top honours) and a feature (i.e. singleton or void) in the bid suit. Game-forcing.

If opener's LHO intervenes

- Single raise is unaffected.
- **Jacoby 2NT is off** and a 2NT bid now reverts to its natural meaning, showing 10-12 points and a balanced shape. Limited so non forcing.
- A cue bid e.g. 1H-(2C)-3C, which is of course forcing, now becomes available and is used to describe **all** hands with secondary or better support and 8 or fewer losers, **therefore**;
- A jump raise i.e. 1H-(2C)-3H now becomes pre-emptive showing a weak hand with support. Opener will usually pass.
- A double jump raise i.e. 1H-(2C)-4H remains pre-emptive but is more shapely. Again, opener will usually pass.

Jacoby 2NT

This is a bid of 2NT in response to partner's 1H or 1S opening. However note that any intervention (including Dbl) switches this convention off so in those circumstances, a 2NT bid reverts to its natural meaning (10-12 balanced and denying any support). It is unconditionally game-forcing and promises;

- Primary (i.e. 4+ card) support.
- Game values or better.
- Possible slam interest.

Openers Responses (again assuming no intervention). 1H-2NT used in examples, 1S-2NT analogous)

- 4H - no slam interest. Non-forcing.
- 3H - slam interest and extra heart length i.e. 6+. Forcing.
- 3NT - slam interest and exactly 5 hearts. Forcing.
- 3C/3D/3S - slam interest with a feature (singleton or void) in the bid suit. Forcing.
- 4C/4D/4S - A high quality (2 top honours) 5 card suit. By definition, opener also has a feature since he can only be 5521 or 5530 but priority is given to showing the high quality suit. Slam is highly likely.

Continuation

Responder may sign off in 4H if he has nothing better to say. Any other bid is control-showing or ace-asking.

Splinter Bids

In simple terms, a splinter is a double jump in a new suit i.e. a double jump-shift (e.g. 1H-3S or 1H-4D).

Actually, the strict definition is that a splinter is jump in a new suit *one higher than is needed to establish a force*. The distinction not pedantic and will arise later in this article.

A splinter bid shows the following;

- Strong support for partner's last bid suit i.e. game going values and usually 4 card support (but excellent 3 card support will do - something like AKJ).
- A feature i.e. a singleton or void, in the bid suit. Note that a feature and a control are not the same thing - a feature is a control but a control is not necessarily a feature, it can also be an A or K.
- Some slam interest but usually only if partner's hand is revalued upwards by the feature. Ideally partner has xxx or perhaps Axx in the feature suit so now 1 or 2 losers have disappeared. On the other hand if partner has something like KQ in the feature suit, that's too bad, the feature has done little or nothing to help them.
- Hands with strong slam interest should not use splinters, even if (as they often do) they have the correct shape, but find some other gadget such as Jacoby 2NT.
- A splinter may be made by responder over opener (e.g. 1S-4C) or by opener over responder (e.g. 1D-1H-4C).

- Where a simple change of suit bid would be forcing, a single jump-shift is a splinter e.g. 1S-2H-3D is a forcing sequence since the 3D bid, a new suit at the 3 level, is forcing; therefore 1S-2H-4D is a splinter showing support for hearts and a diamond feature i.e. a jump in a new suit one higher than is needed to establish a force.
- This also applies on responder's side. The sequence 1D-1H-1S-2C is forcing since the 2C bid is 4SF, therefore 1D-1H-1S-3C is a splinter, a jump in a new suit one higher than is needed to establish a force, showing support for spades and a club feature.
- Where a game force is already in train, a single jump shift is also a splinter e.g. 2C-2D-2H-3S. That 3S bid is a splinter showing a heart fit and a spade feature. The 2D responder has no other reason to jump!

Splinters can be easy to miss. To avoid confusion, always ask yourself why partner has jumped, be it a single or double jump. If it's the latter, it's easy but if it's the former, spend a moment analysing it. Is it a force or a splinter? Watch out for spades. It's very easy to miss a jump in a sequence like 1C-1H-2S or even a double jump as in 1H-3S. The STOP card is supposed to be for your opponent's benefit but it's a good habit to always use it when jumping, and always note when partner uses it.

It will be noted that in all the examples, splinters are being used to show support for majors. This is no co-incidence for while it is possible to splinter over a minor, it is rarely correct to do so as it consumes too much bidding space when the usual target is 3NT as opposed to 5C/5D. The other reason to avoid splinters over minors is that there is a possibility of confusion with Redwood. 1C-3D is ok as it is clearly a splinter but what about 1H-2C-4D. Is that 4D over 2C a splinter showing support for clubs and a diamond feature or is it Redwood, asking for aces with a club slam in mind? There is no logical way to figure it out so we have to revert to a rule which is that, in this system, if it could be a splinter or Redwood, it's Redwood.

Finally, it may have occurred to you that in this system, a single jump shift by opener's partner is not a game force but a very weak bid. Don't go there. For the purposes of using and understanding splinters, simply ignore the fact that we play weak jump shifts, in fact pretend we don't. Splinters are confusing enough without throwing weak jump-shifts into the mix!

Weak Jump Shifts

Traditionally an immediate jump shift by responder to partner's opening bid is strong. In reality it doesn't happen much and when it does, there are equally good if not better ways to describe the hand. In keeping with modern pre-emptive style, this system uses Weak Jump Shifts. A weak jump shift shows a hand with 2-5 points and denies support for partner's opening suit. The bid guarantees 6+ cards in the suit bid.

Openers Responses

- Opener with no fit will generally pass, even with a fairly strong hand.
- Opener with a 3+ card fit may raise preemptively to the 3 level.
- Opener may raise partner's major bid to game and nobody except him knows whether this is purely pre-emptive, on the basis of a 4 card holding in partner's suit, or genuine on the basis of a fit (2 cards+) and 19 points!
- A strong opener with no fit and extra length may rebid his own suit.
- Finally, an opener with genuine game aspirations may initiate an Ogust sequence by bidding 2NT. The responses are as usual but note that minimum is 2-3 and maximum 4-5, so you can't have a good suit unless you are a maximum, so no bids above 3H are necessary! The responses therefore are;
- 3C minimum & poor suit
- 3D maximum and poor suit
- 3H maximum and good suit

Remember, that as with all pre-emptive actions (and this is as pre-emptive as it gets!) you must be sensible and pay due attention to vulnerability.

The 2C Opening

This is in essence similar to a SAYC 2C opening. However, because this system uses a Multi 2D opening to show 23-24 count balanced hands and also powerful minor hands, the meaning of the bid is a bit more precise than usual and is as follows;

- A 25+ HCP hand with a balanced shape (incl. 5422 if there's no better way to describe it).
- A Major 1 suiter with 4- losers
- A Minor one suiter with 3- losers (4 loser minor one suiters use the Multi)
- A two suiter with 4- losers and about 20+ HCPs

Because of the incorporation of the Multi into this system, *all 2C openings are now unconditionally game forcing* including 2C-2D-2NT since this requires opener to have 25+ HCPs. Another useful feature is that even the strongest balanced hands open 2C and reverse into 2NT (as opposed to 3NT), thus allowing Puppet Stayman and Transfers to be used in all cases. The more conventional approach of opening 25+ balanced hands 2C and reversing into 3NT kills Transfers and Stayman.

Responses

- 2D is the most common response. This is **not** a negative but a waiting bid which simply denies a hand eligible for any of the bids below.
- 2NT shows a balanced hand with 8+ points. Note that slam is already on opposite a 25+ point balanced opener, the only question is 6NT or 7NT?
- 2H/S or 3C/D show excellent suits, usually 6 cards (solid 5 would be ok) with 2+ top honors.
- 3H/S or 4C/D are exceedingly rare bids, showing long solid suits and absolutely demanding game in the suit bid. They are highly invitational to slam and all subsequent bids (other than sign-off in the game in question) are control showing or ace asking.

Continuation after 2C-2D

2NT shows a balanced 25+ hand and switches on the full system of responses to NT openings. Other bids are natural and the *principle of slow arrival* applies i.e. stronger hands proceed as slowly as possible so jumps to game suggest minimum type hands.

Multi 2D Opening Bid

This shows either;

- A weak 2 in the majors or;
- A balanced hand with 23-24 HCPs or;
- A strong, near game forcing, hand in one of the minors i.e 6 cards+, solid or near solid, 4-5 losers.

It says absolutely nothing about diamonds.

Responder assumes it is a weak 2 in the majors in the first instance.

Responses available are;

- 2H shows a hand with no interest in progressing further if opener has a weak 2 in hearts and which may or may not bid on if opener's suit is spades.
- 2S shows a hand with no interest in progressing further if opener has a weak 2 in spades but is happy to play at the 3 level or higher in hearts.
- 2NT shows good hand (16+) and requires opener to bid again.
- 3C or 3D are natural and forcing. Opener will show his suit if weak (3H/S) or his type if strong (3NT, 4C/D).
- 3H is a pre-emptive raise in either hearts or spades. Opener passes or corrects or shows a strong type.
- 3S is natural and invitational.
- 3NT is to play, generally based on a long minor.
- 4C asks opener to set up a transfer to his major and declares at least some slam interest.
- 4D asks opener to bid his major and denies slam interest.
- 4H or 4S are to play.

Opener's Re-bids

Where responder has bid a major, opener will usually pass or correct if he is a weak 2 or bid NT or a minor as cheaply as possible if he is strong. However, there are two sequences where a more elaborate scheme applies;

After 2D-2S

Opener with a weak 2 in spades passes. A strong balanced opener bids 2NT and a strong minor opener bids 3C/D. If opener has a weak 2 in hearts, he raises to 4H if maximal (8+) or else bids 3H.

After 2D-2NT

- 3C shows a maximal (8+) weak 2 in hearts
- 3D shows a maximal weak 2 in spades
- 3H shows a sub-maximal weak 2 in hearts
- 3S shows a sub-maximal weak 2 in spades
- 3NT shows the strong balanced opening type
- 4 C/D shows the strong minor opening type.

Interference

If the 2Ds LHO doubles, two new bids become available in addition to the normal scheme (which stays intact);

- Pass shows a hand playable in diamonds
- Redbl asks partner to show his suit if weak or type if strong

If the 2Ds LHO bids 3H/S or 4H/S, double says pass if your suit is the one bid by the opposition, otherwise bid your suit.

Muiderberg 2H/S Opening

These show exactly 5 of the bid major plus a 4+ card minor, 5-10 HCPs concentrated in the suits in question. Responses are mostly natural with three exceptions; 2NT says “name your minor” either for sign off or to bid on, 3C says “I’m 15-17 with no support for your major”, 3D says “I’m 15-17 with support”

Responses to 2H

- Pass Weak with support or tolerance.
- 2S Natural & Forcing.
- 2NT Relay instructing opener to identify his minor.
- 3C Relay showing invitational strength (15-17) and denying support.
- 3D Relay showing invitational strength (15-17) and support (3 cards+).
- 3H Purely pre-emptive.
- 3S Natural & game forcing.
- 3NT To play.
- 4m Splinter.
- 4M To play.

Over a 2S opening, responses are identical except;

- Pass is simply weak.
- 3H is natural & invitational.
- 3S is pre-emptive.

After 2H-2NT-3C

- Pass Weak with clubs.
- 3D Natural & forcing.
- 3H Slam hunting.
- 3S Interested in 3NT and showing a spade stopper.
- 3NT To play.
- 4C Slam hunting.
- 5C To play.

After 2H-2NT-3D the responses are identical except;

- Pass is simply weak.
- 4C is natural & forcing.
- 4D is slam hunting.
- 5D To play.

After 2S-2NT-3C

- Pass Weak
- 3D Natural & forcing.
- 3H Natural & game forcing.
- 3S Slam hunting.
- 4C Slam hunting.
- 5C To play.

After 2S-2NT-3D

- Pass Weak.
- 3H Natural & game forcing.
- 3S Slam hunting.
- 4D Slam hunting.
- 5D To play

In essence, the 2NT bidder is either weak and looking for the best place to play or strong. An invitational responder uses 3C or 3D.

After 2H/S-3C

- Pass Minimum with clubs.
- 3D Minimum with diamonds.
- 3H Maximum with clubs.
- 3S Maximum with diamonds.

Pre-emptive Opening Bids

In this system, All 3 level openings, Major 4 level openings and Minor 5 Level openings are pre-emptive. All show hands with fewer than 10 HCPs. The 3 level openings promise 7 card suits, the higher level pre-empts are more shapely but no stronger.

3 Level Pre-empts

Classically, a vulnerable 3-level pre-emptive opening promises 7 tricks while a non-vulnerable one needs only 6. This rule tends to be bent more than most but it is still prudent in first/second seat. In third seat, many players shade it. In fourth seat, generally only open preemptively if you expect to make, assuming partner has his fare share of the outstanding values, which is generally a fair assumption, otherwise one of your opponents would probably have opened. You might open at the three level with a hand that just qualifies for a one level opening to keep them out. Ideally, the pre-emptive opener does not have an outside four card major. Following this rule makes partner's life easier when it comes to responding.

Responses

The pre-emptive opener will not bid again so responder assumes complete control. Opener is essentially advertising a hand that is useless in anything other than his bid suit so you generally go along with that and either pass or raise. The latter may be constructive or simply an exercise in upping the pre-empt, only responder knows which. A change of suit bid is rare and forcing. Remember that a "good" partner won't have a 4 card major when contemplating this. To bid 3NT, you really need to see 9 tricks in your own hand or with fewer, have enough of partner's suit to run it. Remember, by definition, partner has no outside entries. Over 3H or 3S, 4NT is RKCB. However, over 3C or 3D Redwood is used as the ace asking bid.

Interference

The advantage you have when they overcall is that they are often doing so based on very incomplete information. Don't help them. For example, if they overcall 3H over partner's 3D and you are looking at four nice hearts in a good hand, resist the temptation to double unless you are confident you can beat anything they try to escape into. Even then, it may pay to pass smoothly in tempo. Overcaller's partner may raise to 4H and now you can pounce. In other circumstances, when contemplating defending their overcall, assume that partner's hand will be of no help at all and if, on that basis, it seems very likely they will make, give careful consideration to sacrificing.

Higher Level Pre-empts

4 level major pre-empts are the same but promise 8 cards. Note however that opener has now unequivocally set his suit as the one the partnership will play in, therefore any change of suit response is a cue bid and 4NT is RKCB. In this system, 4 level minor openings are not natural pre-empts but are Namyats, so the only minor pre-empts available are at the 5 level. This means that 5C/5D openings are weak (9-) showing a long minor, as opposed to classic Acol where such openings may have outside values. This is not a major problem as strong minor openings are catered for within the Multi 2D opening.

The Gambling 3NT Opening

This shows a long (7+) solid minor with little or nothing outside. Vulnerable, you should have the top 4 honors but it is ok to use this bid missing the jack if NV. Responder with an entry to the minor in question passes. If the identity of the minor is unclear, responder must have at least one entry to both. By definition, opener has no outside entry so if responder has no entry to the minor(s) he must take opener out into 4C which opener will pass or correct to 4D. If responder leaves 3NT in and it is doubled, he can reconsider bidding 4C. If responder considers slam is a prospect, he has, in addition to the usual slam hunting arsenal, one special bid; 4D announces slam interest and asks opener to show a feature by bidding the feature suit or 4NT if 7222.

Namyats

This is Sam's lesser known convention (Namyats is Stayman spelled backwards!) This is an opening bid of 4C or 4D to show the majors. The meaning is quite precise;

4C shows a long (6-7+) solid (3+ top honors) heart suit with outside values such that the hand has precisely 5 losers. With one fewer loser, the opening would be 2C intending to rebid 3H, thus insisting on game/slam in hearts. With 6+ losers, the opening would be 1H. 4D is the same but showing spades.

Responding

Opener has absolutely set the trump suit so responder's only task is to find the correct level. Responder is usually well placed to do this; such is the precision of the opening in terms of trick taking strength. The 4C opening is used in the examples below but responses to 4D are analogous.

Over a 4C opening;

- If responder knows the appropriate level, he can just bid it i.e. 4H, 6H or 7H. However, this will wrong side the contract (i.e. put the strong hand on the table) so unless responder has good reason to do so (perhaps to protect a tenace) he should relay;
- If responder knows the correct level and wishes to right side the contract, he relays i.e. 4D, 6D or 7D and opener transfers to hearts.
- Responder can bid 4NT which is RKCB. Note that he already knows opener has 2 keycards plus the trump queen so he is really only interested in hearing a 5C or 5D response.
- Any other bid by responder has to be control (1st or 2nd round) showing, thus 4S shows a spade control, 5C shows a club control and denies a spade control if 4S was skipped, likewise 5D etc.
- In the face of intervention, responder is usually well placed to pass, bid on, double or bid 5D/H as required.

Forcing Sequences

One of the hallmarks of a well developed bidding system is the ability to make bids which will be seen by partner as unambiguously forcing. A number of such bids are lumped together on this page.

Responder's change of suit

When opener's partner responds by changing suit, this is a one round force. Therefore there is never a requirement for responder to jump-shift in order to force opener to bid on. A simple shift suffices. In most systems, the jump-shift response is used to show a powerhouse but an alternative, used in this system, is the weak jump-shift used to show a 6 card suit with fewer than 6 points. Where responder is a passed hand and therefore limited, opener may pass but will generally be reluctant to do so.

Reverses

If you open a suit, partner changes suit (forcing) and you now bid a third suit of higher rank than the first one, such that partner will have to go to the 3 level to show preference for the first suit, that is a reverse. Partner who is minded to show preference will often be quite weak and may be loath to go to the 3 level unless he knows you are strong. Therefore, to reverse, you must have 16+. Breaking this rule is one of the most efficient ways of destroying partnership trust! A reverse is always forcing for one round and in a situation where responder's first bid was at the 2 level e.g. 1H-2C-2S, it is game forcing since opener has 16+ and responder 10+. Note that 1C-1D-1S is not a reverse as partner can show preference for clubs at the 2 level.

Jump-Preference

Showing preference is, of course, not forcing - indeed it is just the opposite. In some systems, showing jump-preference is forcing but not here. Showing jump-preference is constructive but not forcing.

Bidding a New Suit at the 3 Level

The introduction of a new suit into the auction, by either partner, at the 3 level is unconditionally game forcing in most standard systems. It applies in this system with the exception of jump shift responses to opener which in this system are weak (and thus alterable) and can be passes.

Fourth Suit Forcing (4SF)

In an unopposed auction, when responder bids the fourth suit at the 2 or higher level, this is 4SF, a purely conventional bid which says nothing about the fourth suit but asks partner to further describe his hand. It is a forcing bid, depending on system, either for one round or to game but in this system it is unconditionally forcing to game. Why use it? The 4SF bidder knows that game values are present but is not certain which game. The most usual (but not the only) situation is that he knows the values are present for 3NT but is worried about the fourth suit. Whatever the 4SF bidder's motivation is, partner's duty is to further describe his hand and in the following order of priority; With a stopper in the fourth suit, bid 3NT.

Lacking that but with secondary support for responder's first bid suit, bid that suit.

Otherwise, with extra length in his own suit, rebid it.

The first action ends the auction, the others pass the decision back to the 4SF bidder. Occasionally, the 4SF bidder will now bid 3NT in the absence of confirmation of a stopper from opener. This indicates he has a single stop and passes the final decision back to opener who can either risk passing or plough on in his own suit.

Note that 1C-1D-1H-1S is not 4SF. If responder wishes to set up a game force in this situation, his second bid must be 2S.

Bids after 1x-3NT or 1x-1y-3NT

In both these situations, the 3NT bid is to play, often based on a long running minor. Any further bidding by the 3NT bidder's partner is slam-hunting and thus forcing.

Bids after partner reverses in 2NT

All such bid (short of game) are forcing e.g. 1C-1D-2NT-3H

Bids after partner reverses into 1NT

Normal bids can be passed but a jump bid is forcing e.g. 1D-1H-1NT-2S

Jump bids by opener in a new suit

These show rock crushers and are unconditionally game forcing e.g. 1H-2C-3D

Repeat of responder's suit

This is often weak except where it follows a jump by opener. Thus while 1D-1H-2D-2H is a weak sequence which opener can (probably should!) pass 1D-1H-3D-3H is forcing.

Responders reverse

Everyone knows that a reverse by opener is forcing but many don't seem to realise that the same applies to responder's reverse. A responder should not reverse unless strong and such a bid is a one round force e.g. 1D-2C-2H-2S

Trial Bids (Help suit trial bids)

These arise after low level major suit agreement sequences i.e. 1H-2H or 1S-2S. Opener will typically have a good hand, about 16 points and have a side suit where he fears 3 or so quick losers. If partner can help with this suit, by virtue of either high card strength or shortage, game may be on. To proceed, opener bids the suit he needs help in as cheaply as possible. Partner responds as follows;

- With 0-1 loser in the side suit, bid game.
- With 3 losers in the side suit, sign off in 3 of the agreed major.
- With 2 losers and a maximum for the 2 level bid (i.e. 9 losers or 9 points), bid game, otherwise sign off.

Note that opener must be happy to play at the 3 level in the face of a negative response from partner, otherwise he should have settled for the 2 level part score.

Note also that after 1H-3H or 1S-3S the bid of a new suit is not a trial bids but a control showing cue bid for slam.

Slam Bidding

In this system, Gerber is used only in the context of balanced hands and is dealt with, together with Quantitative Raises in that part of the system manual. This section deals with all other slam bidding techniques.

Control Showing Cue Bids (Italian)

When the partnership has agreed a suit at the 3 level or higher, the bid of any other suit is showing a control in that suit. The same applies after one member of the partnership has insisted on a suit. This system uses Italian style cue bids which show *first or second* round control, as opposed to the more usual method where first round controls are shown first followed by second round controls. Suits are bid up the line so skipping a suit denies *both* first and second round controls in that suit. One of the strengths of the Italian style is that totally unguarded suits are discovered quickly, often allowing the partnership to bale out in game e.g. 1H-3H-4C-4H. Opener here knows immediately that partner has no controls in spades and unless he has spades controlled, can immediately bale out in 4H.

The other big advantage is that if the partnership has all suits controlled at either the first or second round level, this too is discovered quickly so 4NT is still available. Italian style cue bids and Roman Key-Card Blackwood work particularly well together.

The down side is that you don't know whether partner is showing first or second round control, unless of course (as is often the case), you have a first or second round control in the suit in question yourself. This can be overcome if cue bidding continues to a higher level allowing the suit to be mentioned twice showing both first and second round control. However, this will usually be at the cost of bypassing 4NT.

Note that when the partnership agrees a suit at the 2 level e.g. 1H-2H, the bid of a new suit is not a control showing cue bid but a help asking trial bid.

Roman Key-Card Blackwood (RKCB 0314)

This is a version of Blackwood which allows the trump king and sometimes the queen to be shown. It works by promoting the King of trumps to Ace status. The 4 aces and trump king are renamed Key-Cards so the pack now contains 5 Key-Cards, 3 Kings, 4 Queens, 4 Jacks etc. The asking bid is 4NT. The responses are as follows;

- Step 1 i.e. 5C shows 0 or 3 key-cards (aide memoire – a club has 3 leaves).
- Step 2 i.e. 5D shows 1 or 4 key-cards (aide memoire – a diamond has 4 points).
- Step 3 i.e. 5H shows 2 key-cards.
- Step 4 i.e. 5S shows 2 key-cards and the trump queen.

This scheme of response is quite workable but there is a further elaboration available which can be used, subject to partnership agreement, as follows; After the 4NT asking bid, in addition to the responses described above, the following responses are available;

- 5NT shows 2 or 4 Keycards and an unspecified useful void.
- 6 of the non-trump suit shows 1 or 3 key-cards and a void in the bid suit. This is only usable if the void in question is in a suit lower ranking than the trump suit.
- 6 of the trump suit shows 1 or 3 keycards and a void in a higher ranking suit.

When to use it, when to avoid it?

Blackwood (of whatever flavor) is one of the most overused conventions in Bridge! Try to remember the following guidelines before pulling the 4NT card out of the bidding box;

- RKCB works best when you know that the partnership has either first or second round control of all suits, either because you can see them in your own hand or because they have been cue bid. Note that it doesn't matter whether the control is first round or second round. That's why Italian cue bids and RKCB work so well together.
- If you have reached 4S in cue bidding and there is still a suit whose control status is unknown to you, it is generally safer to continue cue bidding rather than bidding 4NT.
- Do not launch into RKCB straight away after finding your fit if you can show a control. Always show your controls first. So, for example, if you open 1H, partner responds 3H and you say 4NT, you are denying any controls in the side suits and partner will see it that way!
- Don't use RKCB if the identity of partner's key-card is vital (as opposed to just how many key-cards partner holds). Suppose you are heading for a heart slam holding AKJTxxxx of hearts, a spade void, AKQ in diamonds and xx in clubs. It is vital that partner has the club ace or king. If you bid 4NT and partner replies 5C (no key-card) or 5H/S (2 key-cards) you know exactly what to do but what if he replies 5D? You're stuffed. Now you know that partner has either the Club ace which is critical or the Spade Ace which is waste paper! You have absolutely no way of knowing which.
- Don't use RKCB if you are hunting for a minor slam and if partner's response might push you beyond 5 of your minor. Suppose you are

heading for a diamond slam missing 4 key-cards and you bid 4NT. If partner has 3 or 4 keycards, you're fine but what if he has 2? He will bid 5H that's what and now you are stuffed again only worse! You can't bid 5D so you are now stranded in 6D and you know you are going down even before you see dummy! In general RKCB is not great when you are hunting minor slams, which is where Redwood comes into play (see below).

- If hearts is the agreed suit and partner bids 4NT, be very wary of replying 5S as this might put you overboard. One solution is to employ full blown kickback (see below). The other inelegant but not unreasonable answer is to agree that all 2 key-card containing hands in this specific situation just respond 5H, even if the trump queen is held. This may result in missing the odd slam but will avoid disasters. The asking bidder might have the trump queen, in which case he knows that a 5H response is real. If not, he should consider the possibility that partner has the trump queen but has been forced to lie!

King Ask (Grand Slam Try)

If (and only if), after hearing partner's response to 4NT you know that the partnership holds all 5 key-cards, you may bid 5NT to ask for kings. The responses are;

- 6C – no king.
- 6D – 1 king.
- 6H – 2 kings.
- 6S – 3 kings.

Don't forget, there are only 3 "kings" since the trump king is now a "key-card".

Queen Ask

This is another optional extra, subject to partnership agreement. After hearing a response of 5C or 5D, the Blackwood bidder does not know whether partner holds the trump queen. He can ask by bidding the cheapest suit that is not a sign-off. In response, partner without the queen bids the trump suit. Partner with the queen bids step 1. Partner with the queen and an outside King below the rank of the trump suit bids the suit in which he holds the king. With two such kings, he bids the cheapest.

Example Auction

- 1H - opening
- 4C - splinter agreeing hearts with a club feature
- 4NT - How many keycards have you?
- 5D - 1 or 3
- 5S - queen ask (5H would be a sign-off)

The available answers are;

- 6H - No trump queen, says nothing about outside kings
- 5NT - Shows trump queen and denies outside kings below the rank of the agreed trump suit
- 6C - Shows trump queen and club king
- 6D - Shows trump queen, diamond king and denies the club king
- 6S - Shows the trump queen, spade king and denies both minor kings.

Note that this bid commits the partnership to 6NT or a grand slam so be very careful. There will be circumstances where you will hold the spade king but will have to deny it for fear of going over-board, just as you sometimes have to deny the trump queen holding two keycards where the agreed suit is hearts.

Dealing with Interruption (DOPI)

Usually when you are slam bidding, the opposition will be listening passively, but what if partner has just bid 4NT and RHO bids? The solution is to use DOPI or more accurately DOP1;

- Double shows 0 or 3 key-cards.
- Pass shows 1 or 4 key-cards.
- Step 1 shows 2 key-cards.
- Step 2 shows 2 key-cards and the trump queen.

So if partner has bid 4NT and RHO comes in with 5H. Holding exactly 2 key-cards, your bid is 5S (step 1). Holding 2 key-cards plus the trump queen, your bid is 5NT (step 2), and you have lost the ability to king hunt – live with it!

Which suit is the trump suit?

Ideally, this will have been agreed (e.g. 1H-3H). Occasionally, one partner will have insisted on nominating it (e.g. 2C-3H). What if there is ambiguity?

Supposing the auction goes 1D-1S-2H-4NT. From opener's perspective, he can't tell whether partner has found a 5-3 diamond fit or a 4-4 heart fit. Opener responds on the assumption that the slam they are heading for is the last suit bid before 4NT, hearts in this example. The Blackwood bidder must remember this, particularly if he knows the last bid suit is not the slam suit, in interpreting partner's response.

Redwood and Kickback

The problem with using 4NT as the asking bid to initiate the RKCB stepped response is that the answer may strand the asker above the safe bale-out point of 5 of the proposed trump suit in any suit other than spades. The lower the rank of the trump suit, the greater the potential danger of this happening. Kickback addresses this by using the suit above the proposed trump suit at the 4 level as the asking bid. Thus for clubs, the asking bid is 4D, for diamonds 4H, for hearts 4S and for spades, it remains 4NT. Redwood is the same but applied only to the minors so the asking bids are 4D and 4H, the two red suits, thus Redwood! The downside of Kickback (and Redwood) is the possibility of confusion between its asking bid and other bids such as splinters, control showing cue bids and, in some auctions, natural bids.

The compromise I propose is to use Redwood for the minors and for now, to continue to use the 4NT asking bid for hearts as well as spades (with the modification outlined above vis a viv trying to avoid answering 5S when the agreed suit is hearts). To minimize the risk of confusion, the following rules will apply, based on the principle that cue bidding trumps Redwood, which in turn trumps splinters;

1. If the 4D/H bid could be a splinter of Redwood, it's Redwood. There is little loss here as splinters are generally not a great idea over minor suits.
2. If you want to cue bid rather than ace ask (often the better approach), go ahead and do so. This switches Redwood off and the ace ask reverts to 4NT.
3. If the first cue bid you would normally make corresponds with the Redwood bid, you can't make it as partner will interpret it as Redwood. Instead, cue bid your next highest control and hope to return to the Redwood suit later in the auction.

The response to Redwood is exactly the same as RKCB if you think "Step Thoughts";

- Step 1 shows 0 or 3 key-cards.
- Step 2 shows 1 or 4 key-cards.
- Step 3 shows 2 key-cards.
- Step 4 shows 2 key-cards and the trump queen.

Having got your answer and *if, and only if*;

- You know the partnership holds all five key-cards *and*
- You have sufficient bidding space left;

You can make a Grand Slam Try (i.e. ask for Kings) by making a relay bid (i.e. the cheapest bid available unless that bid is in the agreed slam suit, in which case the relay bid is the suit above it). Again, the responses are straightforward once you have become a "Step Thinker";

- Step 1 – no king.
- Step 2 – 1 king.
- Step 3 – 2 kings.
- Step 4 – All 3 "kings".

Some examples of Redwood auctions;

- 1C-4D
- 1D-4H
- 1C-2C (inverted)-4D
- 1D-2D (inverted)-4H
- 2D-2NT-4C-4D
- 2D-2S-3D-4H
- 1D-1H-2C-3C-4D
- 1C-1H-2D-4H

Voidwood

After suit agreement at the 3+ level, a sudden leap to the 5 level shows a void in the bid suit and asks partner to say how many useful aces (i.e. outside the void suit) he has using a stepped response; step 1 = none, step 2 = one etc.)

Acol 4NT

This opening bid is made by a powerhouse hand whose only interest in partner's hand is whether or not it contains an ace and if so, which ace. The responses are;

- 5C - No Ace
- 5D/H/S - The bid Ace
- 5NT - Two Aces
- 6C - The bid Ace.

If partner's answer embarrasses you, you have only yourself to blame!

Balancing aka Protective Bidding.

When they have opened at the 1 level and there are two passes around to you, you are in the “Balancing or Protective Position”. Opener’s partner is marked with 5- points. Your partner might have as much as 15 but can’t bid because he is balanced or holds “their” suit. You must protect him against this possibility and this is called balancing. It is of fundamental importance in any disciplined bidding system where partner doesn’t have the luxury of doubling just because he has opening points!

Theory of the Deferred King

When balancing, you borrow 3 points from partner. So you can now overcall at the 1 level on 5-6 points + or at the 2 level with 9+. You can also double on 9+ but the shape requirements remain the same. Partner must, of course, be mindful of the fact that you have borrowed the 3 points and respond appropriately. This is absolutely critical.

Other Bids in the Balancing Position

- 1NT shows 11-14, balanced shape and their suit stopped. The system is on.
- 2NT shows 19+, balanced shape and their suit stopped. In the balancing position, 2NT is not “unusual” but is a natural bid so the system is on.
- Holding a balanced 15-18 count and a stopper, first double and then rebid NT. System is on.
- A jump overcall in the balancing position is strong (even though we normally play Weak Jump Overcalls) showing an excellent 6+ card suit and at worst 6 losers.

Balancing at Higher Levels

After a feeble suit agreement e.g. 1H-pass-2H-pass-pass it is correct to balance even though you are a passed hand and the overcall will have to be at the 2 level, because both your opponents are weak and have limited their hands and they have found a fit. You can safely double or overcall at the 2 (not 3) level, using the theory of the deferred king but you and partner should generally leave it at that. Partner must recognize that you are balancing (why else would you fail to overcall on the first round and then do so in the second?) and not get carried away. What happens next is up to them. They may leave you in your 2 level part-score which will usually be fine or they may bid on and go too high which is even better!

Overcalls

Simple Overcall

At the one level, this promises a good quality, 5+ card suit and about 7-15 points. With 16+ double first and then bid your suit on the next round. Part of the aim is to be disruptive so a 1S overcall over a 1C opening is particularly appealing. The more disruptive the overcall, the more you can compromise on points requirement, especially at favorable vulnerability. The same applies in the balancing position.

A two level overcall is quite different. You *should* have a high quality 6+ card suit (a near solid 5 card suit is ok) and you *must* have opening points. This is because you are far more likely to be doubled for penalties.

Responses

- Normally pass or raise. This system uses a pre-emptive response style so advancer should raise partner's overcall to the level of the fit (minus 1 if vulnerable). So if partner overcalls 1S and you have 4 spades and are non-vulnerable, immediately raise to 3S i.e. the number of cards known to be held by the partnership less 6. Points don't come into it - you might have a Yarborough. Overcaller will generally pass but may up the pre-empt holding extra length. The raise must be immediate, otherwise its pre-emptive advantages are compromised.
- A Change of suit response is rare and in this system, **forcing**. Advancer must have a suit that he thinks is a better option but **must also be tolerant** of partner raising his own suit.
- A NT response is also rare and generally unwelcome. To contemplate it, you must have opening points. Partner will tend to pass unless he has a 6 card suit.
- An Unassuming Cue Bid is used to tell partner you have support (3+) and you are strong enough for limit raise or better opposite a weakish partner. Partner must bid and is expected to clarify his holding. Note that all direct raises and jump raises will be assumed to be pre-emptive so if you wish to make a constructive raise, you must go via the cue bid.
- A Fit Jump e.g. 1H-1S-2H-4C shows support (3+) and a high quality 5+ holding in the bid suit. Total HCP strength may not be great but your 5 card suit must be excellent. Armed with this knowledge, partner should be well placed to call the contract.

Weak Jump Overcalls

In keeping with the general style of this system, these are weak. They show a Weak 2 opening type hand i.e. 6 cards+ and good quality. How good depends on seat and vulnerability so in first seat, vulnerable it needs to be excellent where as in third seat, non-vulnerable a respectable suit quality will suffice.

Responses

These are exactly the same as responses to a weak 2 opening in a conventional system. With support you can pass, up the pre-empt to the 3 level or bid game - either genuinely or pre-emptively - nobody knows which but you! A change of suit is forcing. With genuine game ambition, you may bid 2NT which initiates an

Ogust response scheme as follows;

- 3C - Minimum and a poor suit
- 3D - Maximum (8+) and a poor suit
- 3H - Minimum and a good suit (2-3 top honors)
- 3S - Maximum and a good suit
- 3NT - Solid

N.B. A jump overcall in the balancing position is never weak and promises 15+ HCPs.

Pre-Emptive Overcalls

These show a hand which would be opened at the 3 level and responses are analogous to those after a pre-emptive opening.

2-Suited Overcalls

There are two such overcalls used in this system. These are in addition to a double after the enemy have bid two suits, which shows opening points and 4+ in both unbid suits.

Michaels Cue Bid

This is an immediate overcall of their suit e.g. 1H-2H or such a call in the balancing position e.g. 1H-pass-pass-2H. It shows two 5 card suits. Over a minor, it shows both majors. Over a major it shows the other major and one of the minors. The suits must be of good quality i.e. each biddable as a simple overcall. This implies about 8-12 HCP. With a stronger hand, it is generally better to bid the two five card suits naturally and constructively. However, with a powerhouse, one can start with a Michaels cue-bid and then bid on. Partner should get the message that your original bid was not the usual, essentially pre-emptive, type of Michaels but rather the powerhouse type.

Response

Assuming the normal Michaels type hand, if both majors are being shown, partner simply shows preference (or jump preference if he happens to be strong). If the bid is showing a known major and an unknown minor, partner will often do best to raise the major with tolerance rather than asking for the minor and finding himself misfit and a level higher! However, if partner wishes to know the identity of the minor, the asking bid is 2NT.

Note that a Michaels cue bid is extremely descriptive so only use it if you think your side will declare. If you end up defending having used this bid, you have given away an enormous amount of information about your distribution. As usual with these attractive gadgets, the moral is don't use them just because you can. Only do so when you think it is preferable to any other available bid - including pass!

Unusual NT

This is an immediate overcall of 2NT showing 5-5 in the two lowest unbid suit. Natural 2NT overcalls are rare and used only in the balancing position or over weak 2 openings. Any other 2NT overcalls are "unusual". Everything in the section on Michaels applies here except that both suits are always known. The system of responses to NT is on after natural 2NT overcalls but is obviously off after an unusual 2NT.

1NT Overcall

This shows a balanced or near balanced (5422) 16-18 HCP hand with a stopper in their suit. With 19+, double first and then bid NT. System is on in both cases.

Natural 2NT Overcalls

In the balancing position, this shows a 19+, balanced or near balanced hand and a stopper. It is a rare bid so watch out for it. System is on. The other situation where a 2NT overcall is natural is over their weak 2 opening. In this case, it shows a hand which would have overcalled 1NT over a 1 level opening. System is on.

Doubles

This is an extremely versatile bid. In fact, one of its *less* common uses in modern systems is for penalties, the original intent! So in a sense Dbl has become the most used conventional bid of all. The uses of Dbl in this system are listed here.

Take-out Doubles

Standard Take-out Doubles

This is the most common double used in this (and most other) systems. To make a standard take out double, *all of the following must apply*;

- The opposition have opened a suit.
- Partner has not bid (other than to pass).
- You have opening points.
- You are short (2- cards) in the suit they have opened.
- You have tolerance (3+ cards) for all other suits.
- This is your first opportunity to double (note you might have passed initially).

These conditions must be adhered to strictly. In particular, you should *never* double just because you have opening points; everything else *must* be right. That means you will occasionally pass with a balance 15 count or a 15 count with their suit. Don't fret about this because the other part of the deal is that a competent partner will *always protect you in such situations by balancing*. What are opening points? Usually 12+ but if you are 4441 or 5440, you can shade that by 1-2 points. You can also shade in the balancing position by up to 3 points.

Some other issues to bear in mind include;

- The upper limit for a take-out double in this system is 4S.
- Doubles of all genuine pre-emptive openings (but not Multis and such like) are for take-out.
- If they open and opener's partner raises, double is still for take out e.g. 1H-pass-3H-dbl.
- If they open and opener's partner responds NT, double is a take-out of opener's suit e.g. 1H-pass-1NT-dbl is a take-out of hearts.
- Ideally, if you are doubling their major, you should have 4 of the other major. If not, you may still go ahead but think twice. Is there a better alternative such an overcall in a sound 5 card minor or, if you are marginal to double, pass?
- Doubling by a passed hand is ok at favorable vulnerability with a hand unsuitable for defense and an unexcitable partner!

Responses

- Partner must always bid unless there has been an intervening bid, in which case a weak (7-) partner can pass.
- If weak and forced to bid, bid your longest suit as cheaply as possible.
- With 8-11 HCPs bid to the level you think the partnership can make assuming partner has 12+ HCPs and is 4441. Remember vulnerability.
- If you are 4333 or 4322 with 6-9 points, you can bid 1NT or 2NT with 10-12. A NT bid basically says that the only suit you could have usefully bid is the oppositions. When you bid NT, you are guaranteeing stoppers. If this

is your shape and you have 0-5 HCPs and have to bid, bid your 4 card suit, unless it is their's in which case bid your least bad 3 card suit. Don't fret too much. Your LHO probably has the values to bid on in which case you can gracefully pass next time around.

- With game going points (12+) either bid game when you know the correct denomination or cue bid their suit (i.e. an unassuming cue-bid) requiring partner to further describe his hand.
- Very rarely, when you have a holding in opener's suit that you *know* will bring him down, you may pass, converting the double to penalties. You better be right and even if you are, partner will get a terrible fright!

Doubler's Rebid

In the standard situation, the only options are to pass, raise partner's suit or respond to his cue bid.

Responsive Doubles

This is a double in response to partner's take-out double following a bid by RHO e.g. 1C-dbl-3C-dbl. It tells partner you have values to bid at the current level but don't know what to bid. Partner can make inferences for example, you clearly don't have a 5 card suit, nor in the case of a double of opener's major, 4 of the other major. If the original double was over a minor, you are probably 4-4 in the majors, otherwise you would have called your other major. Partner should be able to pick the best spot.

Re-Opening Doubles

When you open a suit and they overcall and the bidding has come back around to you (partner having passed), a double now shows partner that you are short of their suit and asks him to bid accordingly. This is a re-opening double. Before doing it, take note of partner's likely strength. If he passed before the overcall, (e.g. 1H-pass-pass-2D) he is 0-5. On the other hand, if he passed following a 2 level overcall, (e.g. 1H-2D-pass-pass) he could have up to 9. Judge accordingly. A re-opening double *can* also used after you open 1NT and are overcalled but this is risky. Only consider it if you have small doubleton in their suit. Moreover, if their suit is a major, you should hold 4 of the other major. Partner will bid a suit if he can. If he knows that both majors are out (because they overcalled one and he is short of the other) and he can live with either minor, he may bid 2NT asking you to pick your minor.

Non-Standard Take-out Doubles

There are two types;

- The first is where you have a strong hand; either 19+ balanced, so too strong for a 1NT overcall, or a 16+ one suiter, too strong for a standard overcall. In either case you double first and then rebid either NT (system on) or your suit. Partner now knows the real situation and proceeds accordingly.
- The second situation is where you are in 4th seat and both of your opponents have bid different suits, your partner having passed. Now your double shows opening points and 4+ in both unbid suits.

Negative Doubles

This arises when partner opens and your RHO overcalls. Negative doubles give you a versatile way to show your suit(s) and strength, with the emphasis usually being on showing major suits, as follows;

- 1C-(1D)-Dbl shows 4+ of both majors and 6+ points.
- 1m-(1H)-Dbl shows exactly 4 spades and 6+ points, therefore 1m-(1H)-1S now promises 5+ spades. Neat!
- 1m-(1S)-Dbl shows 4+ hearts and 6+ points.
- 1H-(1S)-Dbl shows 4+ of both minors and 10+ points.
- 1M-2m-Dbl shows 4+ of both majors and 10 + points.
- 1D-2C-Dbl shows 4+ of both majors and 10+ points.

Note that the points shown reflect the level that would have had to be bid to proceed naturally. Respond on the assumption that the negative doubler is minimal for his bid. There is no concept of reverse bidding showing strength after a negative double. Opener can “reverse” with a minimum and should he wish to force, the only tool available to him is a cue bid. The upper limit for negative doubles in this system is 4S.

Doubling to show a 15-17 balanced hand after “they” prevent you from reversing into 1NT

When you are a balanced 15-17, you open 1 of a suit. If partner passes and their intervention robs bidding space such that you can no longer reverse into 1NT, you have no option but to pass. However, if partner has bid, you can now double to show your hand. Think about it. If you open say 1D, LHO bids 2C, partner passes, RHO passes and you double, that is for take-out (see definition above) and partner will take you for being short of clubs and doubling to re-open. However, if you open 1D, LHO passes, partner bids 1H and RHO bids 2C, now your double can't be for take-out as partner has bid (other than pass). The only logical meaning is “I wanted to reverse into 1NT, they have stopped me and I'm too weak for 2NT” i.e. “I'm 15-17 balanced”.

Lead Directing Doubles

Doubling their conventional bid e.g. 2C Stayman or 2D/H Transfers or their conventional response to a conventional bid e.g. 2D response to Stayman or any suit response to any version of Blackwood 4NT is lead directing, asking partner to lead that suit. When the opposition have voluntarily bid to slam, a double by the partner of the defender who will be on lead is a Lightner double and asks for an “unusual” lead. This is typically a lead of dummy's first bid suit or a request to refrain from leading a trump or an unbid suit or, if the defenders have bid, a request not to lead that suit. The most common situation is where the doubler is void in dummy's suit and wants it lead so he can ruff it.

Doubles of 3NT are lead directing if done by the partner of the defender who will be on lead. It's special and a little complex. The following rules apply;

- If no suit has been called by anyone during the auction, a Dbl says "I have a solid suit that will defeat this and I want you to lead it". Of course, partner can't know for sure which suit it is but he can often guess. If partner has a solid suit, you can't have an A,K or Q in it, so leading an honourless short suit seems logical!
- If neither defender has bid but dummy has, Dbl asks for a lead of dummy's first bid suit.
- If either defender opened a major or overcalled anything (both indicating a 5+ card holding), the natural reaction of partner is to lead that suit. A Dbl here asks him to lead a different suit, one in which you are strong but couldn't mention - typically one of lower rank than the one you mentioned!
- If you, partner and dummy have all bid, partner will tend to lead your suit and Dbl asks for a lead of dummies suit or of partner's own suit.

Penalty Doubles

In modern systems, virtually all first round and low level second round doubles are for take-out. If you are in doubt, the test to apply is that a double is only for penalties if logic dictates there is no alternative! This is a little extreme but you won't go too far wrong if you follow it. To aid clarity, the following is a list of penalty doubles;

- When opener is doubled for take-out and partner redoubles, a double of whatever they escape into is always for penalties e.g. 1H-dbl-redbl-1S-dbl
- A double of a suit which could have been doubled at a lower level, logically has to be for penalties e.g. 1H-1S-pass-pass-2C-2S-dbl. If the doubler had wanted to make a take-out double of spades, he would have done so immediately after the 1S bid i.e. at the first opportunity.
- Doubling their 1NT opening in this system is always for penalties (but this does not necessarily apply to all systems).
- A double when there has been a previous penalty double (or penalty pass) by the same side is for penalties. By default this applies to a double of anything they escape into after a penalty double of their opening 1NT but this can be waived subject to partnership agreement.
- Doubling of contracts where there has been a competitive auction and it is clear they are sacrificing or have become overstretched is for penalties. Note that this requires judgement.
- Doubling 5 level contracts is generally penalty orientated and often profitable.

Note that the doubling of voluntarily bid slams by competent opponents is usually wrong and that's why it is usually only done as a lead directing exercise. Likewise, be very wary of doubling part score contracts between 2H and 3S as you are doubling them into game.

Competitive Doubles

With the exception of the examples cited in the above section on penalty doubles, all doubles in a competitive auction up to 2S are for take out even where partner has bid. What advancer is saying to his overcalling partner is "We have not yet found a fit but I'm not willing to sell out yet, tell me more!". He can only do this if he can live with any rational response from overcaller. Here are some examples of relatively simple competitive doubles;

1C-1S-2H-dbl. Advancer has a decent hand but has only 2 spades and has long diamonds. He is thus giving overcalled two options from which to choose! He has to be able to live with 2S or 3D.

1S-2H-2S-dbl. Again advancer is giving overcaller options. What are they? He can play in either of the unbid minors but if this is not on, he can live with 3H. So he probably has 2 hearts and ideally 5-5 (or at worst 5-4) in the minors.

The above are simple examples. There is a lot more out there but for now we will confine ourselves to these i.e. competitive doubles up to 2S in the first round of bidding.

Redoubles

When your RHO doubles your partner's opening and you have a good hand (10+) but can't raise partner, you should redouble. It tells partner that the best outcome may well be to let them play doubled and thus asks partner to double whatever they escape into if he can. If he can't and passes, it promises that you will bid. Partner should not repeat his opening suit unless he is happy to play in it with little or no support from you.

Responding When Partner's Take-Out Double is Redoubled

The redoubled is saying "Our side has the balance of power so lets double these guys for penalties!" Painful as it seems, if you have 5+ cards in the next suit up, you must bid it, even with a Yarborough. Alternatively, with length in their suit, bid 1NT. With neither of these, pass and let partner decide how to escape. In all cases, you must expect whatever you escape into to be doubled so don't panic but seek to limit the damages.

Defences Against;

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Multi Landy

There are many defenses available after the opposition opens 1NT. This one is popular in Europe and parts of it come very naturally if you are familiar with the Multi 2D opening. It is among the best around. It applies over any 1NT opening, regardless of strength.

There is no set point count but *all suits being shown must be of decent quality*. Don't think you have to use this convention just because your hand happens to have a suitable shape. Always ask yourself whether it would be better to pass and defend and always take vulnerability into account.

Over "their" 1NT opening;

- 2C shows both majors, at least 5-4.
- 2D shows a single suited major hand with a good quality 6+ card suit.
- 2H shows 5 hearts and a minor (4+).
- 2S shows 5 spades and a minor.
- 2NT shows 5-5 in the minors i.e. unusual 2NT
- Double is for penalties - most 16+ hands should double (particularly over a weak NT)
- 3 level bids are natural, strong and very rare.

Responses

- Over the 2C overcall, advancer* bids his longest major or 2D with majors of equal length. The auction now proceeds naturally.
- The 2D bid can be used to show any suit but is generally used to show only a major as in this system. There are two reasons for playing it this way. The first is that the response is very simple i.e. a weak partner bids 2H and you pass or correct, while a strong partner bids 2NT. The second reason is that holding a six card minor, it is almost always better to defend than play in the minor at the three level. If you happen to pick up a minor powerhouse, you can advertise it by overcalling at the 3 level.
- Over 2H/S, your usual options are to pass with support or tolerance, or bid 2NT to force partner to show his minor. If you have support for partner's major and invitational strength, raise partner's major to the 3 level. Finally, you can bid any other suit at the three level to play.
- Double should usually be passed but if you have less than 4 points, consider taking it out. Partner will get the message that you are very weak.

* In bridge parlance, opener's partner is responder and an overcaller's partner is advancer.

Defence Against Their Weak 2 Opening Bid

- Simple overcall shows a high quality 5+ card suit and about opening points (comfortable opening points if you are bidding at the 3 level).
- Jump overcalls are always strong, the underlying principle being that you never pre-empt their pre-empt. Shows a powerful one-suiter i.e. 5 or fewer losers.
- 2NT is a balanced 16-18 with their suit stopped i.e. like a conventional 1NT overcall. It is not unusual so the full response system is on.
- 3NT to play.
- 4C/4D is Leaping Michaels. It applies only over 2H or 2S. It shows a powerful 2 suiter, being happy to be in game in either suit. The suits in question are the one bid and the unbid major. Partner shows preference.
- Double has it's usual shape and strength requirements. A weak responder bids his suit at the 2 level if possible or else bids 2NT which is Lebensohl. The doubler, on hearing 2NT will bid 3C which partner will pass or correct. If responder is strong (8+) he bids his suit at the 3 level. Using Lebensohl in this way regains the bidding space robbed by the pre-emptive 2 level opening.
- A cue bid over a weak 2 is not Michaels but is a stopper asking bid for 3NT (aka Western Cue Bid). Partner with their suit stopped bids 3NT, otherwise he bids his own long suit, leaving further decisions to the cue bidder.

Defence Against Their Pre-emptive Openings

Treat them as if they opened at the one level and be aggressive! Take opener for about 6 points, add that to your own and subtract from 40. Now assume partner has half the outstanding. In the balancing position, behave as usual i.e. "borrow" a further 3 points from partner!

- Double is for take-out and the same rules apply as usual. Responder should be conservative as partner has already taken them for half the outstanding values.
- A simple overcall shows a one-suiter.
- 3NT is natural. If you have the correct shape and stoppers and your point count plus partners presumed point count adds up to 25+, go for it. It's a little risky but will pay off in the long term.
- A cue bid of openers suit is a special case, showing a powerful 2 suited hand.

Defence Against Their Multi 2D Opening Bid

The crux of the matter is that there is no anchor suit so double gets a new meaning.

- Double shows a balanced 12-15 or a balanced 19+ or a powerful one suiter.
- 2H/S are natural showing a high quality 5+ suit and opening points or thereabouts.
- 2NT is a balanced 16-18 just like over a weak 2 except there is no requirement for a diamond stop since the diamond opening bid was not natural.
- 3C/D/H/S are natural showing a high quality 6+ card suit and comfortable opening points.
- 3NT to play, usually based on a long running minor.
- 4C shows a powerful 2 suiter, hearts and a minor, happy to play in either. Partner supports hearts or bids 5C which will be passed or corrected to 5D. This is a sort of variation on Leaping Michaels over a Weak 2
- 4D ditto but spades and a minor
- 4H/S to play

Responding to the double is just like responding after a double of a weak 2 (including Lebensohl) but 3D is not a cue bid but shows diamonds and 8+ points.

Defence Against Their Strong Club Opening Bids

Strong 1C

Strong club systems, such as Precision, have advantages and disadvantages. One of their disadvantages is that they don't cope particularly well with interference. It is important to exploit this aggressively. Over a strong 1C opening, simple, jump and double-jump overcalls retain their usual meanings but should be made if at all possible i.e. with minimal values. However, don't be totally reckless. You must have the minimum length (i.e. 5 for simple, 6 for jump and 7 for preemptive overcalls) and the suit quality must still be respectable. As always, take account of vulnerability. Most of the time, since opener is strong, your overcall is much less likely to be constructive than disruptive and partner should treat it as such.

If you actually have a good (12+) hand, pass and bid on the second round. There is no risk involved in this because since opener's partner can't pass 1C, the bidding will come back around to you. When you bid on the second round, having passed on the first, partner will realise you actually have a good hand and can act appropriately. The corollary of this is that an immediate simple overcall denies opening points in this situation whereas over a natural opening, a simple overcall can be as good as 15HCPS.

Over a strong club opening, Michaels and Unusual 2NT are off. Instead, double shows the majors, ideally 5-4 but 4-4 will do; while 1NT is used to show the minors, ideally 5-5 but 5-4 will do. Again, both bids deny opening points. With

opening points and these shapes, pass in the first round and bid in the second. Double will always be available. If 1NT is available, use it, otherwise 2NT can be used for the minor 2 suiter, in which case you must have 5-5.

Conventional 1D Negative Response to 1C

The exact same scheme should be used by the player in 4th seat. Note that a strong 4th seat can still pass as opener will always bid something after the 1D negative.

Other Precision Openings

1H, 1S, 1NT and 2C are natural 11-15 bids so treat them as such. 1D is dustbin bid but is most usually 11-13 balanced so proceed initially on the assumption that that's what it is. 2D shows a 4441, 11-15 with a diamond shortage. Proceed accordingly.

Polish Club

This is the most common Small Club System you are likely to encounter. It is a forcing opening like a Precision 1C but while it may be strong, it usually shows a 12-14 balanced or a natural limited club opening so proceed initially as if it is a weak 1NT hand. The Polish Club 2C opening is similar to the Precision 2C opening.

Natural Strong 2C openings (Acol, SAYC etc)

The system outlined above to defend against a Precision 1C opening works very well over an Acol style 2C opening or it's 2D negative response provided you are a bit more cautious. In particular, no compromise on shape should be allowed.

Helvic

Playing a weak 1NT, it is essential to have an escape route when you are doubled for penalties. Note, that not all doubles of 1NT are penalty orientated so before launching into Helvic, it is prudent to ask the doubler's partner the nature of the double. Assuming it is for penalty, this convention is always used. There are two scenarios;

1. Partner opens and next seat doubles 1NT-(dbl)
2. Partner opens, next seat passes, you pass and next seat doubles i.e. 1NT-(pass)-pass-(dbl)

1NT-(dbl)

Holding a 5+ card suit, redouble. Opener will now bid 2C which you pass or correct. Holding two touching 4 card suits, bid the lower one so;

- 2C shows clubs & diamonds
- 2D shows diamonds & hearts
- 2H shows hearts & spades
- 2S shows a 4333 hand with 4 spades. (In original Helvic, it showed spades and clubs but that stranded responder intolerant of spades at 3C - often far too high)

Otherwise pass which forces opener to redouble.

After openers redouble;

- 2C shows clubs & a major (not clubs and hearts as in the original version). Opener can now pass or use 2D to ask for the major
- 2D shows diamonds & spades
- pass instructs opener to play (and make!) 1NT redoubled.

What if your shape is 4333? You have to lie. Either upgrade the 4 card suit to 5 or pick the least offensive 4-3 combination.

1NT-(pass)-pass-(dbl)

This is less neat and can be handled in a variety of ways. The following is what I suggest;

If opener has a 5 card suit he may bid it, otherwise he passes and leaves the final decision to you as responder. With a 5 card or touching 4 card suits there's no problem. Likewise if you are strong and can stand the idea of 1NT doubled playing, you just pass. Otherwise, you have to lie!

Note that Helvic is a rescue maneuver so if the opposition intervenes at any point it is usually right to breath a sigh of relief and let them at it!

Defence After They Overcall Our 1NT Opening

Playing standard methods, when RHO overcalls partner's 1NT opening, the system of responses is switched off and responder's bidding options are as follows;

- Pass.
- Double for Penalties.
- Bid a new suit which is natural and non-forcing.
- Bid 2NT which is invitational and does not promise a stopper in RHOs suit.
- Cue bid RHOs suit which sets up a game force.

This is not disastrous but we do lose the ability to distinguish between a suit we want to play, invite or force at the 3 level. There are a variety of conventional solutions to this problem, the best known of which is lebensohl which uses a 2NT bid to force opener to bid a puppet 3C and things proceed from there. Note that we use a version of this in our defense against Weak 2s where partner has doubled, to distinguish between weak and strong responses to partner's a double. A more comprehensive defense exists called Rubensohl which has numerous advantages but is more complex. This is the defense I propose we adopt in preference to lebensohl. Until we have mastered it, we can continue to use standard methods.

Rubensohl

After RHO overcalls opener's 1NT overcall, the following bids are available to responder;

- Pass.
- Double (see below).
- Any remaining available 2 level bids are to play.
- 2NT transfers partner to 3C showing length (5+) in clubs and denying a four card major. Promises game going points.
- 3C is a transfer to 3D showing 5+ diamonds and denying a four card major. Promises game going points.
- 3D is a transfer to 3H showing 5+ hearts. Promises game going points.
- 3H is a transfer to 3S showing 5+ spades. Promises game going points.
- Exception: the bid that would transfer partner into overcaller's suit, called the "Transfer Cue Bid" is used to ask for stoppers and show 4 card majors with game going points and is therefore also called the "Ask & Stayman Bid". It is possible to do both unless the overcall is 2S.
- 3S is a transfer to 3NT denying either a stopper or a four card major (Slow Denies). Promises game going points.
- 3NT denies a four card major but shows a stopper (Fast Shows). Promises game going points.

Where a 2 level bid corresponding to the transfer bid is not available (because the overcall is in a higher ranking suit), responder is showing either a hand that wants to sign off at the three level or a game forcing hand. Opener must always complete the transfer to allow responder to sign off by passing if that is his intent. Responder now passes to play or bids on thereby setting up a game force.

Where a 2 level bid corresponding to the transfer bid is available responder would have used it to sign off, therefore in this case, responder is either inviting game or will insist on it. Opener will assume in the first instance that responder is inviting him to game. By completing the transfer, opener declines the invitation. Responder may pass or insist on game by bidding on. If opener wishes to accept the invitation, he does so by making the next highest descriptive bid available to him, thereby setting up a game force.

Example 1

Opener bids 1NT and his LHO overcalls 2H. Responder now bids 3C instructing Opener to transfer to 3D. Responder did not have the option to bid 2D so from Opener's point of view, Responder may wish to play in 3D or set up a game force. Opener has no way of knowing which and so he has no option but to dutifully bid 3D, completing the transfer.

- Responder may now pass and that ends the auction. Any other bid is game forcing.
- In the event, Responder bids 3H, a cue bid of Over-caller's suit. A cue bid promises a stopper in Over-caller's suit and extra length in Responder's, so in this case, Responder has 6+ diamonds. Opener should now be well placed to choose between 3NT and 5D.
- On a cloudier day, Responder might have called 3S. That is still game forcing but promises nothing extra and denies a stopper in Over-caller's suit. If Opener has a stopper, all is well and he just bids 3NT. If not, he has a decision to make but at least he has lots of information on which to base it; he can see his own hand, he knows partner has 14+ HCPs, 5+ diamonds and does not have a four card major and he can presume that Over-caller has 5+ hearts, more likely 6 and a decent hand. Alternatively, the 2H overcall may be conventional (see below).
- On a better day, Responder might have bid 3NT, promising a stopper and Opener would not have had to engage the brain at all, or would he? Why didn't partner just bid 3NT directly over the 2H overcall? Because he has slam interest, that's why!

Example 2

Opener bids 1NT and his LHO overcalls 2D. Responder bids 3D asking Opener to transfer to hearts. This is different because Responder had a 2H bid available to him if he wanted to play in a heart part-score contract so Opener now knows that Responder is at worst invitational with at least 5 hearts and may be stronger.

If Opener wants to decline the invitation, he can do so by completing the transfer i.e. bid 3H.

- Responder can now pass, ending the auction if he is simply invitational.
- If Responder is game going opposite a minimal 1NT opener, he can bid 3S which is forcing and denies a diamond stop, sign off in 3NT which promises one or bid 4H promising 6 hearts. Confronted with the 3S force, Opener must engage the brain!

If Opener wishes to accept the invitation, he does so by not completing the transfer. His options are;

- 3NT promising a diamond stop and denying 3 hearts. Responder will pass unless he has 6 hearts, in which case he will bid 4H.
- 3S denying a diamond stop and denying 3 hearts. Now it's Responder's turn to engage the brain but look how much he knows! In addition to being able to see his own hand and make inferences about Overcaller's, he knows that Opener was happy to insist on game opposite a hand that he has no right to assume was anything better than invitational
- 4H to play

The Transfer Cue Bid (Ask & Stayman)

Supposing responder is looking at a game forcing hand with a four card major and is about to bid 2C in response to opener's 1NT when his RHO overcalls. The solution is to bid the suit under the one bid by the over-caller, thereby inviting opener to bid over-caller's suit, thus the term "Transfer Cue Bid". Opener's options are as follows;

If over-caller's suit is a minor the transfer cue bid (2NT/3C) promises game going points and one or both 4 card majors.

- If opener completes the transfer, he denies a stopper in the overcalled suit but neither denies nor confirms possession of a four card major(s).
- If he has the overcalled suit stopped he shows this by bidding his cheapest 4 card major or 3NT lacking a 4 card major.

If over-caller's suit is hearts the transfer cue bid (3D) promises 4 spades and game going points.

- If opener completes the transfer, he denies a heart stopper and denies 4 spades.
- A 3NT bid confirms a heart stopper but denies 4 spades.
- A 4S bid promises 4 spades and says nothing about stoppers.

If over-caller's suit is spades, the transfer cue bid (3H) promises 4 hearts and game going points.

- If opener completes the transfer, he denies a spade stopper or 4 hearts.
- A 3NT bid confirms a spade stopper and denies 4 hearts.
- A 4H bid promises 4 hearts and says nothing about stoppers.

What if opener has denied a 4 card major and has no stopper and responder also lack a stopper?

- Responder bids his cheapest sensible 4 card suit.
- Opener with tolerance passes but with a doubleton bids the next suit up.
- Responder with tolerance passes or with a doubleton bids up.

Remember that opener has only one doubleton for his opening bid so a 4-3 fit will usually emerge.

Example 3

Opener bids 1NT and his LHO overcalls 2D. Responder has 14 points and is 4-4 in the majors. He therefore bids 3C, a transfer cue bid to Over-caller's diamonds, advertising his possession of one or both 4 card majors. Opener has 2 small diamonds and 4 spades. He knows Responder has a major but his first duty is to warn of his own lack of a diamond stopper which he does by completing the transfer, bidding 3D. Responder now shows his hearts by bidding 3H, Opener replies 3S and is pleasantly surprised when Responder bids 4S.

Example 4

Opener bids 1NT and his LHO overcalls 2D. Responder has 4 hearts, 14 points and no diamond stopper. He bids 3C to advertise his possession of a 4 card suit. Opener bids 3D, completing the transfer and thereby denying a diamond stopper. Responder bids 3H and Opener replies 3S. Responder now knows that there is no 4-4 major fit and that diamonds (Over-caller's suit) is wide open so 3NT is unthinkable. Responder has four clubs so he bids them. Opener has three clubs so while things are not ideal, he is at least relieved that partner did not bid his doubleton, so he passes. The hand is played in 4C with a 4-3 fit which while not pretty, is much preferable to 3NT with a wide open diamond suit.

Conventional Overcalls

Much of the foregoing depends on knowledge of the identity of over-caller's suit. That's fine if the overcall was natural but what if it was conventional?

- If the conventional overcall was 2C and that shows an unspecified long suit, ignore it completely and push ahead with system on but using dbl to replace your normal 2C Stayman bid.
- If the conventional overcall promises a specific anchor suit plus an unspecified other suit (e.g. a Multi-Landy 2H/S), proceed on the assumption that the anchor suit is the overcall suit unless the contrary is established.
- If the conventional overcall promises 2 specified suits (e.g. Landy 2C promising both majors), proceed as normal but as a result;
- A direct 3S bid denies stops in either specified suits.
- A direct 3NT bid promises stops in both specified suits.
- A transfer cue bid of either suit promises a stop in that suit and denies a stop in the other.

Example 5

Opener bids 1NT and his LHO overcalls 2C which Advancer alerts. In response to Responder's query Advancer replies "Landy, 5-4 or longer in the majors". Responder has 14 points with 4 hearts to the AK and 3 spade rags. The fact that he has 4 hearts is of secondary importance to the fact that while he has hearts stopped, his spades are wide open. He therefore bids 2D, the transfer cue bid to hearts, not because he happens to have 4 hearts but to show a heart stopper and deny a spade stopper. Advancer passes and Opener surveys his hand. He has 4 small hearts and AKx in spades. He knows Responder has hearts stopped but he can't be sure whether he has 4 since in this auction, showing stoppers is paramount. There is another (not so) subtle issue which is that Over-caller has at

least 4 hearts and might have 5 so even if a heart fit exists, the trump break is guaranteed to be horrible. Armed with this wealth of information, he bids 3NT which turns out to be far and away the best spot despite the existence of a 4-4 heart fit.

Doubles

The final part of the system relates to the meaning of a double of the oppositions overcall.

- If the overcall is natural and at the 2 level, double is for takeout and promises invitational values.
- If the overcall is natural and at the 3 level, double is for takeout and promises game going values.
- If the overcall is conventional and shows unspecified suits (e.g. Multi-Landy 2D) or specified suits other than the suit called (e.g. Landy 2C), a double shows length and strength in the suit called and is therefore penalty/Lead Directionally oriented.
- If the overcall is two suited showing the suit called as the anchor suit plus another unspecified suit (e.g. Multi-Landy 2H/S) double is for takeout of the anchor suit.

Downside

The only price you pay for using this convention, apart from the memory load, is the loss of ability to make a 2NT invitational bid after an overcall. This is not entirely insignificant but is a price worth paying.

Brief Summary of the System

Weak (12-14) 1NT

Five Card Majors

Short (non-forcing) Club

Two level openings:

- 2C Unconditional Game Force (25+ balanced or 9+ playing tricks)
- Multi 2D (Weak 2 Major, Acol 2 Minor, 23-24 NT)
- 2H/2S Muiderberg

Three level openings:

- 3C/3D/3H/3S pre-emptive
- 3NT Gambling

Four level openings:

- 4C/4D Namyats
- 4H/4S pre-emptive
- 4NT Acol

Five level openings:

- 5C/5D pre-emptive

System after 1NT Openings

- 2C: Stayman (incl. Garbage Stayman)
- 2H/2S: Transfers (with bouncing & breaking)
- 2S: Minor suit run-off
- 2NT: Invitational
- 3C/3D/3H/3S: Slam Tries
- 4C: Gerber
- 4NT/5NT: Quantitative

Effect of Interruptions

- Penalty Double: Helvic
- Overcall: Rubensohl

System after 2NT Openings & 2D/2x/2NT & 2C/2D/2NT Sequences

- 3C: Puppet Stayman
- 3D/3H: Transfers
- 3S: Minor Suit Stayman
- 4C/4D/4H/4S: Slam Tries
- 4NT/5NT: Quantitative

Reverse into 1NT: 15-17

Reverse into 2NT: 18-19

Major Opening Treatments

- Single raise weak
- Double raise limit
- Game raise preemptive
- Delayed game raise strong with secondary support
- Jacoby 2NT

Effect of Interruption

- Jacoby 2NT off, 2NT becomes balanced 10-12
- Cue bid now shows limit raise of better, double raise becomes preemptive

Minor Opening Treatments

- Inverted raises
- Interruption switches off inverted raises, raises revert to natural meaning

Other related conventions

- Weak jump-shifts
- Help suit trial bids over majors

Slam Bidding

- Splinters
- Italian style control showing cue bids
- RKCB (0314)
- DOPI
- Redwood
- Voidwood
- Acol 4NT

Competative Bidding

- Takeout doubles
- Responsive doubles
- Reopening doubles
- Negative doubles
- Competative doubles
- Simple overcalls with pre-emptive style responses plus unassuming cue bid
- Weak jump-overcalls
- Pre-emptive overcalls
- Michaels & Unusual 2NT

Conventions used in defence

- Multi-Landy over 1NT
- Lebensohl, Leaping Michaels & Western cue bids over weak 2s
- Prepared systems over Multi 2D & Strong Club openings

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