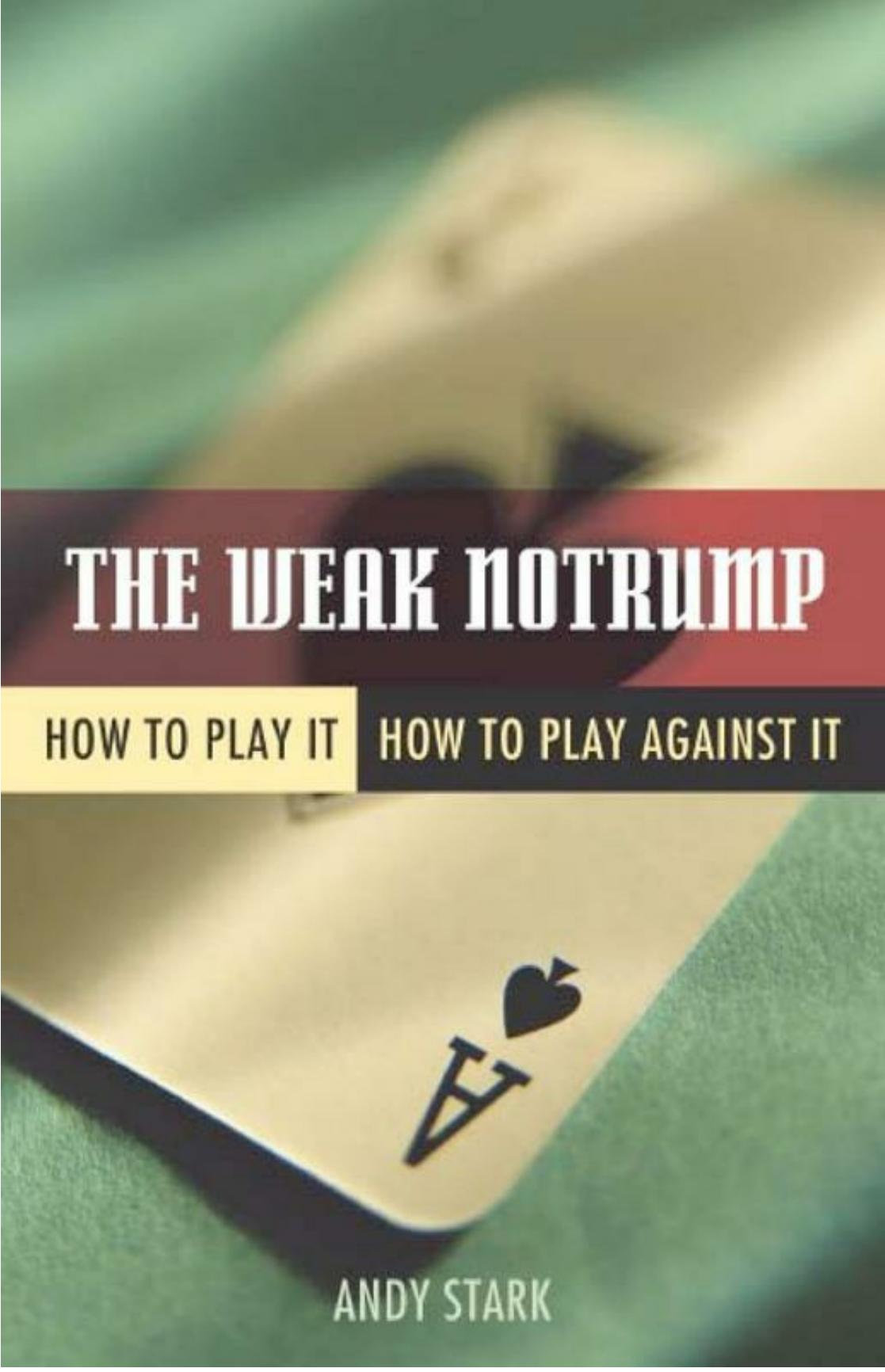


# THE WEAK NOTRUMP

HOW TO PLAY IT      HOW TO PLAY AGAINST IT



ANDY STARK



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*For Rosemary*

I would like to dedicate this book to the memory of my mother, my first bridge teacher. One of the game's greatest gifts is the opportunity it provides for people of all ages to spend time together and I shall always be grateful for the time we spent playing bridge.

## INTRODUCTION

Even if you've never played it yourself, you must have heard of the weak notrump; in fact, you've probably encountered it at the table already. You know how it goes: an opponent opens one notrump and his partner announces, 'Twelve to fourteen.' Perhaps you've even felt a little intimidated playing against the players who use a weak notrump. You didn't know how to compete against it. You either stayed silent in the bidding and lost the partscore battle or, even worse, you entered the auction and got punished! You may have wondered, 'What's so weak about the weak notrump?'

Up until now you've never delved further into understanding the weak notrump or its bidding structure and responses. Perhaps you've seen already how opening the bidding 1NT with a balanced hand and 12-14 HCP (instead of one of a minor) has created some swings or interesting results — who knows, maybe even a top or bottom board. Well, now is the time for you to learn more about the weak notrump.

Is it time to toss aside the 15-17 range and give your system an overhaul? If it is, this book will highlight almost everything you need to know about the weak notrump so that you and your partner can feel confident playing it at the table. You'll know what to do when you have the auction to yourself, and also when it becomes competitive. In addition, this book will show how best to defend against the weak notrump, so that if your opponents open it up against you, you'll know the best tactics to brush it aside and continue bidding to your side's best spot.

The objective of this book is to make you a better, stronger player. Perhaps you have been playing for a year or so and you would like to emulate some of the great players you've read about in books and magazines. Perhaps you are

intrigued and curious because you've noticed these top players using notrump ranges *other than 15-17*. Or maybe you have been playing for years at the club level and have become bored of the strong notrump. You wish to spice up your game a little. Well, let there be no doubt — the weak notrump will spice up your game, maybe more than just a little.

You have a challenge ahead of you, to be sure. However, if you take your time to absorb the weak notrump and all its intricacies, you will not only find yourself having a lot of fun at the bridge table but you'll also be achieving good results. Fun and good results — those two go hand in hand, don't they?



# HOW TO PLAY IT

## SECTION ONE



# CHAPTER 1

## THE OPENING BID

Anyone who learned to play bridge in North America has been taught that a 1NT opening bid shows a good hand. In the old days, it showed a balanced 16-18 HCP; but time takes its toll on everything, including opening bids, and these days beginners are encouraged to open 1NT with 15-17 HCP. Sooner or later, perhaps in a tournament or even in a club game, they will come to realize that not everyone plays this way. Indeed, a surprising number of opponents seem to favor what they call a ‘weak’ notrump opening, often on far less than a comfortable 15 HCP. I’m not going to discuss why they do this — not, at least, until the final chapter of this book. Suffice it to say that there are sound practical and theoretical arguments in favor of opening 1NT on minimum balanced hands. Instead, I’m going to make the assumption that you picked up this book at least partly because you want to know how weak notrump systems work: either you are tempted to play one or they are causing you trouble when your opponents play them. So we’ll look at the mechanics first and then get into the why’s and wherefore’s at the end.

Let’s start off by clarifying exactly what we mean by a ‘weak notrump’. One definition is ‘any notrump range weaker than the strong notrump of 15-17 HCP’. So by that logic we might consider the ranges of 13-15 or 14-16 as weak. But that doesn’t quite make sense. Certainly those two ranges are weaker than 15-17, but they are a tad more hefty than the traditional weak notrump range of 12-14.

A better definition of the weak notrump is an opening bid of 1NT with a minimum balanced hand. Since some 15-point hands are considered stronger than a minimum, we can't really consider any of the millions of hands with 15 HCP as 'weak' under this guideline. Therefore, for most bridge players, this definition would imply a range of 12-14 HCP. I say 'most', because some weak notrump tournament players like to open 1NT with 'good' 11-point hands, which gives them a notrump range of 11-14.

Can the weak notrump ever be weaker than 11-14? Yes, it certainly can. Some players bring their notrump range down to 10-12, especially at matchpoints. (Granted, they usually do so only when the vulnerability is in their favor.) This range is known widely as the 'mini-notrump', or the 'Kamikaze notrump', and some later chapters are devoted to talking about how to play it and how to play against it.

What about lower still? Can your notrump range be weaker than 10-12? By all means — you can bring it down to 4-6 HCP if you like, but most likely you'll be playing in a kitchen somewhere and the hour will be well after midnight. In North America, the ACBL does not allow any ranges lower than 10-12 HCP in its tournaments. Well, actually it does, but with one major caveat: you are not allowed to play any conventions over a notrump opening that is weaker than 10 HCP. This means not even Stayman and certainly not Jacoby Transfers. So it's safe to say that you probably won't encounter anything out there weaker than the 10-12 mini-notrump. An interesting note about that range is that if you do open a 10-12 notrump, most of the time you will have a hand that isn't even a true opening bid for most people, let alone a minimum, so (as we shall see) you tend to get unusual results.

Enough talk about the ranges; let's now delve deeper into the world of the weak notrump. Unless otherwise indicated, everything that follows and all example hands that feature a 1NT opening will assume a 12-14 HCP range.

## **WHAT DOES A WEAK NOTRUMP LOOK LIKE?**

The weak notrump looks much the same as a strong notrump opening bid of 15-17 HCP, with the only obvious difference being that it is about a king (3 HCP) less in value. It contains 12-14 HCP; no more, no less.

The hand on which you bid a weak notrump will be balanced. This includes the three standard balanced distributions of 4333, 4432, and 5332. The weak notrump might also be semi-balanced — it may contain a five-card suit, a four-card suit and two doubletons, i.e. 5422. With this shape, the five-card suit should not be a major, however. If you hold a minimum hand with 5422 pattern and a five-card major, open in your major. Also, the weak notrump should never contain a singleton. If you open 1NT and the opponents later discover you hold a singleton, you may hear the familiar cry, ‘Director!’

If you want to upgrade beefy looking 11-point hands, counting them as 12, that’s up to you and your partner to agree upon. You may also want to downgrade some 15-point hands and treat them as 14-pointers, but again, it’s a subjective opinion when to do that and requires both judgment and partnership discussion. Here are four 11-point hands you might want to consider upgrading. Note their compensating values, such as an array of nines and tens and/or a decent five-card suit and/or aces and kings.

♠ J 10 9 4	♠ A 3	♠ A J 10	♠ 8 3
♥ Q J 10 8	♥ 10 9 6	♥ 10 9	♥ K J 10 9
♦ J 10	♦ A K 10 9 8	♦ Q J 9 8	♦ J 9
♣ A Q 10	♣ 10 9 7	♣ K 10 9 6	♣ A Q 10 8 7

Now that you have the basics, see if you can recognize what a weak notrump opening bid looks like. As dealer, what is your call with each of the following hands?

(1) ♠ J 10 5 4	(2) ♠ A 3	(3) ♠ K Q 8 7 4	(4) ♠ 8 5 2
♥ A J 9	♥ Q J 9 8 3	♥ Q 9 4 3	♥ A 9
♦ K 8 6	♦ J 6 4	♦ 10 9	♦ Q 8
♣ K 10 2	♣ A J 7	♣ A Q	♣ K Q J 7 6 3
(5) ♠ K Q 8	(6) ♠ Q 8 3 2	(7) ♠ K J 3 2	(8) ♠ 9 7 4
♥ 4 3	♥ K 9 4	♥ A 9 8 5	♥ 10 8 4
♦ A J 9 5	♦ J 7 4 3	♦ Q 10 3	♦ A Q J
♣ K 7 6 5	♣ A J	♣ K Q	♣ A Q J 5

[To Answers 1 - 6](#)

[To Answers 7 - 8](#)

### [To Answers 1-6](#)

### [To Answers 7-8](#)

With (1), open 1NT. You hold 12 HCP and a balanced hand.

With (2), open 1NT. It's okay to hold a five-card major and open a weak notrump. There are some weak notrump aficionados who prefer to open this hand one heart and that is fine. However, the majority of weak notrumpers will open this 1NT and you should too. More to come on this topic.

With (3), open 1♠. Since your hand is semi-balanced and you hold five spades along with four hearts, you are better placed if you open one spade and rebid two hearts. Even if your four-card suit were a minor, you should prefer the major-suit opening. The difference between this hand and (2) is that this hand is only semi-balanced, so pattern out naturally.

What is an acceptable semi-balanced 1NT opening bid? Both of these hands should be opened 1NT:

♠ K 4   ♥ Q 8   ♦ A 10 8 5 4   ♣ K J 3 2

♠ J 3   ♥ K 9 8 3   ♦ Q 8   ♣ A K J 7 6

With (4), open 1♣. Although I know of many weak notrumpers who would open this hand with 1NT, you have an easy rebid of 2♣ after a 1♣ opening. Don't distort your hand type; keep it simple.

With (5), open 1NT. Again this hand is a textbook weak notrump. You hold a fine 13-point hand and the weak doubleton in hearts is not to be feared. (Although it might have been feared in 1932 — back then they

needed stoppers in every suit — but they also wanted 16+ for a 1NT opening!). With only 12 HCP or so, you'll never have stoppers in all suits, so don't worry about it — partner's supposed to contribute something.

### [To Questions](#)

With (6), don't open at all — pass! While many players might treat this hand as a 'good eleven' (because all 11-counts are considered good), you should not. This hand is not even close to being a 'good eleven'. There is nothing wrong with passing balanced 10 and 11-point hands in first and second seat. If partner opens a major in third or fourth, you get to use the Drury convention. Plus, as Danny Kleinman, author of *The Notrump Zone*, is fond of saying, 'balanced hands defend'. Defending with hands like these is fun and often leads to extra down tricks. Declarers can't believe you hold 11 HCP. After all, you might have opened, but didn't. In the words of one of my partners after I opened a trashbag hand like this, 'Did you have between 12 and 14 high card points? No? Then don't open a weak notrump.'

With (7), open 1♦. Did you count your high card points? 15, right? Is that between 12 and 14? No. So don't open a weak notrump. Instead open your better minor and be prepared to support partner's major-suit response.

With (8), open 1NT. Don't be afraid of being wide open in two suits — you hold a decent 14-count and you are balanced. It's a simple game. Even if either one of your queens were a deuce, making your hand a 12-count. Open 1NT.

### [To Questions](#)

## ***Review***

You should open 1NT whenever your hand meets all of the following criteria:

- You hold a minimum hand containing 12-14 HCP. Even if you hold a 12-count that is flea-bitten, tattered and "holey"— just do it, open 1NT.

- Your pattern is 4333, 4432 or 5332. You may also be 5422 if your five-card suit is a minor.
- You hold thirteen cards (with fewer, call the director).

## **FITTING THE WEAK NOTRUMP INTO YOUR SYSTEM**

If you play Standard American or 2/1, you should not encounter a big problem incorporating the weak notrump into your system. Just remember to change your treatment of the hands on which you used to open 1NT. You'll see a complete rebid structure later, in Chapter 5. For now, just know that the balanced hands containing 15-17 HCP will usually be opened with one of a minor (or in a major if you hold a five-card suit, of course).

## **WHAT ABOUT VULNERABILITY?**

The original Kaplan-Sheinwold System, devised by Edgar Kaplan and Alfred Sheinwold, stipulated that all balanced 12-14 hands were to be opened 1NT. However later on, perhaps after a minus 800 or two, they decided to alter their 1NT ranges depending on seat and vulnerability. This decision is up to you. I have played with partners who like to keep 1NT openings as 12-14 in every seat no matter the vulnerability and I have played with partners who prefer to play 'chicken notrump'.

'Chicken' is a notrump system that represents an attempt not to get carved by the opponents. So when you think it is easier for the opponents to sit back and double you, such as when you are vulnerable and they are not, then don't open 1NT with a minimum strength hand. Instead, revert to a 15-17 notrump (or 14-16 at least).

Chicken notrump comes in two varieties; you might refer to them as ‘regular chicken’ and ‘super chicken’, although there are no definitive terms in the bridge literature. Regular chicken notrump means that you only open a 12-14 1NT in first and second seats and only at favorable or equal vulnerability. That means whenever you are not vulnerable and whenever you and the opponents are both vulnerable. If the vulnerability is not in your favor, then you revert to a strong notrump system. Super chicken notrump means you need the vulnerability even more in your favor. You only open a 12-14 notrump whenever you are not vulnerable in first or second seat. If you are vulnerable in first or second, or at any vulnerability in third or fourth seat, you open 1NT with 15-17 HCP.

Should you adopt chicken notrump? Well, you may as well get used to this familiar refrain now: that decision is up to you and your partner. If you have a bold bidding style or if you like to roll the dice a little, then by all means keep your 12-14 range. However if you feel a little snake-bit, or if you simply feel more comfortable having fuller values when vulnerable, then by all means alter your notrump ranges depending on seat and vulnerability. Perhaps the best advice is to get out to the club and try both versions. Then decide for yourself a few months down the road.

## **ADVANTAGES OF OPENING A WEAK NOTRUMP**

Although there is a later chapter which discusses the rationale for playing the weak notrump, it doesn’t hurt to mention now the advantages the weak notrump has over its stronger cousin.

In no particular order, here are some of them:

- *The preemptive effect.* Opening 1NT with minimum hands takes up the whole one-level and thus forces the opponents to enter the

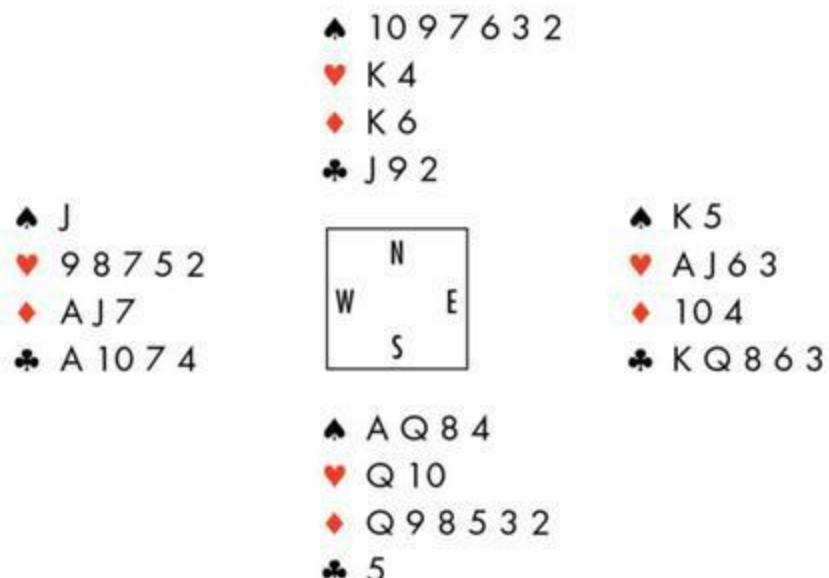
auction at the two-level or higher. In addition, a 1NT opening bid might be just enough to keep the opponents from bidding at all.

- *Frequency.* There are more possible balanced hands containing 12-14 HCP than there are hands containing 15-17 HCP. Therefore you will be opening 1NT more often.
- *Rebidding becomes easier.* Since all minimum balanced hands are opened 1NT, you won't have to worry about which suit to open, nor will you fret over your rebid. You get most of your hand off your chest with one bid.
- *Punish your opponents when it's right to do so.* Many of your opponents will be eager to compete against a weak 1NT opening bid. Perhaps they think you are stealing the hand from them. For example, if you are playing against a DONT fan and he steps into the auction over partner's 1NT because he doesn't feel like being shut out, well, trot out the red card. That is, if you have the values of course. But thanks to partner's 1NT opening, you will have a pretty good idea of what he will be contributing to the defense.
- *An improved bidding structure when partner opens one of a minor.* Responder is allowed to bid with fewer than the usual 6 HCP required for a response, since opener is either unbalanced or holds 15 or more HCP. This last point requires further clarification and will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter.

Before we move on to the next chapter, let's take a look at a deal that illustrates how effective the weak notrump can be. The weak notrump's preemptive value is such that it keeps the opponents guessing just enough, and sometimes they decide on the wrong course of action. This deal is from the finals of the 1994 Canadian National Team Championships. Notice how the preemptive effect of the weak notrump was just enough to keep the North-South pair from reaching their best spot.

*Dealer: West*

*N-S vul.*



At one table, Fred Gitelman and Joey Silver, playing the weak notrump, stole the pot in two hearts (and made three) when North-South could not find a bid. This was their auction.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
<i>Gitelman</i>	<i>Caley</i>	<i>Silver</i>	<i>Schwartz</i>
pass	pass	1NT	pass
2♥	all pass		

Note that North-South are on for 4♠, a game that is a lot easier to bid if East-West are playing a strong notrump system. East will open the bidding with one club, allowing South an opportunity to overcall at the one-level, after which North gets a chance to show his spades. Will North-South get to 4♠? We'll never know. What we do know is that versus the weak notrump, *North-South never took a bid*.

## CHAPTER 2

# RESPONDING TO 1NT

As mentioned earlier, you can adopt the weak notrump into your current system without committing to a huge amount of memory work. The invitational sequences will require some study, since you will be working with different ranges, but they are not all that difficult to learn. This chapter will highlight the use of Four Way Transfers, and how you can continue to use this system over a weak notrump opening.

More and more partnerships that play the weak notrump are comfortable with transfer responses. You too should feel free to stay with what you are accustomed to — bridge can be tough enough as it is, and it's often best to stay within your comfort zone. Keeping with what is comfortable for you is probably the number one advantage of continuing to play transfers — just remember to factor in the three-point differential between ranges.

So now you need at least 12 HCP to drive to game. All (balanced) responding hands with ten or fewer high-card points are played in a partscore. The tricky hands are those with exactly 11 HCP. You may wish to give up on bidding a game or you may wish to invite partner immediately — this decision is more a matter of your partnership style. I recommend treating them as invitational, especially when looking for a major-suit game, since distributional features can increase the chance of success.

Let's assume you are already comfortable playing Jacoby Transfers or Four Way Transfers over 1NT openings. Keep in mind that you typically need 3 more points in order to bid game (partner is 3 points short of what he would have had if you were playing a strong notrump). What is your bidding plan when partner opens 1NT and you hold the following hands?

♠ J 9 7 5 3    ♥ A Q 10    ♦ K 7 4    ♣ J 9

With this hand, transfer to spades, then invite to game with 2NT. You have 11 HCP, partner has 12-14. You want to be in game, either 3NT or 4♠, if partner has a maximum (14 HCP) or a hand that revalues to that with a spade fit.

♠ 4    ♥ K Q 10 8 2    ♦ K 9 8 4 3    ♣ 7 4

With this hand, simply transfer to hearts and pass. With only 8 HCP and a partner limited to 14, you know the limit of the hand is partscore. Granted, there are some magic hands that produce game, but that will require luck and good breaks . . . best to avoid those kinds of games.

♠ A 8 7 4 2    ♥ K Q J    ♦ Q J 8    ♣ 10 8

With this hand, transfer to spades and then bid 3NT. This offers a choice of game contracts, either 3NT or 4♠. Partner will prefer the suit contract with appropriate support.

♠ Q 2    ♥ K J 9 7 2    ♦ Q 10 3    ♣ K 10 2

With this hand, transfer to hearts and then bid 2NT — invitational to game. Again, partner can choose between hearts or notrump, in addition to picking between game and partscore.

To sum up, you require at least 12 HCP to leap to game after a transfer. With 11 HCP, you should invite. With anything less, transfer and pass — unless you have a sixth card, in which case you can invite by repeating your major at the three-level. The auction would proceed like this:

**OPENER**

1NT

2♠

**RESPONDER**

2♥<sup>1</sup>

3♠<sup>2</sup>

1. Transfer to spades.
2. Invitational with six (or more) spades.

# OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Turning the tables, let's look at a transfer auction from opener's point of view. You have opened 1NT and partner transfers you to hearts. You hold a good hand with four-card heart support, something like:

♠ A 5 3    ♥ Q J 10 5    ♦ A K 9 2    ♣ 4 2

The auction goes:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1NT	2♦1
?	

## 1. Transfer to hearts.

The question is, do you bid 2♥ or 3♥? Is there anything else to consider? Some tournament players merely accept the transfer at the two-level for fear that responder has a weak hand and that maybe eight tricks are the limit. Others prefer to follow the Law of Total Tricks and jump to the three-level in hearts to tell partner about the nine-card fit. A more sophisticated strategy is to use the bid of 2NT to show four-card support and a maximum for hearts. (The corollary is that now you can bid three of the major (the Law level) with four-card support for partner and *minimum* strength.) Finally, there are others who will bid 3♣ at their second turn to call; this shows a worthless doubleton in clubs as well as four-card support, but says nothing about strength.

Any one of the above strategies is fine. The advantage of showing a worthless doubleton by bidding it at the three-level (or bidding 2♠ if partner transfers to hearts and your worthless doubleton is in spades) is that *responder can now become the declarer*, thus protecting his holding in your weak suit. In addition, responder knows where most of your values lie for slam bidding purposes. If responder knows you have a worthless doubleton (which is defined as J-x or worse) in a side suit, plus four-card trump support, ostensibly he will be able to count your side's losers in that particular suit.

Using the methods just described, try bidding these hands as opener. In each case, you open 1NT and partner bids 2♥, transferring you to spades. What is your call? You hold:

♠ J 10 7 4    ♥ A Q J 3    ♦ K Q 8    ♣ 8 6

Bid 3♣. This promises four-card spade support and exactly two clubs (not including the club ace, king or queen).

♠ A J 9 3    ♥ Q 3    ♦ K J 5 4    ♣ K 9 8

Bid 2NT. This promises four-card spade support and a maximum strength hand — usually 14 HCP, but sometimes a very good 13. You can't bid 3♥ because your doubleton is headed by the queen. Too good — if your hearts were J-x or worse you could bid 3♥.

♠ 8 7 5 4    ♥ A 9 3    ♦ 10 3    ♣ A K J 7 4

Bid 3♦. Since you are now playing according to the Law, you can bid worthless doubletons on any strength. The only time you indicate a difference between a minimum and a maximum is when you have four-card support for partner's major and no worthless doubletons. Therefore, this bid merely announces your four-card support and a doubleton diamond.

♠ Q 10 9 4    ♥ A 10 4    ♦ Q J 6    ♣ A 5 4

Bid 3♠. The choice is really between showing a minimum and a maximum, so this is one of those judgment calls. But since you have just 13 HCP and a 4-3-3-3 pattern, perhaps you should indicate a minimum hand to partner while showing your good spade fit.

The strategy of using ‘superaccepts’ over transfers is not favored by all tournament players. Sometimes responder transfers on nothing but junk and a five-card major, and so the three-level is simply too high. On other hands, it's important to tell partner about the nine-card trump fit. Once again, partnership agreements will be necessary here. But by playing 2NT as a

maximum with four-card support (sometimes you will even have five-card support), you will be able to continue investigating slams at a low level. Therefore, it's good for game and slam bidding, but potentially disastrous to your partscore bidding. Oh well, you can't have it all in this game.

## TRANSFERRING TO MINORS

In addition to using transfers to show the majors, you can transfer to show each of the minors. So:

**1NT–2♠ shows clubs**

**1NT–2NT shows diamonds**

From here, opener can indicate how much he likes his hand for that minor based on high-card strength and fit for partner. Many partnerships agree that honor-third is a minimum requirement for a positive attitude. This would include the queen, king or ace in responder's minor. However, jack-fourth or better should suffice, too.

Some play that bidding responder's known minor at the three-level shows a positive attitude towards that strain; it's as if opener is saying, 'I like my hand for this minor'. Others play the in-between step to say, 'I like it'. Either is fine, but there are some slight advantage to playing the former. Here's why.

Take a weak hand with clubs:

♠ J    ♥ 8 5 3    ♦ 10 4 2    ♣ Q J 9 8 5 4

Your plan is to transfer to clubs and play it there. If partner bids 3♣, you will pass — you are not worth going beyond a 3♣ contract. If partner bids 2NT, saying, 'I don't like my hand for clubs', then you will bid 3♣ yourself and play it there.

Now let's take a hand where you are weak with both minors:

♠ 8    ♥ 9 4    ♦ Q 10 9 4 3    ♣ K J 8 5 2

What do you do? Do you pass 1NT? Do you guess which minor to transfer to? Try this. Transfer to diamonds and see what partner has to say. If partner likes his hand for diamonds (by bidding 3♦), then pass. If partner bids 3♣ to say he does not like his hand for diamonds, then pass that too! The thinking is that if partner does not like his hand for diamonds, then by inference his hand is better for clubs. Partner might hold something like:

♠ A J 9 2    ♥ Q 7 4 3    ♦ 8 3    ♣ A Q 7

If so, then you can reach a club contract. Unfortunately, it is at the three-level, but that's the way it goes; at least you are getting to the best strain.

The other small advantage is that when opener bids responder's minor, the opponents still don't know the strength of responder's hand. If he is weak, it is harder for them to balance.

## WHAT IS A DIRECT THREE-LEVEL BID OVER 1NT?

The short answer to this is that there are lots of possibilities. Let's quickly look at the old-fashioned style where direct three-level bids are to play. This means anywhere from a preempt to a fairly decent hand, but not enough to be interested in game. This treatment works well if you are only playing transfers for the majors. Also, if you are playing Two-Way Stayman (described in Chapter 3), then direct three-level bids to play work well. In a bit more detail, they work like this.

If you jump to three of a minor, you promise at least a six-card suit; if you jump to three of a major, you promise seven cards (a six-card suit is acceptable if the hand is distributional.) Partner is not invited to bid again. Your desire here is to jam up the opponents, who may have a fit. Here are

some typical hands for a three-level response; in all cases partner has opened the bidding 1NT.

♠ Q J 8 7 5 3 2    ♥ 9 8    ♦ 10 8 3    ♣ J

Bid 3♠. Your seventh spade means you have a nine-card fit. By jumping, you might get away with shutting out the opponents completely — who knows what they can make?

♠ K 9    ♥ J 9 7 6 4 3 2    ♦ 8 3    ♣ 7 4

Bid 3♥. Same strategy as before. Even with 7222 shape, it's worth the preemptive call.

♠ 4    ♥ Q 9 8    ♦ A 10 9 7 6 5    ♣ K 7 4

Bid 3♦. Although your high-card strength is better, can you envision a game contract? (Well, yes — if partner has a diamond fit, a spade stopper and three fast tricks outside diamonds, but how likely is that...?) The most your side would have is 23 HCP — best to play in three diamonds. Note: if you are playing Four-suit Transfers, then your bid is 2NT and your plan is to pass partner's 3♦ call.

♠ 9 4    ♥ 9    ♦ 9 7 6    ♣ J 10 9 8 6 4 2

Bid 3♣. Playing transfers, you would transfer to clubs, but playing weak three-level bids you jump to 3♣ yourself.

If you have a five-card minor and a weak hand, pass partner's 1NT opening. You may run out to that suit if you are doubled, but wait until that happens. (See "Rescue Bidding.")

## USING THE THREE-LEVEL FOR MINOR-SUIT HANDS

A common modern style that goes hand-in-hand with transfer systems is having three-level bids show various hands with both minors. The thinking behind this method is that if you are playing transfers, you already have ways to show all the hand types which include length in a major suit. Therefore you can use the three-level to show the minor-oriented hands. One version looks like this:

Another version looks like this:

1. **3♣ Both minors (5+-5+), weak**
2. **3♦ Both minors (5+-5+), forcing**
3. **3♥ Both minors, 5-4, forcing, fragment in hearts (short spades)**
4. **3♠ Both minors, 5-4, forcing, fragment in spades (short hearts)**

Say, as responder, you pick up:

♠ 4    ♥ K 8 7    ♦ A K 10 8 3    ♣ A Q 9 8

Over partner's 1NT opening, you can now bid 3♥ to show both minors (at least 5-4 in length) and shortness in spades. From here, partner can insist on hearts, because he opened 1NT with a five-card heart suit. Or partner can bid 3NT with lots of values in spades and a bad fit for your minor-suit slam interest. Alternatively, partner can bid four of a minor which is a cooperative call, looking to continue on to a minor-suit slam.

## **3♠ AS PUPPET STAYMAN**

Many tournament players like to play some version of Puppet Stayman. This is a Stayman bid asking about major-suit length. Opener can show five-card length, four-card length or deny having either. Using 2♣ over 1NT as Puppet Stayman doesn't actually work out that well (the original convention was designed to work over a 2NT opening, where inviting or stopping short of game are not really issues). However, instead of playing Puppet Stayman at

the two-level, you can use a 3♣ call over 1NT, showing a game-forcing hand and asking for five-card majors. Thus, as responder, you could hold:

♠ K 10 8    ♥ 8    ♦ K Q 10 8 3    ♣ A J 9 2

Here you have enough values for game but are worried about hearts. If partner has a five-card spade suit, then your 3♣ Puppet Stayman inquiry will reveal it. If partner bids 3♦ — promising one or two four-card majors — you can subside in 3NT and hope for the best. However, if his response is 3NT (no four- or five-card major) you're probably going to wish you had been playing one of the minor-suit methods discussed above!

## WHAT ABOUT FOUR-LEVEL BIDS?

Play what you like. If you are accustomed to Gerber and Texas transfers, then by all means keep playing them. You may even want to consider playing the original version of Texas transfers, also known as ‘South African Texas’.

South African stipulates that you give up the Gerber bid of 4♣ over 1NT (be honest — when was the last time you used it?). Now 4♣ shows hearts and 4♦ shows spades, while 4♥ and 4♠ are both natural and to play. One reason to do this is that it’s harder to have a bidding accident — 1NT-4♥ just sounds so natural! There’s a theoretical advantage too: playing South African allows you to choose whether to play the hand as responder or let partner play the hand as opener. Your decision is based on whether or not your hand features tenace positions such as A-Q or a guarded king. For example:

♠ A Q J 9 7 3    ♥ A 8 6    ♦ J 9 5    ♣ 10

With this hand, bid 4♦ — a transfer to spades. You prefer to have the opening lead coming around to partner’s hand. With this hand, however:

♠ Q J 10 9 7 3    ♥ K 8 6    ♦ A Q 3    ♣ 10

Bid 4♠; natural and to play. You prefer the lead coming around to your hand, especially if your LHO leads a diamond away from his king. Or perhaps your LHO holds the ace of hearts. If you allow partner to play the hand, a heart lead through your king might be enough to set the contract.

Whatever your partnership chooses to agree on will be fine. Texas is good; South African Texas is good; playing natural four-level bids are good. They're all great, in fact. Just make sure you and your partner are on the same page — if one of you is playing a convention and the other is not . . . hello, bad result! (Believe me, I know from experience.)

# CHAPTER 3

## TWO-WAY STAYMAN

If you're ready to look at an alternative structure to transfers over your weak notrump, there is one that works very well: Two-Way Stayman. Since it's the one I like and recommend, I'm going to describe it in detail in this chapter. If you've already settled on transfers, feel free to skip to Chapter 4.

The Two-Way Stayman convention is fairly simple to learn and it's effective. It will usually get you to the right contract, whether it be partscore, game or slam. It's called Two-Way Stayman because there are two Stayman bids over 1NT — 2♣ and 2♦. It works like this:

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
1NT	2♣

If, as responder, you bid 2♣ after a 1NT opening, then you do not have enough values for game. You are either weak or invitational. Thus the 2♣ bid is non-forcing Stayman (i.e. not forcing to game). Responder's hand could be either weak and distributional or game-invitational.

If, however, you respond 2♦ over 1NT, then you are not only enquiring into partner's major-suit holdings, but you are also announcing, 'We are going to game'. With the 2♦ response, you are both describing and asking.

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
1NT	2♦

The 2♦ bid is forcing Stayman (forcing to game). Responder could have a game-only type hand or could be interested in a slam.

And that's all there is to it! Well, not entirely; there are a few more things to learn. For example, since you are not transferring anymore, the other two-level bids over 1NT (2♥ and 2♠) are *natural and non-forcing* — the old-fashioned way of playing these bids (see the next section).

Let's continue with a more in-depth analysis of Two-Way Stayman. First, you'll learn how to handle all weak hand types. Then, we'll examine invitational hands and finally towards the end of the chapter, you'll learn how to handle auctions that begin with the game-forcing 2♦ Stayman.

## WEAK HANDS WITH A FIVE-CARD MAJOR OR LONGER

Before getting to the actual Stayman bids, it's important to review some bidding sequences that go all the way back to the beginning of bridge: drop-dead bids at the two-level. Modern bridge players have transfers so deeply ingrained into their systems that these two natural auctions actually sound 'funny'. I've been at the table when they've come up and they rarely fail to bring a puzzled expression to the opponents' faces when there is no alert. And yet these auctions are 100% 'standard' — no alert is required.

OPENER	RESPONDER
1NT	2♥/2♠ <sup>1</sup>
1. Natural and to play.	

In both cases, responder promises five or more cards in the bid major. Repeat: these bids are not artificial; *they are natural and to play*. There are no guarantees that you are getting your side to the best fit, but you are taking your best shot by playing the percentages. For the same reason that you would transfer partner to a five-card major and then pass, you should bid your five-card major at the two-level. On good days, you will receive four- or even five-card support. On bad days, you will receive two-card support. On

really bad days, you'll receive a singleton for support, but those are the days partner has missorted his hand.

What exactly does ‘to play’ mean? It could be a hand anywhere between 0 and 10 HCP. Many partnerships invite to game on all 11-HCP hands, too, but don’t automatically assume that a player who fails to invite has 10 or fewer HCP. There is nothing wrong with ‘downgrading’ a bad-looking 11-count and treating it as a 10 — for instance, a hand with 4333 shape, lacking in tens, nines and eights. Therefore, there’s a chance of holding an 11-count and passing or signing off at the two-level.

Think of all the information responder has gained after partner opens 1NT. Try the following hands to test yourself. What is your call with each of these hands after partner opens the bidding 1NT?

(1) ♠ J 9 8 3 2	(2) ♠ K 3 2	(3) ♠ Q J 10	(4) ♠ A 10 9 7 6
♥ 5	♥ 10 9 8 5 4 3	♥ Q 10 9 7 2	♥ K J 10
♦ J 10 4 3	♦ J	♦ 8 7 6 3	♦ Q 10 5
♣ 9 8 7	♣ A 4 3	♣ 2	♣ 8 5

With (1), bid 2♠ for the same reason that you’d transfer to spades if playing transfers. A spade contract is likely to be your best spot, unless partner has five diamonds. Plus, the opponents may have a big heart fit, so get in their way. Remember, the points are spread evenly, so jam up the opponents.

With (2), bid 2♥. You don’t have enough to commit to or even invite to game.

With (3), bid 2♥. Even with fewer high card points than this hand, you should get out to your five-card major — the hand will almost certainly play much better in 2♥ than in 1NT.

With (4), bid 2♠. Here is an example of a very decent hand. Again, you don’t have quite enough values to invite to game. As you will see in a later chapter on competitive bidding, should the opponents enter the fray, you may consider teaching them a sharp lesson. Have the double card handy!

So then, why did you make a sign-off bid with all of the above hands? Because you don't have enough for game and your job is to find the safest partscore.

## *After 1NT - 2♥/2♠*

Opener should not take another bid over partner's 2♥ or 2♠ signoff; however, holding four-card support for the major and a maximum, he can raise to the three-level — it won't be the end of the world. In today's hyper-competitive bidding environment, it would be a preemptive strike — an attempt to deprive the opponents from balancing and finding their fit.

Surely if the auction becomes competitive before your chance to rebid as opener, you may raise partner. Say the auction goes:

WEST (you)	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT ?	pass	2♠	3♦

Holding four-card spade support, feel free to support partner. In fact, that's the key: four-card support. If you have that, you may raise partner with a minimum-strength hand, if you feel it's appropriate. It's a two-way shot: the opponents may be making 3♦ or perhaps your side is cold for 3♠. Hey, you're just following the Law — you'd be making Larry Cohen proud.

Obviously, if you don't have four-card support for partner, you should usually not bid. Best to pass and see what partner does. Remember, partner has a much better idea of your side's values. Partner heard you open 1NT, so he knows within 2 points how the high cards are distributed between the two sides.

Auctions that begin 1NT-2♥ or 1NT-2♠ are some of the oldest, most time-honored auctions in bridge. In that respect, playing Two-Way Stayman is like a walk down memory lane. Now, on to the actual Stayman sequences!

## 2♣: NON-FORCING STAYMAN

### *Weak Hands*

You may bid 2♣ with all invitational hands and also with some very weak hands on which your next call is going to be ‘pass’.

Let’s start with the weak hands, a method known (affectionately) as Garbage Stayman. Say partner opens 1NT and you hold any one of the following:

♠ 9 8 7 5	♠ K 8 7	♠ A J 3 2	♠ Q 8 3 2
♥ Q 7 4 2	♥ J 9 6 3	♥ J 10 7	♥ Q 9 4 3
♦ K 10 8 5 4	♦ J 10 7 3 2	♦ 9 8 6 5 4	♦ J 9 7 3
♣ —	♣ 10	♣ 8	♣ 7

As responder, you can afford to bid 2♣ with each of the above hands, because partner must respond with 2♦, 2♥ or 2♣. No matter what opener rebids, you will pass. And there you will play, unless, of course, the opponents decide to compete — then you will most likely choose to defend. If partner chooses to bid again, that’s another story. At least you will be out of 1NT, which is all you ever really wanted.

Why must you pass opener’s response to your 2♣ bid? Because if you take another call, you will be showing a hand with invitational values. You will see some example hands of invitational sequences later, but for now, all you need to know is that with weak distributional hands, one of your options is to bid 2♣, Stayman, and then pass partner’s response. This means that some of the time you will be converting opener’s 2♦ artificial bid (denying a four-card major) into your side’s final contract.

It’s important to know that you cannot bid 2♣ with just any weak hand; there are some distributional requirements. These include:

- *Club shortness.* You should have a void or singleton in clubs.

- *Major-suit support or tolerance.* What this means is that ideally you will have two four-card majors, but sometimes you can't have everything. At a minimum, have at least one four-card major (support) and one three-card major (tolerance). Note that if you have a five-card major, a four-card major and you are weak, you should simply sign off in your five-card major at the two-level. There is no sense mucking about hoping to discover your possible 4-4 major suit fit — just bid your five-card major. At the very worst, you will be in a 5-2 fit.
- *Diamond support.* Logically, if you have no more than four cards in each major and no more than one club, you will have at least four diamonds. So, if partner rebids 2♦, thereby denying a major, you should be well placed to convert that artificial bid to the final contract. The worst case scenario is when partner plays a 2♦ contract with a total of six trumps — two in his hand, four in yours. Oh well.

Some pairs play ‘Crawling Stayman’. This method is similar to Garbage Stayman in that responder is weak, but Crawling Stayman allows responder to take another call at the two-level. This allows some leeway on weak 5-4 hands, for example. However, since it interferes with invitational sequences, necessitating an awkward workaround, Crawling Stayman fits better with a transfer structure than with Two-Way Stayman.

## *Invitational Sequences*

Since all game-forcing hands begin with 2♦, invitational sequences (whereby responder holds 11-12 HCP), need to begin with 2♣. To illustrate, say you hold one of the following:

(1) ♠ K Q 9 7 2	(2) ♠ 9	(3) ♠ Q 9 3 2	(4) ♠ K Q 9 7 2
♥ A 10 8 3	♥ A 10 8 3 2	♥ A 8 3 2	♥ 8 3
♦ Q 7	♦ K 10 9 4	♦ 9 4	♦ A 9 7
♣ 9 7	♣ K 10 5	♣ K Q 10	♣ Q 9 5

When partner opens 1NT, you will respond 2♣ in all cases. Now let's take each of partner's possible rebids and see what the best follow-up is. The three possible rebids by partner are 2♦, 2♥ and 2♠. Let's take the first one. The auction has gone:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1NT	2♣
2♦	?

With (1), rebid 2♠ in order to show five spades and invitational values. You may or may not have four hearts. As it happens, in this case you do have four hearts, but you didn't guarantee both majors when you began with 2♣ — you just guaranteed one four-card (or longer) major.

With (2), rebid 2♥. Similar to the first example, this bid promises a five-card major and invitational values (typically 11 HCP). Partner is free to pass, bid 2NT or bid game in notrump or your major.

With (3), rebid 2NT. This sequence shows one or two four-card majors and 11 HCP.

With (4), rebid your spades over a 2♦ rebid by opener.

Let's say that over your 2♣ bid partner rebids 2♥, showing a four-or five-card heart suit. The auction has gone:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1NT	2♣
2♥	?

With (1), bid 4♥, since your two doubletons increase the value of your hand.

With (2), bid 4♥, since your hand has improved — your singleton spade just made your hand worth more.

With (3), invite to game with a bid of 3♥.

With (4), rebid 2♠ — natural and invitational. (Note that if partner has a minimum, he will pass your 2♠ bid and there you will play, a nice low contract.)

Finally, let's look at a 2♠ rebid by partner. The auction has gone:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1NT	2♣
2♠	?

With (1), jump to game. Your fifth spade and two doubletons make it worthwhile. Don't invite to game with a 3♠ bid, since partner might pass. You don't know his hand, but surely you want to be in game once the nine-card fit has been discovered.

With (2), bid 3♥. This shows a fifth (or sixth) heart and invitational values; partner is allowed to pass, but with luck he will have the values to bid game in notrump or hearts.

With (3), bid 3♠ — invitational.

With (4), just bid game in spades. There's no guarantee it will make, but you want to be there.

## *Responder's Other Options*

Sometimes as responder you will have a six-card major with invitational values. Again, start with 2♣, non-forcing Stayman, then jump to the three-level in your six-card suit. Partner can then choose from three options: pass, 3NT or four of the major.

**OPENER**

1NT

2♥

**RESPONDER**

2♣

3♠

A typical hand for this auction would be:

♠ K J 8 7 5 4    ♥ A 6 5    ♦ Q 10 5    ♣ 2

*Opener's Rebids*

The subsequent auction isn't complicated, since it involves natural bidding. As opener, just continue to describe your hand. Try bidding the following hands, just to see how it goes. The auction is the same in each case. What do you rebid at your third turn to call?

**OPENER**

1NT

2♥

?

**RESPONDER**

2♣

2♠

♠ Q 9 7 4    ♥ Q J 8 3    ♦ A 10 2    ♣ K J

Bid 4♠. Partner has invitational values and a five-card spade suit. You have enough to raise to game, especially with your four-card trump support.

♠ Q 7    ♥ A 9 6 3    ♦ 9 4 3    ♣ K Q J 10

Pass. You have a minimum 12-point hand. Partner has 11-12 HCP and a five-card spade suit. Don't take it beyond the two-level as eight tricks might be the limit.

♠ A J 8    ♥ K 7 6 4    ♦ Q J 9 3    ♣ K 3

Bid 4♠. You have an eight-card fit; that, plus your maximum strength hand, means you should bid game.

♠ K 3    ♥ A J 8 5    ♦ K J 10 4    ♣ Q 7 6

Bid 3NT. You have another 14-point maximum, but with no fit for partner's spades, you should prefer notrump.

Here are a few more hands for you to bid as opener. What do you bid after responder shows a six-card major and invitational values?

The auction goes:

**OPENER**

1NT

2♦

?

**RESPONDER**

2♣

3♥

♠ J 10 8    ♥ K 9    ♦ K Q 7 4    ♣ K 8 6 2

Pass. Although you're happy to locate the eight-card heart fit, your minimum is still a minimum, so pass and hope partner makes it.

♠ 10 8 3    ♥ K 9 7    ♦ K Q 3    ♣ A Q 7 4

Bid 4♥. The known nine-card fit and maximum strength make this one a no-brainer.

♠ Q 9 3    ♥ Q J    ♦ A J 9 3 2    ♣ K J 7

Bid 4♥. This time you have only an eight-card fit; however, the maximum strength tips the scales towards being in game, not partscore. Your heart honors argue for the suit contract over 3NT.

♠ J 9 8    ♥ Q 3 2    ♦ A 10 4    ♣ K Q 8 4

Pass. Now the fit is there, but not the strength. Take the plus (you hope!) and pass 3♥.

Here's a full deal and an appropriate auction using the 1NT-2♣ start:

	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
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		♠ A 3 ♥ Q 9 5 ♦ J 4 3 2 ♣ 8 7 6 4									
♠ K Q 9 7 2 ♥ 8 3 ♦ A 9 7 ♣ Q 9 5											
♠ 10 6 5 ♥ K 10 6 2 ♦ Q 8 6 5 ♣ K 2		♠ J 8 4 ♥ A J 7 4 ♦ K 10 ♣ A J 10 3									

<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
			1NT <sup>1</sup>
pass	2♣ <sup>2</sup>	pass	2♥ <sup>3</sup>
pass	2♠ <sup>4</sup>	pass	4♠ <sup>5</sup>
all pass			

1. 12-14 HCP.
2. Non-forcing Stayman.
3. Shows 4 (or 5) hearts.
4. Five spades, invitational.
5. Maximum with spade fit.

## 2♦: GAME-FORCING STAYMAN

You make this bid with any hand on which you want to create a game force. The 2♦ bid not only immediately informs partner that you are going to bid at least a game, but it also asks partner for more information about his hand. Most of the time you have interest in a major-suit contract; however, you can also begin the auction with a 2♦ bid when you have interest in locating a minor-suit fit.

## *Opener's Rebids with a Major Suit*

After a 1NT-2♦ start, opener's first obligation is to rebid in a four-card major. Holding 4-4 in the majors, opener will rebid 2♥. Holding a five-card major, opener will bid it at the two-level: there is no sense in using up our own space by bouncing to the three-level.

Say the auction goes:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1NT	2♦
?	

Rebid 2♥ after responder's 2♦ bid with the following weak notrump hands:

(1) ♠ A 9 4 2	(2) ♠ A 9	(3) ♠ A K Q 9	(4) ♠ A 9
♥ K 10 7 5	♥ K 10 7 5 2	♥ 10 7 5 2	♥ J 10 7 5
♦ Q J 8	♦ Q J 7	♦ Q 6	♦ K Q 10 9 5
♣ K 2	♣ K 6 2	♣ Q 6 2	♣ K 2

With (1), you hold 4-4 in the majors. Bid hearts first, as there is no rush to show your spades. If partner rebids 2♠ over 2♥, then you can raise to the three-level and you will still find a fit below game.

With (2), you hold a five-card heart suit. Again, show it at the two-level. If partner next bids 2♠, 2NT, 3♣ or 3♦, rebid 3♥ to show the fifth card in that

suit.

With (3), you again hold 4-4 in the majors, but this time your spades are much more appealing than your weak-looking heart suit. No matter — bid hearts anyway. Spades can be mentioned later if necessary.

With (4), you hold a semi-balanced hand with five diamonds, but the first priority is to show your four-card major if you have one. Since you have a four-card heart suit, show it first. If the auction stays at a convenient level, you can mention diamonds later if you like.

Clearly hearts have the first priority here, which is consistent with the principle of bidding up the line. It pretty much goes without saying, then, that if you hold four (or more) spades and fewer than four hearts, you should rebid 2♠ as opener. What do you rebid with the following hands over partner's 2♦?

(1) ♠ A 8 4 3	(2) ♠ Q J 9 7 6	(3) ♠ A J 10 8	(4) ♠ Q J 10 5
♥ A K 4	♥ A K 3	♥ K Q 9 3	♥ Q 9
♦ Q 4 3 2	♦ Q 3 2	♦ 4 3	♦ J 4
♣ 9 4	♣ J 9	♣ Q J 8	♣ A K 9 7 6

With (1), you rebid 2♠ to show your four-card suit. This bid is obvious.

[To Answer 4](#)

With (2), you rebid 2♠ to show your five-card suit. At this point, partner does not know you hold five spades, so you will rebid them at your next opportunity (unless partner jumps to 3NT, which you should pass).

With (3), you hold two four-card majors, so rebid 2♥. Always rebid hearts first holding both majors; the spades will not get lost and you will show them next, unless partner beats you to it by bidding them at his next turn.

With (4), rebid 2♠ to show the four-card suit. Once again, the strong five-card club suit can wait. Remember: four-card major suits have priority over five-card minors.

[To Question 4](#)

## *Showing a Five-Card Minor*

To show a five-card minor, opener bids it at the three-level: 3♣ or 3♦.

### **OPENER**

1NT  
3♣1

### **RESPONDER**

2♦

1. Five-card club suit, denies a four-card major.

### **OPENER**

1NT  
3♦1

### **RESPONDER**

2♦

1. Five-card diamond suit, denies a four-card major.

## *Other Hand Types*

Finally, we come to the 2NT rebid by opener. This is the catch-all bid that denies any of the holdings noted above. When opener rebids 2NT he guarantees either a 4333 hand with a four-card minor or a 4432 hand with two four-card minors. (See [Baron Corollary](#) for more on this sequence.) Simply put: opener does not hold a four-card major nor does he hold a five-card minor. So:

### **OPENER**

1NT  
2NT<sup>1</sup>

### **RESPONDER**

2♦

1. Opener's precise shape is either 3-2-4-4 or 2-3-4-4 or 3-3-3-4 or 3-3-4-3.

Here are examples of the four hand types on which opener will rebid 2NT after 2♦:

♠ A 9 2	♠ A 9	♠ K 8 3	♠ Q 8 3
♥ Q 10	♥ Q 10 9	♥ Q 9 7	♥ Q 9 6
♦ A J 8 3	♦ K Q 8 3	♦ K 8 3	♦ K Q 8 3
♣ Q 8 5 4	♣ J 8 5 4	♣ A Q 5 4	♣ A 5 4

## Review

As opener, it's really quite simple: ask yourself two quick questions.

'Do I have a four-card major?'

If the answer is 'Yes', then bid that major. If you have two four-card majors, bid 2♥. If the answer to the first question is 'No', then ask yourself:

'Do I have a five-card minor?' If yes, bid that minor.

If the answer to both of those questions is 'No', then you should rebid 2NT.

## Responder's Rebids after a 1NT-2♦ Start

After the preliminary exchange of information, the auction will usually proceed naturally. Responder can either show a five-card suit (or longer) by bidding that suit as cheaply as possible or he can mark time with 2NT (if available) and ask partner for more information.

In all of the following auctions, responder is showing a five-card (or longer) major at his second turn:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1NT	2♦
2♥	2♠ <sup>1</sup>

1. Five-card spade suit.

**OPENER**

1NT

2♠

**RESPONDER**

2♦

3♥<sup>1</sup>

1. Five-card heart suit.

**OPENER**

1NT

2NT

**RESPONDER**

2♦

3♥<sup>1</sup>

1. Five-card heart suit.

**OPENER**

1NT

3♣

**RESPONDER**

2♦

3♠<sup>1</sup>

1. Five-card spade suit.

This way, all 5-3 fits are discovered. Another way a 5-3 fit can be found is when opener holds the five-card major — he simply rebids his suit at his third turn to call:

**OPENER**

1NT

2♥<sup>1</sup>3♥<sup>3</sup>**RESPONDER**

2♦

2NT<sup>2</sup>

1. 4+ hearts, does not deny four spades.
2. Tell me more.
3. I have five hearts.

As illustrated in the above sequence, responder's rebid of 2NT is an attempt to keep the bidding low and thus elicit more information regarding opener's hand pattern. Responder can keep the bidding low to investigate other fits. In this way, even 4-4 fits in a minor can be found. This is the benefit of having the 2NT bid available. It acts as a waiting bid, biding time to allow opener to

describe his hand further. Note that 2NT can never be passed, not even in a million years. Once the 2♦ response is made to the 1NT opening, opener must keep bidding until a game is reached. If opener were ever to pass responder's 2NT call, he might well find himself looking for a new partner.

Remember: the primary message of responder's 2♦ response is 'Partner, we are going to game — please describe your hand some more.'

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
1NT	2♦
2♠1	2NT2
3♣3	

1. 4+ spades, and not 4 hearts.
2. Tell me more.
3. I have four (or five) clubs, and therefore exactly four spades.

When responder bids 2NT, he tends to deny holding a long suit of his own; he is more interested in locating a 4-4 fit. If the 2♦ bidder has a long suit of his own, he can show it at his second turn to bid after setting up the game force.

So responder has a choice at his second turn: he can elicit information from opener by bidding 2NT or he can choose to describe his own hand (by bidding a suit).

Try these. What should you, as responder, rebid at your second turn with each of the following hands after this start?

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
1NT	2♦
2♥	?
(1) ♠ K J 8 7 4	(2) ♠ K J 8 7
♥ K 3	♥ K 9 7 3
♦ K 9 6 5	♦ K 9 6
♣ Q 2	♣ Q 3
(3) ♠ K 8	(4) ♠ K J 7
♥ A K 9 7	♥ K 7
♦ K Q 9 5 3	♦ A Q 8 2
♣ K 4	♣ K Q 9 4

## [To Answers](#)

With (1), bid 2♠. You might still have an eight-card (or nine-card) spade fit. Partner will know you have at least five spades and will raise you to the three-level with three-card support. With a doubleton spade, opener will rebid 2NT or show a good minor suit.

With (2), jump to 4♥. This is known as the Principle of Fast Arrival (PFA) — the faster you arrive in a game-forcing auction, the less slam interest you have. Save a (forcing) raise to 3♥ for a hand on which you have slam interest.

With (3), bid 3♥. In contrast to Hand (2), this is the time to keep the bidding low in order to give your side room to investigate slam. Your 3♥ bid invites a cuebid from partner, and with the right cards from him, together you may have a biddable laydown slam.

With (4), bid 2NT. Again, you have slam interest, but first you want to explore for a 4-4 minor suit fit. If partner has a four-card minor, he will bid it now.

## [To Questions](#)

# *Bidding with a Six-Card Major*

One unresolved situation is when responder holds a six-card major. With interest in a game contract only (no slam interest), you should just transfer at the four-level and get your side to 4♥ or 4♠. We described two ways to do this on page 18: Texas and South African Texas. To review them, playing Texas, you simply bid the suit below your major and pass. Playing South African Transfers, you bid the suit two below your major.

Now, using Two-Way Stayman, what should you do with a six-card major and slam interest?

Start with 2♦ and then rebid your major twice.

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
1NT	2♦
2♥ <sup>1</sup>	2♠ <sup>2</sup>
2NT <sup>3</sup>	3♠ <sup>4</sup>

1. Four or five hearts; if only four hearts, may have four spades.
2. Five or more spades.
3. Two spades only.
4. Six or more spades, slam interest.

The auction may take a different turn; you may be forced to rebid your spades at the four-level. Partner will get the idea that you have slam interest, else you would have used a 4-level transfer sequence.

For example:

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
1NT	2♦
2NT <sup>1</sup>	3♠ <sup>2</sup>
3NT <sup>3</sup>	4♠ <sup>4</sup>

1. No four-card major, no five-card minor.
2. Five or more spades.
3. Doubleton spade.
4. Six or more spades, slam interest.

Let's look at a full deal involving Forcing Stayman in action.

*Dealer: North*

*E-W vul.*

<p>♠ K 3 ♥ A J 8 5 ♦ Q J 9 4 ♣ J 9 8</p> <p>♠ 9 2 ♥ K 10 4 2 ♦ K 10 3 2 ♣ 6 5 4</p>		<p>♠ Q 7 6 ♥ 7 6 ♦ 6 5 ♣ K Q 10 7 3 2</p> <p>♠ A J 10 8 5 4 ♥ Q 9 3 ♦ A 8 7 ♣ A</p>
---	--	---

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1NT	pass	2♦ <sup>1</sup>
pass	2♥ <sup>2</sup>	pass	2♠ <sup>3</sup>
pass	3♦ <sup>4</sup>	pass	3♠ <sup>5</sup>
pass	4♠ <sup>6</sup>	all pass	

1. Forcing Stayman.
2. Natural, four (or five) hearts.
3. Natural, five or more spades.
4. Natural, four (or five) diamonds, only four hearts.
5. Six or more spades, slam interest.
6. No slam interest.

## WHAT ARE DIRECT THREE-LEVEL BIDS?

As you saw in the last chapter on transfer responses, direct three-level bids can be considered as natural and to play or used to show some sort of minor-suit holding, either invitational or forcing.

Playing Two-Way Stayman, however, it does not make sense to have your direct three-level bids be game forcing and showing the minors. Why? You

can always go through 2♦ to show any game-forcing hand. You can go back to playing three-level bids as preemptive and to play.

# CHAPTER 4

## SLAM AUCTIONS

Since the focus of this book is on the weak notrump, this chapter deals with some treatments you may choose to adopt after one of you has opened the bidding with 1NT.

### 4NT

When the auction starts 1NT, you need to be very clear what a subsequent bid of 4NT means, especially by responder. You and your partner have probably already discussed what a jump to 4NT means after you've explicitly agreed on a suit. Even more importantly, you will have discussed the responses. (It's always good to be on the same page as partner when it comes to keycard responses!)

In terms of the sequences that often get confused, this auction has not changed:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1NT	2♦1
2♥	4NT <sup>2</sup>

1. Forcing Stayman.
2. Natural, invitational.

Just as it would be if you were using 2♣ Stayman and transfers, 4NT is quantitative, not RKCB. As we'll see shortly, you have ways of agreeing hearts below game (since 2♦ created a forcing auction). You can use RKCB after doing that if you so desire. Similarly, if you are playing Texas, you can set the suit in a major and then ask for keycards:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1NT	4♦1
4♥	4NT <sup>2</sup>

1. Texas, transfer to hearts.
2. RKCB.

## CUEBIDDING

Besides RKCB, another big part of slam auctions is cuebidding. Some partnerships cuebid only aces at their first opportunity to make a cuebid, while other partnerships cuebid first- or second-round controls (aces, kings, singletons and voids).

No matter what structure you choose to play over notrump, splinter bids should be part of your weaponry. The splinter bid is defined as a jump to an unbid suit to show a singleton or void. A fit must have already been agreed upon. If no fit has been explicitly agreed upon, then it is implied that the last-bid suit will be the trump suit. Splinters allow you to bid slams that do not have the typical high-card strength that is normally deemed necessary. When either your hand or your partner's includes a singleton, the most tricks the opponents can take in that particular suit is one (assuming you have a good trump fit with partner, of course). Here's a look at some example auctions.

First, if you are playing transfers, a typical splinter auction might look like this:

**OPENER**

1NT

2♥

**RESPONDER**

2♦1

4♣2

1. Transfer to hearts.
2. Splinter, shows singleton or void in clubs.

No suit has been explicitly agreed, so the splinter to 4♣ implicitly agrees the last-bid suit, in this instance, hearts. Note that in this auction, responder knows that opener has two, three or four hearts. Opener has not had a chance to state precisely how many hearts he holds, but we can narrow it down. Earlier in this book, we talked about some agreements where with four hearts opener does something other than bid 2♥. Since opener bid 2♥ here, there is an inference that he holds exactly two or three hearts.

That being said, the 4♣ bid is known as a ‘self-splinter’. It shows a six-card heart suit, a singleton club and slam interest. Opener can investigate slam with good controls and/or no wastage in the club suit. For example, opener might hold:

♠ A J 3 2    ♥ Q 9    ♦ K Q J 4    ♣ 10 8 3

With this hand, opener should bid 4♦, which shows a control in diamonds and slam interest — and by implication, no wasted values in clubs. Responder can usually take over from there, often by using Roman Keycard. However, if opener holds a hand with wastage in clubs and/or a lack of controls, he should retreat to the trump suit at the four-level. Only with a ‘monster’ should responder continue on to slam, having been sufficiently warned of the unsuitability of partner’s hand. For his negative attitude towards investigating a slam, opener might hold something like:

♠ Q J 8    ♥ Q 9 3    ♦ K J 4    ♣ K Q 10 9

Clearly, with the five high-card points in clubs and a lack of aces, opener is not thrilled by responder’s club shortness. With this hand, he would simply

bid 4♥ over 4♣.

Another splinter appears in this auction:

**OPENER**

1NT

2♥

**RESPONDER**2♦<sup>1</sup>3♠<sup>2</sup>

1. Transfer to hearts.
2. Agrees hearts as trumps, shows a singleton or void in spades.

Here, responder's jump does not need to be to the four-level. A rebid of 2♠ by responder would be natural and forcing, so the 3♠ bid is freed up to be a splinter in support of hearts.

Let's switch over to the Two-Way Stayman response structure. Here the auction can look quite similar, so be careful. The bids are nearly identical, although the messages are quite different.

Playing Two-Way Stayman, responder's 2♦ call over 1NT is asking for further description. When opener announces a four-card major, responder's splinter is assumed to be in support of a known major-suit fit. The auction might proceed:

**OPENER**

1NT

2♥<sup>2</sup>**RESPONDER**2♦<sup>1</sup>4♦<sup>3</sup>

1. Forcing Stayman.
2. Four-card heart suit (maybe five).
3. Agrees hearts as trumps, shortness in diamonds.

The key here is that responder has at least some slam interest. If responder has no slam interest, he should keep silent about his short suit. When making a splinter bid, you need to be able to picture your partner (the opener) with

the ‘right’ cards for slam. In other words, you need to imagine a specific holding in partner’s hand to have a play for six. Even then, if making the final contract will require a successful finesse, you’ll want to stay out of slam, since it is at best a 50-50 proposition. For example, say your partner opens 1NT and you hold:

♠ Q J 5 4    ♥ K J 8 6    ♦ A 10 8 7    ♣ Q

**OPENER**

1NT

2♥

**RESPONDER (YOU)**

2♦1

4♥2

1. Forcing Stayman.
2. No slam interest.

As a practical matter, to make a slam, you need your partner to hold the ace of spades, the ace-queen of hearts and the king of diamonds. Those cards add up to 13 HCP, so it’s conceivable partner could come up with one more beneficial card: the jack of diamonds. Even then, the slam requires a spade finesse and probably a good guess in diamonds (and partner may need the ten of spades too!) As Bob Hamman is fond of saying, ‘Don’t play me for perfect cards, partner; I won’t have them.’ The percentages tell you that partner does not have that perfect hand and even if he does, *the odds are not in your favor*.

So you should ask yourself, ‘Why should I tell the opponents more about my hand when I know I don’t want to go any higher than game?’ Therefore, on this kind of hand, just bid to game (4♥) directly and provide no further clues to the opponents.

Here we come to an important distinction between raising your partner’s major to the three-level and jumping to game (raising to the four-level). By supporting partner’s major at the three-level, you indicate some slam interest:

**OPENER**

1NT

2♠

**RESPONDER (you)**

2♦

3♠<sup>1</sup>

1. Spades are trumps; 'please cuebid, as I have some slam interest.'

Do you see another inference in this auction? Hint: it has to do with what you didn't do. You didn't make a splinter bid, so you are almost guaranteed not to hold a singleton or void *somewhere*. (I use the term 'almost guaranteed', since there is only one guarantee in bridge — there aren't any guarantees. Perhaps, for example, your partnership has agreed not to splinter into a singleton ace.)

Note that these are the types of sequences Edgar Kaplan was talking about when he wrote that the weak notrump allows you to keep the bidding low. You can investigate for slam below the game level. If you like what you hear, away you go; if you don't like what you hear, stop in game. Oftentimes, you will win IMPs or matchpoints because other pairs will have unwisely got themselves to the five-level... If ten tricks are the maximum on the deal, you earn yourselves a plus score!

## LOCATING THE MINOR-SUIT FIT

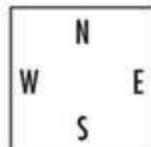
Let's look at an auction that starts slowly and ends up in a slam. It features 2♦ Forcing Stayman, a cuebid and RKC. Most importantly, it highlights one of the advantages of playing Two-Way Stayman: the ability to locate a 4-4 fit in one of the minors.

*Dealer: South*

*E-W vul.*

♠ J 10 9 6  
♥ 7 6  
♦ Q 5 3 2  
♣ 10 3 2

♠ A Q 5 4  
♥ K Q 2  
♦ A 4  
♣ K J 7 5



♠ 8 7 3  
♥ J 10 9 8  
♦ K J 9 7  
♣ 6 4

♠ K 2  
♥ A 5 4 3  
♦ 10 8 6  
♣ A Q 9 8

North picks up a ‘boatload’ and hears his partner open the bidding with 1NT. Instead of blasting into 6NT (after looking for a spade fit), North can afford to go slowly and investigate another strain, in this case clubs. The auction might go:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	2♦ <sup>1</sup>	pass	1NT
pass	2NT <sup>3</sup>	pass	2♥ <sup>2</sup>
pass	4♣ <sup>5</sup>	pass	3♣ <sup>4</sup>
pass	4NT <sup>7</sup>	pass	4♥ <sup>6</sup>
pass	6♣ <sup>9</sup>	all pass	5♠ <sup>8</sup>

1. Game-forcing Stayman.
2. Four (or five) hearts.
3. Tell me more.
4. Four clubs.
5. Agrees clubs and shows slam interest (else North would bid 3NT or 5♣).
6. Cuebid.
7. Roman Keycard.
8. Two keycards with the club queen.
9. Let's play here.

Note that 6♣ is a superior contract to 6NT, because North has a ruffing value in diamonds. In fact, this is how the club contract can be fulfilled. Declarer can ruff a diamond for his twelfth trick. A 6♣ contract should make any day clubs are not 5-0.

Also of note in this slam sequence is North's 2NT call. As you saw earlier, it carries the meaning, 'Please tell me more about your hand'. Opener now has the opportunity to provide more description. He can either show a fifth card in the major already shown or he can bid another four-card suit (which is usually a minor).

That's all very well, but sometimes you will be stuck for a sensible way to continue if, after you bid 2♦ Forcing Stayman, opener rebids 2NT. The 2NT call says, "I have no four-card major and no five-card minor." However, it doesn't preclude opener holding a four-card minor and that may be (as we have seen) the place you want to play your slam. How do you get around this? How can you try to locate your minor-suit fit now? The answer lies in a useful little convention called the Baron Corollary.

## WHAT IS THE BARON COROLLARY?

The Baron Corollary is a  $3\clubsuit$  bid after this common start:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1NT	$2\heartsuit^1$
2NT <sup>2</sup>	$3\clubsuit^3$

1. Game-forcing Stayman.
2. No four-card major, no five-card minor.
3. Baron Corollary – ‘Tell me more’.

Since the opening bidder is known to be either 4333 (with his four-card suit being a minor) or 4432 (with his four-card suits being both minors), responder bids an artificial  $3\clubsuit$  to ask for further description. (Think of it as ‘more Stayman’ if you like.) Now opener can reveal his exact distribution.

That’s not so difficult to memorize, is it? Think of it this way: the major suit bids by opener reflect precisely the number of cards in that suit. So by bidding  $3\heartsuit$ , opener shows a hand with three hearts. Likewise,  $3\spadesuit$  shows the hand with only a four-card diamond suit, and the only three-level bid left (3NT) shows clubs.

The Baron Corollary is highly effective for discovering 4-4 fits in the minors; however, it is not absolutely necessary to use it. If you decide to adopt Two-Way Stayman, you can agree to play a simpler system: that responder’s bids after the  $2\heartsuit$  inquiry are all natural. (The example slam hand we discussed featured that kind of natural bidding.)

Here is a complete deal featuring the Baron Corollary in action:

*Dealer: East*

*N-S vul.*

<table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>K J 8 6</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>A K 9 6</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>A Q J 5</td></tr> </table> <table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>A 10 8 6</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>10 9 4</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>8 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>8 7 3 2</td></tr> </table>	♠	5	♥	K J 8 6	♦	A K 9 6	♣	A Q J 5	♠	A 10 8 6	♥	10 9 4	♦	8 2	♣	8 7 3 2		<table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>K 9 7 4 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>Q 7 5</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>5 4 3</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>10 6</td></tr> </table> <table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>Q J 3</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>A 3 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>Q J 10 7</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>K 9 4</td></tr> </table>	♠	K 9 7 4 2	♥	Q 7 5	♦	5 4 3	♣	10 6	♠	Q J 3	♥	A 3 2	♦	Q J 10 7	♣	K 9 4
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♥	Q 7 5																																	
♦	5 4 3																																	
♣	10 6																																	
♠	Q J 3																																	
♥	A 3 2																																	
♦	Q J 10 7																																	
♣	K 9 4																																	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	2♦ <sup>1</sup>	pass	1NT
pass	3♣ <sup>3</sup>	pass	2NT <sup>2</sup>
pass	4♦ <sup>5</sup>	pass	3♦ <sup>4</sup>
pass	4NT <sup>7</sup>	pass	4♥ <sup>6</sup>
pass	6♦ <sup>9</sup>	all pass	5♣ <sup>8</sup>

1. Forcing Stayman.
2. No four-card major, no five-card minor.
3. Baron Corollary, tell me more.
4. 3-3-4-3 distribution.
5. Natural, slam interest.
6. Cuebid.
7. RKCB.
8. 1 or 4 keycards.
9. 'I like our chances here!'

A good slam is reached. The 6♦ contract is good because South can arrange to ruff two spades in dummy and pitch his heart loser on dummy's fourth club.

# USING JUDGMENT

Just for a moment let's forget about conventions and agreements. Here is a hand to test your judgment. You hold:

♠ K 10 3    ♥ A 6 4 2    ♦ A Q 8 7 5 3    ♣ —

You are told that partner holds 12-14 HCP, four spades, a fit with you in diamonds, the king of hearts and the ace of spades. How do you feel about your prospects in a 6♦ contract?

You should feel pretty good about your chances. I know of one player who held this hand and took a rosy (and correct) view, getting a top board in a pairs event at a recent tournament in Toronto. North-South were playing the weak notrump.

Here's the full deal and auction:

*Dealer: South*

*Neither vul.*

<p>♠ K 10 3 ♥ A 6 4 2 ♦ A Q 8 7 5 3 ♣ —</p> <p>♠ 9 8 7 5 ♥ Q 10 ♦ K 2 ♣ A 9 5 4 3</p>		<p>♠ 6 2 ♥ J 9 7 5 ♦ 6 ♣ K Q 10 8 7 6</p> <p>♠ A Q J 4 ♥ K 8 3 ♦ J 10 9 4 ♣ J 2</p>
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<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
			1NT <sup>1</sup>
pass	2♦ <sup>2</sup>	pass	2♠ <sup>3</sup>
pass	3♦ <sup>4</sup>	pass	3♥ <sup>5</sup>
pass	3♠ <sup>6</sup>	pass	4♠ <sup>7</sup>
pass	5♣ <sup>8</sup>	pass	5♦ <sup>9</sup>
pass	6♦	all pass	

1. 12-14 HCP.
2. Game-forcing Stayman.
3. Natural, four (or five) spades, denies four hearts.
4. Natural, five or more diamonds.
5. Implies diamond support, shows heart control.
6. Spade control.
7. Spade control, denies club control because 4♣ was bypassed.
8. Club control.
9. Nothing more to say.

One of the standout bids in this auction is South's 3♥ call. What is so special about this bid? It relays two messages at once. It implies diamond support and shows a heart control. North, of course, can deduce that the control must be the king, since he is looking at the ace. How does North know that 3♥ is not natural? If South had a four-card heart suit, he would have shown hearts

directly over the 2♦ bid. This type of slam sequence rewards further study, as there are plenty of nuances in the language of bidding. So let's look at all of South's choices at his third turn.

At the point, North bids 3♦, a natural bid promising five or more diamonds, South has many options. He can do what he did by bidding 3♥ or he can bid 3♠, which is also a cuebid in support of diamonds. 3♠ has an additional message, however; it also denies a heart control. This is really pretty logical. South can also bypass both 3♥ and 3♠ and bid 3NT. The message here is, 'Sorry, partner, I'm not interested in co-operating. Let's play here.' South makes this call when he has no great fit for diamonds, his hearts and clubs are well-stopped (we can only hope!), he has a minimum-strength hand and a lack of controls. The thinking is: why go beyond 3NT in the search for a diamond slam? A 3NT bid conveys South's opinion of the best final contract. North would need an even stronger hand than this one to continue the slam investigation.

Here is a quick review of where we are in the auction:

NORTH	SOUTH
2♦	1NT
3♦	2♠ ?

If South were to bid 4♣ at this point, it would be in much the same vein as 3♥ and 3♠. This time it would promise a club control and deny a control in both hearts and clubs.

That leaves us with 4♦ by South. What should this be? Well, if we were to continue with the logic presented above, it would show diamond support and deny controls in all the other suits. But if South had *that hand*, he would prefer to play in 3NT, wouldn't he? He must be loaded with queens and jacks — good notrump cards — if he cannot show an outside ace or king. No, this doesn't quite make sense. Instead, 4♦ should be the World's Fair Bid. It should say it all in one fell swoop. It should say, 'Partner, whatever you want, I think I've got it.' So save a raise of responder's minor suit, in this case

diamonds, to show a control in *all the other three suits and good support for partner.*

## ONE MORE GADGET

Here is a specialized gadget invented by Henry Caspar of Toronto. It fits perfectly into a Two-Way Stayman system. Normally a direct 2NT bid would be inviting opener to bid 3NT if he holds a maximum, but Henry uses it as an artificial relay to 3♣.

After the automatic 3♣ rebid from opener, responder can pass — in effect, it's the way to get to play the contract in 3♣ — or responder can bid 3♦, which is natural and to play. However, the real point of the convention is that responder can also bid 3♥ or 3♠. These bids are known as Caspar Keycard. Yes, you read that right. These three-level bids in the majors are simultaneously natural and RKCB for responder.

To review:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1NT	2NT <sup>1</sup>
3♣ <sup>2</sup>	?

1. Relay to 3♣.
2. Forced response.

Here are the continuations responder may choose from:

<b>pass</b>	<b>clubs, to play</b>
<b>3♦</b>	<b>diamonds, to play</b>
<b>3♥</b>	<b>hearts, RKCB for hearts</b>
<b>3♠</b>	<b>spades, RKCB for spades</b>

If after the 3♣ relay bid responder bids a major, then opener shows his controls in step responses. Thus, if playing 1430 RKCB, a bid of 4♣ over responder's 3♥ bid would show two keycards in support of hearts and deny the heart queen. A 3NT call by opener after responder's 3♠ call, for instance, would show 1 or 4 keycards in support of spades.

The advantage of this treatment is that sometimes responder has a long major and slam interest. Keycarding at a low level allows the partnership to stop at the four-level. This may win some IMPs (or matchpoints) if the opponents investigate slam, stop at the five-level and go one down.

The other advantage of playing this 2NT relay bid is that now all your three-level bids are freed up to show something other than 'to play'. One suggestion is that now all your direct three-level bids over 1NT can be treated as natural and invitational, six-card suits promising two of the top three honors (or 'two of the top four honors', if you prefer). If you don't hold two of the top three honors, you need to go through 2♣, non-forcing Stayman, and then rebid your suit. Later, when you show your suit at the three-level, opener will have the information that your six-card suit is not as beefy as it could be. Who knows? It might be all the difference in making the right decision.

# CHAPTER 5

## 1NT REBIDS

Since the weak notrump opening bid shows 12-14 HCP, you need a way to show a balanced hand containing 15-17 HCP. Even more importantly, you will need agreements with your partner as to how to bid *after* you have done this. Before we get to the recommended structure, let's first look at how you should bid with a 'strong' notrump hand in a weak notrump system.

As you probably guessed, in order to show the balanced 15-17 hand, you must open with one of a suit (usually it will be a minor) and plan to rebid 1NT. This is all assuming, of course, that you cannot raise partner's major to the two or three-level. Here are some typical auctions:

### OPENER

1♦

1NT

### RESPONDER

1♠

Opener could have any one of the following hands:

♠ K 2

♥ A Q J 2

♦ J 8 7 3

♣ A J 4

♠ 8 5 2

♥ K 10

♦ A K J 9

♣ K J 9 2

♠ J 10 3

♥ A 4

♦ K Q J 8 3

♣ A Q 4

♠ Q J 4

♥ J 9 8 3

♦ A 5 4 2

♣ A K

An alternative auction looks like this:

### OPENER

1♣

1NT

### RESPONDER

1♥

Opener begins with 1♣, because that is his better minor. Over East's 1♥ response, opener bids 1NT to show 15-17 HCP. Playing strong notrump, you would have opened the bidding 1NT. Playing weak notrump, however, you start with your better minor.

Other agreements are possible in regard to which minor suit to open. You may want to agree that you always open 1♣ with 4-4 in the minors, for example, since you won't miss any potential fit and you are going to rebid 1NT anyway, whatever partner does. Notice, too, that (assuming you play five-card majors) you will find yourself opening a three-card minor on occasion.

At this point in the auction, the responder knows his partner holds a balanced hand containing 15-17 HCP *and maybe four spades*.

Opener could hold any one of the following hands:

♠ K Q 10 9	♠ A 10	♠ 9 8 7	♣ K J 3 2
♥ K 3	♥ K 3 2	♥ K 3	♥ 3 2
♦ J 10 5	♦ K J 3	♦ K Q 8 4	♦ Q J 9
♣ A Q 9 4	♣ K Q 10 4 3	♣ A K Q 4	♣ A K Q 10

Why should you bypass your four-card spade suit to rebid 1NT? To show partner as quickly as possible that your hand is a balanced 15-17. Think of it like the way you show a balanced hand of 18-19 HCP — with your 2NT rebid, you frequently bypass a biddable major suit in order to reveal your high-card strength.

There is an important corollary here: when you fail to open or rebid notrump, you have an *unbalanced* hand. For example:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♣	1♥
1♠	

In this auction, responder need have no fear about raising clubs — indeed, opener is likely to have at least five of them.

## WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE 1NT REBID?

Let's suppose the auction has started like this:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♣	1♥
1NT	?

If responder has 8 or more HCP (8 being the minimum responder needs to investigate a game contract), then he usually wants to know more about South's distribution. Typical questions include: Does partner have a third heart? Does partner have four spades? Is partner minimum or maximum? This is where it's important — in any system — to have agreements over a 1NT rebid.

Many club players employ New Minor Forcing as their preferred structure over 1NT rebids. If this is already ingrained in your memory banks, there's no particular reason to stop playing it here. Another time-proven method in a weak notrump system is simply to continue with the Two-Way Stayman structure (as outlined in Chapter 3) over the 1NT rebid. If you like, you can call this 'Two-Way Checkback'. The important thing to know (and it's quite effective) is that after a 1NT rebid showing 15-17 HCP, *2♣ shows all invitational hands* and *2♦ shows all game-forcing hands*. If you're already playing it directly over the 1NT opening, it won't tax your memory and works just as well as New Minor Forcing. Either way, you give up the ability to play a quiet little contract of two clubs, but that's life. Instead, you use the 2♣ rebid by responder to ask for more information from opener.

## INVITATIONAL SEQUENCES

Think of the 2♣ rebid as Invitational Checkback Stayman. Playing Two-Way Checkback, after the 1NT rebid, responder's rebid of 2♣ shows invitational values, about 8 or 9 dummy points, and usually interest in a major-suit game. Opener can then show delayed support for responder's major suit with a three-card holding or he can introduce a new major to show four cards in that suit. If he has three-card support for partner, then he should show that before showing a four-card major of his own. In a similar fashion to normal Stayman, a 2♦ bid from opener denies a concealed major or three-card support for responder's major.

Let's look at some common auctions:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♣	1♥
1NT	2♣
2♥	

This sequence indicates that opener holds three hearts and has just minimum strength. Opener could still have four spades. Responder could still make a further game try if he wanted to.

If opener has a maximum, he not only describes his shape but he also shows his strength by bidding at the three-level. For example:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♣	1♠
1NT	2♣
3♠	

This sequence — a delayed jump by opener — shows three-card spade support and a maximum. If opener were to bid 3♥ (instead of 3♠), then he would be showing a four-card heart suit and extras (while denying three spades).

**OPENER**

1♦  
1NT  
3♥2

**RESPONDER**

1♠  
2♣1

1. 'I'm inviting you to bid game. Please tell me more.'
2. 'I have four hearts and maximum strength. Let's play 3NT or 4♥ (or even 4♠). However, I do not have three spades.'

In all cases, if opener jumps to the three-level after responder bids 2♣, then the partnership is forced to game — 2♣ was in itself invitational and opener has accepted.

Opener's priority is always to make the bid that best describes his hand. If he is minimum, then he should rebid at the two-level, including bidding 2♦ over 2♣ with no major-suit support. For instance:

**OPENER**

1♣  
1NT  
2♦

**RESPONDER**

1♥  
2♣

Opener has a minimum hand without either four spades or three hearts. He is very probably 3-2-3-5.

If opener is maximum, then he should rebid at the three-level or bid 2NT with no major support.

**OPENER**

1♣  
1NT  
2NT

**RESPONDER**

1♥  
2♣

Here, opener has a maximum hand without either four spades or three hearts. Again, he is very probably 3-2-3-5.

If opener is maximum with a five-card minor, then he can show that at the three-level, suggesting a suit-oriented hand.

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♣	1♥
1NT	2♣
3♣1	

1. 5(+) clubs and maximum strength.

## WHEN EXACTLY DOES RESPONDER BID 2♣?

Good question. As mentioned earlier, responder often needs more information from partner. When he doesn't, there's no need to get complicated: with a balanced invitational hand and no interest in a major suit, just raise partner's 1NT to 2NT. The 2♣ checkback bid asks for more information and also reveals an invitational hand.

If you and your partner can locate an eight-card major fit, then you will probably prefer to play in game of that major — however, if you don't have enough values for game, then you hope you will get to play at the two-level. At worst, you will get to 2NT or three of opener's minor suit.

When responder holds a six-card major and invitational values, he will still go through the 2♣ Checkback bid. Then, over most of opener's rebids, responder will rebid his own major, promising six cards in the bid suit. This auction, for example:

**OPENER**

1♣  
1NT  
2♠

**RESPONDER**

1♥  
2♣  
3♥

Responder will also go through the 2♣ checkback to show a hand with five-card support for opener's minor. Here is a sequence that illustrates that:

**OPENER**

1♣  
1NT  
2♥

**RESPONDER**

1♥  
2♣  
3♣1

1. 5+ clubs, still invitational to game. (By inference, responder holds only four hearts, else he would prefer the heart game.)

Responder begins with the 2♣ call over the 1NT rebid and then bids clubs at the three-level. This is natural and invitational.

Similarly, if opener's minor is diamonds, responder goes through 2♣ and then supports diamonds at the three-level. If opener disrupts this plan by jumping to three of a major or bidding three of his own minor, well then, off to game you go, because opener has a maximum.

It's time for you to try bidding some hands. The auction goes:

**OPENER**

1♣  
1NT  
2♠

**RESPONDER (you)**

1♥  
2♣  
?

What is your call at your third turn to bid on each of the following hands?

(1) ♠ J 9 7 4	(2) ♠ J 9 7	(3) ♠ J 9	(4) ♠ J 9 7
♥ AJ 9 3	♥ AJ 9 3 2	♥ AJ 9 3 2	♥ AJ 9 3
♦ 8 6	♦ 8 6	♦ 8 6	♦ 8 6
♣ Q J 7	♣ Q J 7	♣ Q J 7 5	♣ Q J 7 5

### [To Answers](#)

With (1), bid 3♠: ‘support with support’. Opener’s 2♠ rebid showed a minimum (and denied three-card support for hearts), but at that point he didn’t know you had four-card spade support. Since you could have bid 2♣ with either a five-card heart suit or a club fit, you should now let partner know about your spade fit. You might still have a game, and 3♠ keeps game in the picture.

With (2), bid 2NT. You can’t raise spades. You can’t pass. (Well you could, but then partner will be playing a 4-3 fit.) You can’t bid 3♥, as this would show a six-card suit. What’s left? 2NT, invitational.

With (3), bid 2NT. You cannot bid 3♣, as that would show five clubs or more. Again, a rebid of 3♥ shows a six-bagger.

With (4), bid 2NT. This one was easy.

Regarding the recommended bids on Hands 3 and 4: you and your partner may choose to agree that a 3♣ rebid by responder, after having gone through the 2♣ invite, can be made on only four cards. Opener won’t know the exact club count, but perhaps you will feel more comfortable in a club partial than in a notrump contract.

### [To Questions](#)

## GAME-FORCING SEQUENCES

After opener’s 15-17 1NT rebid, the 2♦ rebid by responder guarantees enough values for game — typically at least 10 HCP. From there the partnership can proceed almost as if opener had begun the auction with 1NT. Here is how the auction will develop:

**OPENER**

1♣

1NT

**RESPONDER**

1♠

2♦

You will find auctions that begin this way very relaxing. It's always nice to know when you are going to game. It's nice for partner to know he's going to game. And it's even nicer still when you and your partner both know the other knows that you are on your way to bidding a game. Think of the 2♦ rebid as Checkback Forcing Stayman.

If you're nervous about this business of bypassing a major suit to rebid 1NT, watch how easy it is to get to the right game with these two hands. West is the dealer:

**WEST**

♠ Q 10 9 3  
♥ K 3  
♦ K Q J 9  
♣ A 9 5

**EAST**

♠ A J 7 4  
♥ A 9 8 4  
♦ 5 4  
♣ Q 10 8

1♦

1NT<sup>1</sup>

2♠

pass

1♥

2♦<sup>2</sup>

4♠

1. 15-17 HCP, may have four spades.
2. Game-forcing checkback.

West is able to show the strength and nature of his hand at his second turn to bid — a balanced hand containing 15-17 HCP. East, with an 11-count, is able to initiate the artificial game-forcing sequence with 2♦. Now they easily find the 4-4 spade fit.

Try this one:

**WEST**

♠ J 2  
♥ K Q 10 3  
♦ A Q J  
♣ K 9 7 4

**EAST**

♠ A Q 10 8 3  
♥ J 8 7 3  
♦ 3  
♣ A 3 2

1♣  
1NT<sup>1</sup>  
2♥<sup>3</sup>  
4♥

1♠  
2♦<sup>2</sup>  
4♦<sup>4</sup>  
pass

1. 15-17 HCP.
2. Game-forcing checkback.
3. Four hearts, denies three spades.
4. Splinter; agrees hearts, diamond shortness.
5. No slam interest.

Here, East-West are able to locate their heart fit. East makes a mild slam try by revealing his diamond shortness, but West is not interested due to his wastage in the diamond suit and a lack of controls elsewhere.

The main point to remember here is that after a 1NT rebid, 2♦ launches all game-forcing sequences. Once a fit has been discovered, you can use all your partnership slam gadgets, including cuebids, splinters and Roman Keycard.

## JUMPS AFTER THE 1NT REBID

This is a sequence that deserves your attention:

**OPENER**

1♦

1NT

**RESPONDER**

1♥

3♥

What should responder's 3♥ bid mean? Is it weak and preemptive? Is it invitational? Is it game-forcing? Let's go over the possibilities.

Clearly, 3♥ shouldn't be weak and preemptive. The situation where responder has a weak hand with hearts (and wants to preempt) simply won't come up very often. So rule out the weak hand. (If you like, you can play 'weak jump shifts' over partner's opening bid, which deals with this kind of hand anyway. For example: 1♦-2♥ = 6+ hearts and fewer than 6 HCP.)

Is 3♥ invitational? It certainly could be. However, you could also go through the 2♣ rebid by responder to initiate all invitational hands, so that meaning might be considered redundant. By the same logic, 3♥ could be forcing to game, but then why did responder not go through the 2♦ bid to create a game force?

The answer lies with your partnership. A jump rebid by responder after opener's 1NT rebid can be either invitational or game-forcing — it's up to you.

On the one hand, you can make responder's jump rebid show an invitational hand — a six-card suit with two of the top three honors. Then if responder goes through 2♣ first and subsequently rebids his suit, he will be denying two of the top three honors (while still showing a six-card invitational hand). The idea is to bid games you should be in and stay out of games you should not be in. Auctions of that type would go:

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
1♦	1♠
1NT	2♣
2♦/2♥	2♠

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
1♦	1♠
1NT	3♠

In the first auction, responder shows an invitational hand with a six-card spade suit (or longer), lacking two of the top three honors. The spade suit

might be as good as:

♠ A J 9 8 7 6      ♠ K J 10 9 6 3      ♠ Q J 10 9 8 7

or as bad as:

♠ J 8 6 5 3 2      ♠ 10 9 8 6 4 3      ♠ Q 7 6 5 4 2

In the second auction, responder promises an invitational hand with a slightly stronger spade suit. For this jump to 3♠, responder promises two of the top three honors:

♠ A Q 9 6 3 2      ♠ K Q 8 7 4 3      ♠ A K 7 6 4 3

The other option is to apply the same logic to a game-forcing hand, a hand with slam interest. For example, you could make responder's jump rebid of his suit show a one-loser suit opposite a weak doubleton. Now at least your slam bidding will improve thanks to the knowledge that your side has a solid trump suit (or not). A one-loser suit is a beefy suit that will play for only one loser, even opposite a presumed weak doubleton as support from partner and assuming an enemy trump split of five-zero. These are all examples of one-loser suits:

♥ K Q J 10 9 x

♥ A K J 10 9 x

♥ A Q J 10 9 x

♥ A K 10 9 8 6 x

Note that all of these heart suits would be expected to lose only one trick, even assuming the worst case scenario — that partner has two small and one of the opponents has a trump stack.

It is agreements like these that allow your partnership to bid with confidence. Not to sound repetitive, but it really does rest with you and your partner to decide on this matter. If hand frequency is an issue, then go with the jump rebid of responder's suit to show some kind of invitational hand. Over the course of your lifetime, you will be dealt more game decisions than slam decisions. So, at the cost of giving up on some precision slam

sequences, the invitational hand types will come up much more often. However, if bidding good slams (and staying out of bad ones) is your primary concern, then make responder's jump rebid show a specific strong hand type like the one suggested above.

## THE CROWHURST CONVENTION

This convention is popular in the United Kingdom, where it is quite common to play the 1NT rebid as showing a 12-16 HCP range (largely a consequence of opening four-card majors). Invented by Eric Crowhurst, it uses the 2♣ rebid by responder to ask for opener's strength and distribution. There are many possible response structures to choose from now, but a popular one goes as follows. Opener's first priority is to bid 2NT with any and all hands containing the upper range of 15-16 HCP. If opener has 12-14 HCP, he immediately describes his hand by showing delayed three-card support for responder's major or his own unbid major, or by bidding 2♦.

Crowhurst has not caught on in other areas of the world. If you play the weak notrump and you open 1♣ or 1♦ and then rebid 1NT, it's assumed you have 15-17 HCP. However, Crowhurst begins to make a lot of sense when you open 1♥, even if your normal agreement is that a 1NT rebid shows 15-17. Earlier, I recommended opening 1NT with a balanced hand containing 12-14 HCP, even if you hold a five-card heart suit. Playing Crowhurst, you can now open that hand 1♥ and never miss out on revealing your heart length to partner. Here are two examples to illustrate how Crowhurst works:

**OPENER (you)**

♠ Q 3  
♥ K J 9 8 3  
♦ A Q 9  
♣ 10 8 3

1♥

1NT<sup>1</sup>

2♥<sup>3</sup>

(pass)

**RESPONDER**

♠ K 5 4 3  
♥ A 10  
♦ J 10 8  
♣ Q J 7 4

1♠

2♣<sup>2</sup>

2NT<sup>4</sup> (or pass)

1. 12-16 HCP (this range only in effect after a 1♥ opener).
2. Invitational values, asking for strength and distribution.
3. 12-14 HCP, five hearts, denies three-card spade support.
4. To play.

Holding 11 HCP, responder is interested in game opposite 15-16 HCP. He bids 2♣ to ask for more information. When opener reveals a minimum, responder is no longer interested in a game contract. If instead opener held three spades and a minimum, he would rebid 2♠ at his third turn and again responder would sign off when holding the above hand.

If opener holds the top range after a 1♥ opening bid, the auction might proceed:

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
♠ K 2	♠ Q J 10 8 3
♥ A Q 10 7 4	♥ J 6
♦ K J 5	♦ Q 10 4
♣ K 10 8	♣ A J 2
1♥	1♠
1NT <sup>1</sup>	2♣ <sup>2</sup>
2NT <sup>3</sup>	3♣ <sup>4</sup>
3♥ <sup>5</sup>	3NT

1. 12-16 HCP.
2. Invitational values, asking about strength and distribution.
3. 15-16 HCP.
4. Checking back, game-forcing.
5. Five hearts, denies three spades.

If opener holds a third spade and a maximum, he can jump to 3♠ after the 2♣ inquiry. Responder will then know to bid either 3NT or 4♠, depending on his spade holding.

The main point to remember if you want to use this gadget in a five-card major weak notrump system is that after a 1♥ opening bid and 1♠ response, a 1NT rebid shows 12-16 HCP. The subsequent Crowhurst 2♣ bid by responder promises invitational values and asks for more description. Otherwise, you open 1♣ or 1♦ and rebid 1NT, promising 15-17 HCP.

## REBIDDING 1NT ON A SINGLETON

Sometimes in this great game of bridge we are *forced to tell a lie*. Perhaps a better way of putting it is that we are forced to misdescribe our hand.

Sometimes there is no convenient rebid and we must choose from three or four inadequate options, none of which really fits the bill.

Take for instance this typical hand:

♠ K    ♥ Q J 7 6    ♦ K 9 8 2    ♣ A 8 5 3

Suppose as opener, you plan to open 1♦. If partner responds 1♥, you will raise to 2♥. But what should you bid if partner bids 1♠ instead?

You certainly cannot rebid 2♥, as that is a reverse and promises more values and shape than your hand is worth. This leaves you with the option of a 2♣ rebid — also a lie in that you don't have nine cards in diamonds and clubs. What's left? How about 1NT? It's a possibility, but the obvious flaw with a 1NT rebid is that you are not balanced. In addition, when playing the weak notrump, your 1NT rebid promises 15-17 HCP. This hand has only 13.

So which do you think is the best lie to tell partner? The best lie to tell is the one that makes the fewest promises. You should rebid 2♣ and hope for the best.

That takes care of hands in the range of 12-14 HCP. Let's beef up the value of a hand and think about the same rebid problem. Say you hold this hand:

♠ 10    ♥ K J 9 2    ♦ A Q 8 4    ♣ K Q J 3

What is your rebid now after your 1♦ opening bid and partner's 1♠ response?

Again, you could rebid 2♣. However, now you have the option of rebidding 1NT to show your 15-17 HCP. There is only thing you need to be cautious about: whether or not partner will be happy when he goes on to a 4♠ contract and you put down a singleton for trump support when he has every right to expect at least two spades.

As you have seen so far, the problematic hands occur when opener has a singleton spade. There shouldn't be any rebid problems if your singleton is in any other suit. Let's take a typical 4441 hand and rearrange the suits. It could be any one of these hands:

(1) ♠ A Q 9 8	(2) ♠ J	(3) ♠ K 10 8 3	(4) ♠ A Q 4 2
♥ J	♥ K 10 8 3	♥ A Q 4 2	♥ A Q 9 8
♦ K 10 8 3	♦ A Q 4 2	♦ A Q 9 8	♦ J
♣ A Q 4 2	♣ A Q 9 8	♣ J	♣ K 10 8 3

What should you open and rebid in each case?

[To Answers](#)

With 1), open 1♦. When partner responds 1♥, rebid 1♠. If partner responds 1♣, raise to 3♠.

With 2), open 1♦ and rebid either 1NT or 2♣ depending on your partnership's style and comfort zone.

With 3), open 1♦ and raise partner's major-suit response to the three-level. Over a 2♣ response, you will be more comfortable rebidding 2NT. Partner should have a half-decent club suit and you will have time to explore the right game. He is unlikely to launch himself to the five-level in clubs based on your supposed doubleton.

With 4), open 1♣ and also raise partner's major-suit response to the three-level; over 1♦, just rebid a quiet 1♥ and see what develops: if partner can't take another bid, this hand isn't going anywhere.

[To Questions](#)

The only "tricky" rebid problem comes when, as opener, you are dealt a singleton spade. With all other hands, you will have an easy rebid.

I'd like to close this chapter with an anecdote highlighting the issue of rebidding (or in this case opening) notrump with a singleton. It occurred at an ACBL regional tournament in Fort Lauderdale. My partner was the Canadian expert teacher/player, John Rayner. He opened the bidding 1NT (15-17) with this hand:

♠ K    ♥ A J 9 3    ♦ K J 9 8    ♣ A 10 8 7

As responder, I passed and 1NT became the final contract. John did very well in the play, as the opponents didn't figure out until it was too late that he held a singleton king of spades. After the play was over, one of our opponents called the director.

‘He opened 1NT with a singleton,’ said my left hand opponent.

‘Just a second while I check the hand records,’ the director said. The director stepped back, paused for a moment to study John’s opening bid, then returned to the table.

‘It is in my estimation that the 1NT opening bid showed fine bidding judgment.’

Is that the best table ruling of all time or what? Perhaps the director realized, as John did, that if he were to open one of a minor, his rebid after my possible 1♠ response would be a tricky one. So he took his best shot at his first turn to call to describe the *nature of his hand* — a ‘somewhat’ balanced hand with 15-17 HCP. One factor not to be overlooked is that John’s hand held a singleton top honor in spades. Perhaps there is a lesson after all — if you are going to rebid 1NT with a singleton, make sure your singleton is an honor!

# CHAPTER 6

## THE JUMP REBID OF 2NT

The opener's jump rebid of 2NT shows pretty much the same hand type in both weak and strong notrump systems. Although you probably already use some decent methods with your favorite partner, this chapter will offer you an opportunity to fine-tune your methods over the jump 2NT rebid.

There are a few system options to choose from: transfers, New Minor Forcing, and modified Wolff to name just three. Let's take a glance at what the jump 2NT rebid looks like. Later on in the chapter, you'll be shown three follow-up bidding structures from which you can choose.

The auction starts with both players bidding at the one-level. Opener then jumps to 2NT, which shows a balanced hand with 18-19 HCP. (See [page 73](#) for the meaning of a 2NT rebid in a 2/1 auction.) Here are a couple of example auctions:

OPENER	RESPONDER	OPENER	RESPONDER
1♦ 2NT	1♥	1♣ 2NT	1♦

Note that in the above auctions, opener may hold a concealed four-card major (spades in the first case, either spades and/or hearts in the second). In order to show the strength of the hand, opener's priority is to jump to 2NT; the partnership can locate a spade fit later (if one exists).

As dealer, what is your bidding plan with each of the following hands? Assume partner responds 1♠ to each of your opening bids.

(1) ♠ A 8 7	(2) ♠ Q 9	(3) ♠ K J 10	(4) ♠ 8
♥ A Q 10 9	♥ K Q 9	♥ A Q	♥ A K Q 10
♦ K J 4 2	♦ Q J 8 6	♦ J 9 6	♣ A Q 7 3
♣ K J	♣ A K Q 3	♣ A Q 10 8 3	♣ K J 7 6

With (1), open 1♦ and rebid 2NT over partner's 1♠ response. Partner will take it from there. Let's assume (just for practice) that partner responds 1♥ to your 1♦. You will raise to the three-level, which shows four-card heart support and a hand of this strength. (See Chapter 8 for more details on raising partner's major.)

With (2), open 1♣ and rebid 2NT over partner's 1♠ response. Why is 1♣ a better opening bid than 1♦? Well, if you look at suit quality, a suit headed by the A-K-Q is better than one headed by the Q-J. If you and your partner have an agreement that you always open one diamond with 4-4 in the minors, then you should abide by your partnership's system; however, a popular maxim to help solve this sort of decision is "Bid what you have."

With (3), your 'system' rebid is 1NT to show 15-17 HCP. However, many advanced players will choose to upgrade this hand and rebid 2NT. The combination of the good five-card club suit and the quality of spot cards (check out those tens, nines and eights) make it worth more than 17.

With (4), open 1♦ (or 1♣ if that is your partnership style) and jump to 2NT if partner responds 1♠. This is a situation where it is completely reasonable to rebid notrump with a singleton. Once again, there really isn't any other convenient rebid. Rebidding 2♣ is an underbid and rebidding 2♥ implies a diamond suit longer than four. A jump to 3♣ is also a distortion, as partner will expect longer diamonds. Note: it is only on the 4441 hand containing a singleton spade that you may find yourself lying by rebidding 2NT. If you hold a singleton heart (4-1-4-4) you will have an easy 1♠ or 2♠ rebid over partner's 1♥ response to your minor-suit opening.

Now, let's look at responder's options after opener jumps to 2NT on the second round.

One simple (and old-fashioned) approach is to play that every bid is forcing, except for a return to either opener's or responder's suit (which would be to play).

For example:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♣	1♥
2NT	?
3♣	<b>to play</b>
3♦	<b>natural and forcing</b>
3♥	<b>to play</b>
3♠	<b>natural and forcing</b>

The problem with this approach is that sometimes as responder you may want to express slam interest in either your suit or your partner's. Now you may be forced to muck about with not-so-honest forcing bids in order to show your strength. One solution is to say everything over the 2NT rebid is 100% forcing. The problem with this strategy is that pretty soon you will grow uncomfortable responding 1♥ over 1♦ with:

♠ J 8 7    ♥ Q 9 6 4 3    ♦ Q 10 4 2    ♣ 9

and hearing partner jack up the bidding to 2NT. You would like to sign off in hearts or diamonds but you cannot —whatever you do is forcing. The only way out is the green card. So you pass partner in 2NT and hope for the best.

Therefore, a little artificiality is appropriate. One such modern contraption is to play transfers. Yes, even though both you and partner have bid a suit naturally, transfers can be effective. They work like this: every one of responder's three-level bids directly after the jump to 2NT asks opener to bid the next suit up. There is no limit to the strength responder can have to make certain transfer bids. All will be revealed depending on his own follow-up bidding. A sample auction is:

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
1♦	1♥
2NT	?
<b>3♣</b>	<b>transfer to diamonds (usually showing 4+ diamonds; any strength)</b>
<b>3♦</b>	<b>transfer to hearts (showing 5+ hearts; any strength)</b>
<b>3♥</b>	<b>transfer to spades (showing four spades and just four hearts, game-forcing)</b>
<b>3♠</b>	<b>transfer to clubs (showing 5+ clubs, game-forcing strength)</b>
<b>3NT</b>	<b>to play</b>

Opener accepts the transfer about 98% of the time by bidding the next suit up, but there is one exception. It occurs when responder transfers with a bid of 3♠ (showing clubs). Instead of bidding 4♣, opener bids 3NT. This happens because opener is not interested in a club contract. Only if responder is interested in slam will he take the bidding beyond 3NT. If opener accepts the transfer to clubs, it must be because opener is worried about the unbid suit or perhaps because he feels he has great club support and a slam is in the offing.

Here's a hand to illustrate the transfer structure involving clubs:

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
♠ A 3	♠ K 10 8 4 2
♥ J 8 4	♥ 7
♦ A K J 5	♦ 10 4
♣ K Q 9 2	♣ A J 7 6 3

The auction might go:

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
1♦	1♠
2NT <sup>1</sup>	3♠ <sup>2</sup>
4♣ <sup>3</sup>	4♥ <sup>4</sup>
4♠ <sup>4</sup>	5♣ <sup>5</sup>
6♣ <sup>6</sup>	

1. 18-19 HCP.
2. Transfer to clubs.
3. 'I like my hand for clubs'; good controls, no heart stopper.
4. Control (first or second round).
5. Nothing more to say.
6. 'How bad can this be?

If responder's deuce of spades were the deuce of hearts, giving his hand 5-2-2-4 shape, then he would most likely opt for a rebid of 3NT at his second turn and hope for the best. Note that even bidding to only 5♣ is probably worth a bushel of matchpoints or IMPs — especially if the opponents have an easy heart lead, and they probably do.

A word of warning: playing transfers over 2NT rebids takes some practice. All the nuances and bidding sequences that go with transfers are beyond the scope of this book, but they are certainly worth exploring. Transfers are superior in many ways to old-fashioned methods.

If you're ready for a wee bit of memory work, a superior method of bidding over 2NT rebids is called for...

## MODIFIED WOLFF

Many years ago, former world champion Bobby Wolff devised a convention called the Wolff Signoff. It allowed for more sophisticated bidding after the jump 2NT rebid. Although the Wolff signoff was an improvement over

standard methods and many experts adopted it into their system, it still went through some tweaking. What evolved was ‘Modified Wolff’. Here is a rudimentary version of Modified Wolff, something I recommend you try.

After the 2NT rebid, responder’s rebid of 3♣ is artificial and asks opener to bid 3♦. Most of the time, 3♣ is preparatory to a signoff. Responder can pass opener’s 3♦ if that is what he thinks is the best contract. Alternatively, responder can rebid his own suit to sign off. Hence, this auction:

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
1♣	1♥
2NT	3♣1
3♦2	3♥3

1. Artificial, asks opener to bid 3♦.
2. Forced, opener must accept this relay bid and duly bids 3♦.
3. Signoff, not interested in game.

Note that responder has a choice to pass opener’s 3♦ bid or to sign off in the major he has previously bid, in this case hearts. There are two other bids responder can make after relaying opener to 3♦. He can bid three of the other major or he can bid 3NT. Each of these calls has a specific meaning.

Bidding three of the other major is a slam try in the other minor. (Think ‘other-other’.) Bidding 3NT is a slam try in *opener’s* minor. Here’s the complete bidding structure after responder’s 3♣ relay and opener’s forced 3♦ bid:

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
1♦	1♠
2NT	3♣
3♦	?

So responder's 3♣ bid takes care of many hand types. However, did you notice that those hand types were either very weak or strong enough to invite slam? There are many game-only hand types not covered under the relay start of 3♣. How do you show them?

After opener's Jump 2NT rebid, 3♦ by responder is New Minor Forcing. The 3♦ bid is artificial and asks opener to describe his hand further. Opener will raise responder's major with three-card support or he will show an unbid four-card major. With neither of these holdings, opener will rebid 3NT.

Using 3♦ as NMF is excellent for locating the partnership's best fit (if there is one) and it is 100% forcing to game. As responder, you usually make this bid when you need information about partner's hand. If you are more interested in describing your own hand, you can repeat your own major or bid the other major at the three-level. Again, each of these bids has a specific meaning.

Bidding three of your own major after partner's 2NT rebid is a slam try in your major. You promise 6+ cards and are inviting a cuebid from partner. If you are only interested in game, you can jump to the four-level in your major.

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♣	1♠
2NT	4♠1

1. 6+ spades, signoff.

Bidding three of the other major is natural and also slammish. Usually, your first-bid suit is longer than your second. If you respond 1♠ first and then rebid 3♥, however, your majors could be equal length, such as 5-5.

Here, then, is the whole structure:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♣	1♥
2NT	?

If you prefer, you can choose to have agreements as to how good your suit must be in order to rebid it at the three-level. For example, as discussed earlier in the book, you and your partner may choose to have the rebid show two of the top three honors (or three of the top five). Or you can choose to have the rebid of your major show any 6+ cards. The point to remember is that by rebidding your own major at the three-level, you definitely have slam interest, since, without it, you would just sign off in game immediately.

Now that we've dealt with auctions that start 1min-1maj, what about this common start?

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♣	1♦
2NT	?

Nobody has bid a major. What should you do? Is 3♣ by you to play or is it the relay bid? Don't sweat it. You can probably work it out logically. Just stay with the Modified Wolff structure.

3♣ is still a relay to 3♦. Oh sure, you cannot play a 3♣ contract, but you may want to play 3♦. In any case, if you are that weak and you don't like any of your options, pass and let partner play 2NT.

3♦ is still nominally New Minor Forcing, but really it's 'Old Minor Forcing', isn't it? The official term is 'Checkback Stayman'. It is the Great Asking Bid. How else is your side going to discover your 4-4 fit in one of the majors unless one of you either bids a major or asks the other for one?

Rebids of 3♥ and 3♠ are natural and show interest in slam. You rate to have a somewhat distributional hand else you would have gone through the 3♦ Checkback Stayman.

And that's it. But before closing this chapter, it's time for a review of the jump 2NT rebid. As responder, what is your bidding plan after partner jump rebids 2NT?

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>		
1♦	1♥		
2NT	?		
(1) ♠ A Q 10 3 ♥ J 10 7 6 ♦ Q 5 ♣ 8 7 5	(2) ♠ K 5 ♥ A Q 9 8 6 2 ♦ K 6 ♣ 9 7 3	(3) ♠ Q 9 2 ♥ K J 10 7 4 ♦ J 10 ♣ J 10 2	(4) ♠ Q ♥ A J 5 4 3 ♦ 10 2 ♣ K Q 9 6 3
(5) ♠ J 8 4 ♥ Q J 10 9 6 2 ♦ A 10 ♣ 9 8	(6) ♠ A 9 5 ♥ K J 9 3 ♦ Q J 8 ♣ Q J 3	(7) ♠ A 7 ♥ K Q 5 4 ♦ Q J 8 3 ♣ 9 4 3	(8) ♠ Q J 8 4 ♥ A Q 7 3 2 ♦ 4 ♣ K 9 4

### [To Answers](#)

With 1), bid 3♦ and ask partner to describe his hand further. If partner bids 3♠, showing a four-card spade suit, raise to 4♠. If he shows delayed heart support with 3♥, revert back to 3NT. Partner will pass 3NT unless it turns out he holds four spades after all.

With 2), bid 3♥. You have slam interest. Picture partner holding some good, fitting cards, such as the ace of spades, the king of hearts and the ace of diamonds. That adds up to 11 high card points. He still has 7 or 8 more. While you should not expect the perfect cards from partner, you don't need perfect cards. Therefore, show slam interest and see if partner can do something exciting like cuebidding. If partner signs off in 3NT or 4♥, at least you tried.

With 3), bid 3♦. Here you are looking for delayed heart support from partner. If he can bid 3♥ to show three-card support, raise to 4♥. Otherwise, bid 3NT over his 3♠ or pass partner's 3NT.

With 4), you should bid 3♣, a relay to 3♦. After partner dutifully bids 3♦, you will bid 3♠, the other major. By bidding the other major, you are showing slam interest in the other minor — in this case, clubs. Once again, you don't need much from partner to make 6♣ or 6♥ a solid contract.

With 5), you should bid 4♥. You are not interested in anything except the heart game, so bid it. This is also known as the Fox Signoff. (Not to be

confused with the Wolff Signoff.)

With 6), you should bid 4NT, quantitative. While there are many 18-counts partner can have that make slam a good prospect, your 4333 shape is a negative. Take the safe road and see if partner can accept your invitation to slam.

With 7), you should bid 3♣ — the relay to 3♦. At your next opportunity, you will bid 3NT. You want to explore a diamond slam. Since partner opened 1♦, diamonds is his minor. To invite slam in partner's minor, you must first relay with 3♣ and then bid 3NT. This sequence shows diamond support (four or more) and slam interest.

With 8), you should bid 3♠. This sequence tends to show a distributional hand and interest in slam. If partner takes you back to hearts (by bidding 4♥), you may want to take another shot at slam by cuebidding clubs. If partner bids 3NT, you will pass (although it's tempting to bid on, isn't it?). If partner bids four of either minor, then he is implying spade support and showing a control in the bid minor. He's co-operating in the slam investigation — think of 4♣ and 4♦ (over 3♠) in this sequence as an advance cuebid (and poetry to your ears). You can continue the slam bidding with a cuebid of 4♥ or you can just bid 4NT, Roman Keycard.

[To Questions](#)

# CHAPTER 7

## NOTRUMP REBIDS IN 2/1 AUCTIONS

Auctions that use a two-over-one structure are the cornerstone of the 2/1 Game Forcing bidding system. There's good news for weak notrump players — the two-over-one structure is even better with the addition of the weak notrump! Weak balanced hands can create some real rebid problems for opener after a game-forcing 2/1 response. Once these hands are removed from the possible holdings, simply by opening them 1NT, rebids become much easier. This is just one of the many advantages of the weak notrump. However, the following discussion of two-over-one auctions applies (in the most part) even if you are not playing 2/1 Game Forcing. Let's take a closer look.

### OPENER'S 2NT REBID AFTER A TWO-OVER-ONE RESPONSE TO A MAJOR

Since opener can't have a minimum balanced hand (he would have opened 1NT), the 2NT rebid is available to show extra values. Most players play that the 2NT rebid shows specifically 15-17 points in a balanced hand. Let's look at some examples of 2NT rebids after you open 1♥ and your partner responds 2♦.

The auction looks like:

**OPENER (you)**

1♥

?

**RESPONDER**

2♦

What is your rebid with each of the following hands?

(1) ♠ K J 5  
  ♥ A Q 9 5 4  
  ♦ K 3  
  ♣ Q J 10

(2) ♠ A Q  
  ♥ K 9 7 6 5  
  ♦ Q 10 2  
  ♣ A J 5

(3) ♠ A Q  
  ♥ A J 10 6 3  
  ♦ 5 4  
  ♣ A J 5 2

(4) ♠ A Q J  
  ♥ K Q 5 3 2  
  ♦ A 5  
  ♣ 10 4 3

With (1), you have a textbook 2NT rebid: 16 high card points and all unbid suits stopped.

With (2), rebid 2NT. Even though it contains good support for partner's diamonds, it is otherwise perfect for notrump: balanced with stoppers in the unbid suits. If diamonds is the right strain, you will be able to show your support later. This is your best chance to get the nature of your hand across to partner.

The third and fourth hands are a little more controversial.

With (3), you might consider rebidding 3♣ instead of 2NT, and it's doubtful anyone would argue with you. However, 2NT would probably be the mainstream choice playing a weak notrump, for the same reasoning as Hand (2). If you belong in clubs, either you or partner can bid clubs later, whereas bidding 2NT right now lets partner know your hand type immediately.

Hand (4) is simply a matter of style. Some players hate 'stealing' notrump with no stopper in an unbid suit. These players would rebid 2♥ now, planning either to raise 2NT to 3NT or to show a spade fragment at their next turn. However, many players would simply rebid 2NT over 2♦ to get the general nature and strength of their hand across. These players reason that they would have opened 1NT if playing a strong notrump, so this situation really isn't all that different.

# IS IT EVER RIGHT TO REBID A FIVE-CARD MAJOR?

Many readers will be surprised to hear that the answer to this question is yes, yes, yes! In two-over-one auctions, expert bidders set down a few inviolable rules. One of those rules is that you cannot reverse or ‘high reverse’ without extra values. Everyone knows what a reverse is, but what exactly is a high reverse? A high reverse is when you go past your original suit to bid a new suit at the three-level.

For example, 1♥-2♦; 2♠ is a ‘normal’ reverse because opener’s rebid is a reverse at the two-level. However, 1♥-2♦; 3♣ is a high reverse — clubs are being introduced at the three-level. Here are a couple hands that would qualify for these auctions:

- 1)      ♠ K Q 10 3    ♥ A Q J 5 2    ♦ 5    ♣ K J 3  
2)      ♠ 5    ♥ A Q 10 3 2    ♦ Q 3    ♣ A K J 9 4

With (1), you plan to open 1♥ and rebid 2♠.

With (2), you plan to open 1♥ and rebid 3♣.

Notice that both hands have extra values. Expert bidders guarantee extra values when they make a reverse bid, even playing 2/1 Game Forcing, so that partner has an easier time figuring out when it is worth trying for a slam.

How about the next two hands? Again you open 1♥ and partner responds 2♦. What is your rebid?

- 1)      ♠ K Q 10 3    ♥ A Q J 5 2    ♦ 5    ♣ 10 4 3  
2)      ♠ 5    ♥ A Q 10 3 2    ♦ Q 3    ♣ A 8 6 5 4

You may not simply reverse in either case. How is partner to know what to do holding one of these hands opposite you?

- 1)      ♠ A J 7 3    ♥ 7 6    ♦ A K Q 8 7    ♣ Q 2  
 2)      ♠ A Q 4    ♥ 5    ♦ A K 5 4 3    ♣ Q 8 5 2

If partner trusts you to have one of the first set of hands, he can drive to 6♠ on the first hand and 7♣ on the second hand, and you will be in a great contract. However, if it's possible in your partnership to have the second set of hands (which are considerably weaker), even the five-level will be too high much of the time. It is so important for good slam bidding that your partner knows what kind of hand to expect.

Therefore, have extra values to make a reverse bid, even after partner makes a two-over-one response.

### ***Okay, If I Can't Bid My Second Suit, What Can I Do?***

The answer to this is easy: just rebid your five-card major. Sure, you will usually have a six-card suit, but partner will be aware that you could be 'stuck' with a five-card suit and he won't raise you without three-card support. If partner has a second suit, he can bid it, and if you have a fit with him, you can now raise without showing any extra values that you don't have. In fact, nothing terrible ever happens on these auctions where you rebid your five-card major, provided that partner takes that possibility into account.

## **BIDDING 2NT AFTER 1♦-2♠**

Here is an area where acolytes of the weak notrump really gain over everyone else. In standard 2/1, bidding 2♣ over a 1♦ opening is a mushy area. Many people play the 2♣ bid as 'not-quite' game forcing, which puts pressure on both players in two situations: when they have weak hands and when they have strong hands. Some players using the strong notrump play that a jump to 3♣ over the 1♦ opening shows an invitational hand with clubs, so that they can use 1♦-2♣ as game forcing. Happily, playing the weak notrump, no

such athletics are required. Since opener simply cannot have a minimum balanced hand, you can use 2NT to show the 15-17 balanced hand, which is therefore game forcing (making your auctions easier).

## *Can I Have a Four-Card Major?*

Absolutely. If your partner has 5+ clubs and a four-card major, his next move will be to show his major. There's no fear of missing a major-suit fit if you bid this way. Remember: your 2NT bid is game forcing (since the partnership has 25+ HCP).

## **OTHER BIDDING AFTER 1♦-2♣**

Well, you still need a structure for hands that don't fit neatly into the 2NT bid. Since all balanced hands are either opened 1NT or rebid 1NT, 2NT or 3NT, all other hand types must be unbalanced. Therefore, the best way to play suit bids after 1♦-2♣ is that they promise an unbalanced hand. Yes, this includes even a 2♦ rebid! The only 'balanced' shapes you can hold and still rebid 2♦ are hands with 6322 and 7222 shape. All other hands will contain shortness somewhere.

So while it's recommended that responder's 2♣ bid over 1♦ be forcing to game, there are two exceptions: responder's rebid of 2NT and responder's rebid of 3♣. If either of those bids is made by responder, then your partnership can stop below game. So then, let's call the 2♣ bid over 1♦ 'semi-game-forcing'. A non-forcing auction would look like this:

**OPENER**

1♦

2♦<sup>2</sup>**RESPONDER**2♣<sup>1</sup>2NT/3♣<sup>3</sup>

1. Natural, not game-forcing.
2. 5+ diamonds, unbalanced, any strength.
3. Non-forcing. Opener may pass with a minimum.

Since 2♣ does not create a game force, it is useful for opener to create a game force whenever he can. Therefore, the minimum values for a reverse can be slightly lowered to about a good 14 points. Reverses over 1♦-2♣ show unbalanced hands that are worth a game force. Here are some examples:

(1) ♠ QJ42	(2) ♠ 5	(3) ♠ A Q 9 4 3	(4) ♠ A Q J 5
♥ A 3 2	♥ AKJ9	♥ 5	♥ 8
♦ A Q J 10 9	♦ A Q 9 7 6 5	♦ A Q 10 9 8 4	♦ A Q 8 5 2
♣ 8	♣ 4 3	♣ 6	♣ A Q 2

Hand (1) is a minimum reverse to 2♣ after 1♦-2♣. Although this strength is not quite enough to reverse had you opened in a major, after 1♦-2♣, setting a game force while describing your shape takes precedence.

Hand (2) is also a minimum reverse, but it has great distribution. Opener should rebid 2♥ after responder's 2♣.

Hand (3) is sub-minimum for a reverse in terms of high card points. However, once you rebid spades twice to show the 6-5 distribution, partner will know that you may be a little light on the high cards.

Hand (4) is a powerful reverse. As opener, your first rebid is 2♣. Your next move will probably be to raise clubs in order to finish describing your shape.

***What Do I Do with Reversing Shape with a Minimum Hand after 1♦-2♣?***

You guessed it — just rebid 2♦! Partner knows that you might still have a four-card major while rebidding ‘only’ 2♦, so if he has a four-card major, he will bid it right away. You don’t have to worry about missing a major-suit fit. The upshot is that if partner makes one of his minimum rebids (2NT or 3♣), you can pass and go plus. Incidentally, you can also rebid 2♦ with 6+ diamonds regardless of strength — if partner makes a minimum bid next, you simply take another call if you have enough values. All these hands qualify for a 2♦ rebid after responder’s 2♣ bid:

1) ♠ Q J 4 2	2) ♠ K Q 2	3) ♠ Q 4 3
♥ K Q 2	♥ 5	♥ Q 4
♦ A 10 9 8 3	♦ A Q 10 9 7 4 3	♦ A K 10 9 4 3
♣ 5	♣ K 3	♣ J 3

With (1), you don’t have enough strength to force to game. Bidding 2♦ allows partner to bid a major, if he has one, or rebid 2NT or 3♣ if he doesn’t have quite enough to force to game, which you will pass. Note: if partner raises 2♦ to 3♦, it is game forcing.

With (2), you have enough values to go to game, but no available bid better than 2♦. Jumping to 3♦ would promise a better suit.

Hand (3) is a minimum rebid in diamonds. Just as with Hand (1), you plan to pass 3♣, but may choose to raise 2NT to 3NT, especially at IMPs.

If you have a very good diamond suit with extra values, for instance

♠ K 4 2    ♥ A 4    ♦ A K J 10 9 4    ♣ K 3

then there’s a special call available to show your hand: a jump to 3♦ over 2♣. This bid is similar to jumps to three of your major in a 2/1 auction: it shows a one-loser or better suit with extra values.

### ***So Does 1♦ - 2♣ - 2♦ Always Promise Five Diamonds?***

Well, technically no, but essentially, yes. The only hand you can possibly have that doesn’t include five diamonds for a 2♦ rebid is a minimum hand

with 4441 distribution. We recommend that you never reverse with this hand, regardless of strength, so that your reverses can absolutely guarantee five diamonds. This makes slam bidding much easier. However, this 4441 hand type is very rare, so 95% of the time, a 2♦ rebid delivers a five-card or longer suit. What this all means . . . take a deep breath now . . . is that, yes, sometimes you will be end-played into rebidding a four-card diamond suit. There: it's in print.

You might be wondering why you aren't being introduced to Mini-Roman — a 2♦ opening bid that shows specifically a hand with 12-14 HCP and 4441 shape. After all, it's a convention designed to handle this problem. Well, Mini-Roman opens up a whole new can of worms and it's best not to go there. Please, no more questions.

## **WHAT DO I DO WITH A BALANCED HAND AND 18-19 HCP AFTER A GF 2/1?**

If you're lucky enough to have 18-19 points when partner makes a Game Forcing 2/1, you know you're already close to slam territory. A jump to 3NT shows 18-19 balanced and lets partner in on the good news. It may seem scary to bid only 3NT with that many points, especially since slam is going to be in the picture much of the time, but remember that you have a live partner over there. The jump to 3NT is very descriptive, and when there is a good slam, partner will make a move over 3NT. Here, 3NT is *not* a shutout bid; it is a descriptive bid.

### *Important Caveat*

When you have a good fit with partner, your 18-19 point hand may be too strong to risk partner passing 3NT. If you have 18-19 points and a good

three-card fit for partner, your hand re-evaluates to 20 or more dummy points, enough to move toward slam all on your own. With these hands, it is recommended that you not rebid 3NT; rather, you should raise partner's suit and then move past 3NT on your own. Partner will realize that you are likely to have 18-19 points with a good fit for him and he will bid accordingly.

These are all examples of 3NT rebids after 1♠-2♦:

♠ A Q J 9 5  
♥ K 7 4  
♦ Q 4  
♣ A Q 9

♠ K Q J 10 9  
♥ A Q J  
♦ 5 2  
♣ K Q J

♠ A 5 4 3 2  
♥ K Q  
♦ J 3 2  
♣ A K J

Note that none of these hands has a good fit for partner's diamonds.

Here are examples of hands on which you should *not* rebid 3NT after 1♠-2♦:

(1) ♠ A Q J 10 9 3	(2) ♠ A Q 7 4 2	(3) ♠ A K 9 7 6	(4) ♠ A K Q 8 3
♥ K 7 4	♥ K J 4	♥ A 5	♥ J 3
♦ Q 4	♦ J	♦ K Q 3	♦ Q 9 8
♣ A Q	♣ A Q J 6	♣ K 4 2	♣ A Q 10

With (1), never rebid 3NT with a six-card spade suit, especially a good one. The first hand is more suited to a 3♠ jump than a 3NT rebid.

Hand (2) contains a singleton (a no-no) as well as powerful shape if partner fits either of your suits. You are better off making a high reverse to 3♣, which gives you the best chance of finding clubs in case there is a club slam.

Hand (3) is far too powerful to risk partner passing 3NT with a minimum. Your great diamond fit, coupled with good controls and a ruffing value in hearts, makes this 19-point hand more like 22 or 23 points. Simply raise to 3♦ and keycard for diamonds later.

Hand (4) has too many flaws for a 3NT rebid: an unstopped side suit as well as a good diamond fit. You should raise to 3♦ and try for slam whatever partner does.

## *Continuations after a 3NT Rebid*

Sometimes responder will be thinking about slam, but he won't know yet whether to play in a suit or a notrump contract. Suit rebids over 3NT are all natural and 4NT is quantitative and invitational. Going back to four of opener's major is not forcing, but opener is allowed to bid again if he wishes.

Some people play that a jump to 5♣ over 3NT is Keycard for their own suit. The auction would look like this:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♥	2♦
3NT <sup>1</sup>	5♣ <sup>2</sup>

1. 18-19 HCP.
2. Keycard for diamonds.

A corollary to this method is to use four of an unbid major as Keycard setting opener's major as trumps.

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♥	2♣
3NT <sup>1</sup>	4♠ <sup>2</sup>

1. 18-19 HCP.
2. Keycard for hearts.

## WHAT IF THE 2/1 WASN'T GAME FORCING?

In more standard systems, where a 2/1 response is not forcing to game, it is less useful to use the jump to 3NT to show an 18-19 point hand; it simply

takes up too much space. Many pairs assign a wider range (15-19) to the 2NT rebid, which automatically creates a game force. Now they use some kind of Checkback by responder to look for suit fits and establish opener's range. Here's one such scheme (there are many available):

**OPENER**1x  
2NT**RESPONDER**2y  
?

Whatever suits have been bid previously, 3♣ by responder now is Checkback. Opener's rebids are as follows:

After 3♦, responder bids whatever major he is interested in.

## WHAT AM I SHOWING IF I RAISE PARTNER'S SUIT?

This is an important question in a weak notrump structure, and it is necessary for both you and your partner to be on the same wavelength. While it's playable to agree that raising partner's minor after a two-over-one sequence guarantees extra values, it is superior to have it simply show a good fit with partner's suit. What would you bid with each of these hands after 1♠-2♠?

(1)	♠ KJ1083	(2)	♠ AKJ843	(3)	♠ AQ732	(4)	♠ AQ732
	♥ Q1053		♥ 53		♥ 74		♥ 7
	♦ A		♦ K9		♦ A3		♦ AKJ2
	♣ K32		♣ Q84		♣ K943		♣ K103

With (1), a 2♥ rebid is indicated. Getting to a major-suit game takes precedence over raising partner's minor.

With (2), a 2♠ rebid is my choice, following the same reasoning as (1). There will be time to raise clubs later in the auction if indeed a club contract is right.

With (3), a raise to 3♣ is clear. Although the hand does not contain extra values, the excellent fit for clubs is worth telling partner about.

With (4), show your diamonds first and raise clubs later. This sequence implies extra values, especially since you plan to bid past 3NT.

## *What About a Jump in Partner's Major Suit?*

Since a two-over-one auction is game forcing, it makes sense to apply specific meanings to auctions where you consume a lot of bidding space with a jump. We've discussed some jumps already, like the jump to 3NT and a jump in your own suit. But what does a jump in *partner's* suit show?

I recommend that a jump in partner's major (by either player) is a 'picture bid'. You are showing a good suit of your own, really good support for partner and *no controls* in the unbid suits. Here are two examples of hands consistent with the following auction:

	<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>
(1) ♠ AKJ98 ♥ AJ53 ♦ 63 ♣ Q5	1♠	2♥
(2) ♠ KQJ105 ♥ AKJ10 ♦ 97 ♣ 96	4♦	

Both of these hands satisfy the criteria: good suit of your own; great help for partner and no controls in the unbid suits. This means you will not have shortness in either of the unbid suits. Similarly, these hands are consistent for responder after the auction:

<b>OPENER</b>	<b>RESPONDER</b>	
1♠	2♥	(1) ♠ KQ93 ♥ AKJ103 ♦ 74 ♣ 93
2♠	4♦	(2) ♠ AKJ ♥ A Q J 9 4 3 ♦ J 4 ♣ 10 8

The first hand is prototypical. This sequence is more descriptive than using Jacoby 2NT, as partner will have a clear picture of your hand. The second

hand has only three trumps, but again partner will know almost exactly what you hold. He will value very highly any fitting heart cards and minor-suit controls.

## ***What About a Jump Raise of Responder's Minor Suit?***

There is less agreement amongst experts on this auction. It is not as effective to play that a jump to four of responder's minor (e.g. 1♠-2♣; 4♣) is a 'picture bid', because you are bypassing a likely contract of 3NT. Therefore, many experts play the jump to four of the minor as Roman Keycard Blackwood for the minor. If you agree to use this treatment, you might have this hand:

♠ A K Q 5 4    ♥ 5    ♦ K Q    ♣ A J 5 4 3

Here, all you care about is the number of keycards partner holds, so that you can place the contract in one of 5♣, 6♣ or 7♣.

Another playable treatment is to play the jump to four of the minor as showing a 5422 hand that is too strong to play in 3NT. A possible hand:

♠ A Q J 7 6    ♥ A 5    ♦ 5 4    ♣ A K 10 5

On this hand, slam is in the picture. Your auction will be easier now, as partner will likely cuebid 4♦ for you and you will be on your way.

Whichever treatment you choose, make sure your partner agrees to it first.

## ***Do Splinters Show Extra Values?***

It is recommended that splinters do not guarantee significant extra values; neither should they be made on minimal hands. In addition, splinters always deliver four-card trump support. Yes, always. Splinters are an invaluable bidding tool to help determine how well your hands fit. If partner is worried

that you could have a dead-minimum dog, however, he will sometimes be overly conservative. Incidentally, simple jumps in new suits in two-over one auctions should be treated as splinters. For example:

**OPENER**

1♠

3♦ 1

**RESPONDER**

2♣

1. Four-card club support, shortness in diamonds.

There is no reason to jump to 3♦ to show extra values. You can show that hand type eventually by starting with a rebid of 2♦. Thus 3♦ is freed up to show other hand types — in this case, a splinter. Opener's hand in the above auction might look like this:

♠ A Q 10 6 3    ♥ K Q 2    ♦ 9    ♣ Q 9 6 3

Now then, try some splintering on your own. Which of the following hands qualifies for a splinter bid?

The auction so far:

**OPENER**

1♥

?

**RESPONDER**

2♣

(1) ♠ 2  
    ♥ A Q 9 5 3  
    ♦ K Q 3  
    ♣ A 10 4 3

(2) ♠ K  
    ♥ K J 9 5 4  
    ♦ A 9 2  
    ♣ J 7 4 2

(3) ♠ A Q 10 9  
    ♥ A J 10 4 3  
    ♦ 3  
    ♣ A K 10

(4) ♠ 9  
    ♥ Q 10 9 7 6  
    ♦ A K 4  
    ♣ K Q 5 3

[To Answers 3-4](#)

1) This hand is actually a very comfortable 3♠ splinter bid. You have a few extra values and a four-card trump fit; plus, partner will be pleased to see dummy whatever the contract ends up being.

2) Don't even think about splintering with this dog. Just raise to 3♣ (or rebid 2♥, as per your partnership agreement).

3) Unfortunately, you need four-card trump support to splinter. To show this hand, you will need to two-step: first reverse to 2♠ and then raise clubs at your next turn. If partner is in the zone today, he will figure out that you probably have a singleton diamond.

4) Although you have the values to splinter, we recommend not splintering for a very specific reason: splinters should deliver a control in the suit you opened. Imagine partner's dismay upon bidding a club slam and finding out that the opponents can cash the ace and king of your major! If you add this guideline to all your splinters, your slam bidding will become more effective.

[To Questions 3-4](#)

## QUIZ

You've just been presented with a great deal of new information and perhaps you are feeling overloaded. Here, then, is an end-of-chapter quiz to help you review some of the principles and guidelines.

What do you bid with the following hands? In each case, the auction has begun 1♠-2♦.

(1) ♠ A Q 9 5 3	(2) ♠ A Q 9 5 3	(3) ♠ A Q 10 4 3	(4) ♠ A Q 10 4 3
♥ K 10 6	♥ 8	♥ K Q 9	♥ K 5
♦ Q 2	♦ Q J 10 5	♦ Q 4	♦ K Q 9
♣ A J 9	♣ A Q 2	♣ A Q 2	♣ A 4 3

What do you bid with the following hands? In each case, the auction has begun 1♦-2♣.

(5) ♠ K Q 4 2	(6) ♠ K Q 3 2	(7) ♠ K 9 3	(8) ♠ K 9 4 3
♥ A 3 2	♥ A Q 5 3	♥ J	♥ A J 5 3
♦ K Q J 5 3	♦ A 4 3 2	♦ A Q 5 3 2	♦ A Q 9
♣ 5	♣ 9	♣ K Q 5 2	♣ Q 9

What do you bid with the following hands? In each case, the auction has begun 1♠-2♥.

(9) ♠ A Q J 9 3	(10) ♠ K Q 9 5 3	(11) ♠ A Q 7 4 3	(12) ♠ A Q 10 9 8
♥ A Q 9 3	♥ K Q 3	♥ Q 9	♥ 5 4
♦ J 4	♦ A K 3 2	♦ A 3 2	♦ 5 4
♣ J 4	♣ 8	♣ J 3 2	♣ A Q 5 3

## [To Answers](#)

Hand (1) is a textbook example. A textbook 2NT rebid, that is, showing 15-17 and a balanced hand.

Hand (2) is a perfect hand to splinter with 3♥, showing a non-minimum four-card diamond raise with heart shortness. Partner will be well placed to advance the auction with all this information.

With (3), jump to 3NT to show 18-19 without a great fit for partner. If your 2/1 is not GF, rebid a wide range 2NT.

Unlike the previous hand, (4) has a super diamond fit. It is too strong to jump to 3NT. If 2♦ was GF, raise to 3♦ and plan to move toward slam, no matter what partner bids next. Otherwise, rebid 2NT and raise diamonds later if partner shows any slam interest.

With (5), bid 2♠ to describe your shape and set up a game-forcing auction, which will be easier on both you and partner.

With (6), although you have the values to go to game, you cannot reverse, as that would guarantee a fifth diamond. Settle on a 2♦ rebid for now, intending to spring to life over partner's next bid.

Hand (7) is perfect for a 3♥ splinter bid, showing four-card club support, a singleton or void in hearts and a decent hand.

With (8), despite holding both four-card majors, you should rebid 2NT, showing a balanced 15-17 HCP. If there is a 4-4 major-suit fit to be found, partner will help.

With (9), bid 4♥. This is a 'picture bid', showing good cards in the suits you have bid and no control in the other suits.

Hand (10) is a matter of style. One possibility is to raise to 3♥, setting trumps immediately and giving partner a chance to cuebid if he wishes. Another approach is to high reverse by bidding 3♦ now — which shows extra values — and then to bid 4♥ at your next opportunity, implying this distribution and strength. One thing you cannot do is splinter over 2♥; that promises a fourth trump. It's recommended that you high reverse to 3♦, followed by 4♥, as this sequence accurately describes your hand.

With (11), you should have opened a weak notrump in the first place! Don't get cold feet; you should open all your balanced hands 1NT when in range or your further bidding can get very messy.

With (12), bite the bullet and rebid 2♠. Bidding 3♣ would show extra values that you don't have, so there is no other reasonable alternative. Partner should be aware that you may be on a five-card suit and will bid accordingly. If partner's next move is to bid 3♣, you can happily raise this, knowing that you have denied extra values.

[To Questions](#)

# CHAPTER 8

## SUIT REBIDS AND OTHER CONTINUATIONS

A common theme throughout this book is negative inference, or how much you are able to infer about partner's hand *from what he doesn't bid*. For instance, when partner does not open 1NT, you know he cannot hold a minimum balanced hand. Likewise, when partner opens at the one-level and does not rebid 1NT, you know he cannot hold a balanced hand with 15-17 HCP.

Now let's go one step further — let's look at what you do know whenever partner opens the bidding with one of a minor. You know he holds either a) a strong balanced hand containing 15-19 HCP; or b) an unbalanced hand with 11+ HCP.

If partner, the opening bidder, holds the strong balanced hand, then his notrump rebid will usually be 1NT (15-17 HCP) or 2NT (18-19 HCP). In addition, if partner rebids his minor or if he rebids another suit, then systematically he is unbalanced. Partner will have 11+ HCP — enough points to open the bidding — but his hand will contain a void or a singleton or multiple doubletons.

## RAISING PARTNER'S MAJOR-SUIT RESPONSE

Say your partner opens one of a minor and you respond with one of a major. If partner rebids two of your major it has the same meaning as if you were playing a strong notrump system. That is, partner has either a minimum-strength hand with four-card support or he has minimum strength, three-card support and a ruffing value such as an outside void or singleton. This structure differs from that of the original K-S structure, but its advantage is that it is simple to use and easy to remember. Additionally, since it fits in with the modern style, you are still free to open hands such as:

♠ 9 7 4    ♥ K Q 10 5    ♦ A Q 10 8 4    ♣ 9

You have no qualms opening one diamond, since you can raise partner's 1♥ response to 2♥. If partner responds 1♠, you can either rebid your diamonds or choose to raise spades — that is, if you are comfortable raising with three-card support. Lastly, if partner bids 2♣ over your 1♦ opener, you can rebid diamonds (as you saw on [page 76](#)).

Now let's see how the structure works. Think about what your opening bid would be when holding each of the following hands. Also, plan your rebid over partner's response of 1♥.

(1) ♠ A J 9 2	(2) ♠ K 3	(3) ♠ 4	(4) ♠ Q J 5
♥ K 10 3	♥ A Q 9	♥ K J 9	♥ 10
♦ J 8 7	♦ K J 7 4 2	♦ A J 8 7 6	♦ J 10 4
♣ A Q 9	♣ A Q 10	♣ K 7 6 3	♣ A K J 9 7 5

With (1), you have an easy bidding plan. You open 1♣ and expect to rebid 1NT to show this hand, unless partner responds 1♠, in which case you will raise to 2♠.

With (2), open 1♦ and plan to rebid 2NT, unless partner responds 2♣ — then you will bid 2NT (wide range) or jump rebid 3NT, depending on your agreements.

With (3), your bid depends on your partnership style. I use the agreement that it is okay to support with three cards in partner's suit, so I would open 1♦ and raise partner's 1♥ to 2♥. You can do this whenever your hand has ruffing

value. With this hand, your singleton spade is your ruffing value. The maxim to follow is, ‘Support with support’. You may end up playing the odd 4-3 fit but supporting immediately has the effect of making auctions flow smoothly. Of course, if partner responds 1♠ to your 1♦ opening, then you have a clear-cut 2♣ rebid.

With (4), you always plan to open and rebid clubs. The only time you will not rebid your clubs is when partner responds 1♠. Then you can choose to support — again because you have an unbalanced hand and your shortness is outside spades.

## RAISING PARTNER’S MAJOR TO THE THREE-LEVEL

In order to raise partner’s major to the three-level, you should have a medium-strength hand: something in the 16-18 point range. Say you open the bidding with 1♦ and partner responds 1♠. Jumping to 3♠ would be appropriate with each of the following hands:

(1) ♠ J 8 5 3	(2) ♠ A K 7 4	(3) ♠ K 10 9 3	(4) ♠ 9 8 4 2
♥ A	♥ Q 3 2	♥ A 10	♥ K 8 3
♦ K Q J 9 8	♦ A J 10 4	♦ A Q 7 6 3 2	♦ A K Q 9 7 3
♣ K Q 2	♣ K 7	♣ 5	♣ —

The auctions should go:

YOU	PARTNER
1♦	1♠
3♠	

With (1), you have 16 HCP and a singleton ace of hearts — not enough to jump directly to game, but definitely enough to show more than a minimum.

With (2), you have 17 HCP and a doubleton club; therefore, 3♠ fits the bill.

With (3), you have only 13 HCP, but a sixth diamond and a singleton club. These distributional values increase the hand's value.

With (4), you have only 12 HCP, but the club void and solid diamonds make it (potentially for partner) the best hand of the lot.

Incidentally, while on the topic of raising partner, have you ever seen this auction before?

**OPENER**

1♣  
4♣

**RESPONDER**

1♥

What do you think opener's rebid of 4♣ means?

- (a) Gerber — asking for controls
- (b) Splinter — shortness in clubs (I'm joking, of course!)
- (c) Natural — a powerful hand with long clubs
- (d) Picture bid — 6+ clubs, 4+ hearts, game-forcing

You can play it however you please, but I recommend (d), a picture bid. You might hold something like:

♠ 4    ♥ A J 9 4    ♦ K 3    ♣ A K Q 10 6 2

A picture bid shows *ten* of your cards to partner. It promises at least four-card support and a solid minor — usually a suit that will play for one loser suit opposite a void. You can relax this a little depending on your style.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE AUCTION GETS COMPETITIVE?

Let's look at a common competitive sequence. After you open as South, partner responds and your right-hand opponent (RHO) competes. A typical auction might go like this:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	1♥	2♣	1♦?

What are the meanings of your rebids here? Let's look at the easy calls first.

- A rebid of 2♦ would show a minimum hand with a sixth diamond.
- A new suit rebid, in this case 2♠, would be natural and show an unbalanced hand with extra strength. It is a reverse bid after all. If your new suit rebid were lower ranked than your first suit, then you wouldn't necessarily promise extra strength.
- A 2NT rebid would show 18-19 HCP. You should have clubs well stopped too.

What about 'pass' and 'double'? Many modern-day tournament players have adopted the support double into their bidding system. This means that a double here shows three-card heart support for partner, but remains silent about hand strength. Opener could have anywhere from 11 to 19 HCP. One of the perks of playing support doubles is that raising partner (2♥ with this hand) shows any minimum-strength opening bid and promises four-card support.

If you don't play support doubles, then a double by opener here would show a hand with extra strength and no obvious descriptive bid — usually a balanced 15+ HCP with no stopper in the opponents' suit. Partner will not know your exact heart holding, but he can infer that you hold fewer than four hearts. Why? With extra strength and four hearts, you would have raised to 3♥ or 4♥. A raise to 2♥ shows any minimum hand and either three- or four-card support if you are not playing support doubles.

A pass, whether playing support doubles or not, shows a minimum hand and denies three-card heart support. Again, if playing support doubles, opener doubles with three-card heart support; if not playing support doubles, opener raises hearts to the two-level.

So the \$64,000 question is: ‘Do you play support doubles or don’t you?’ I recommend that you play support doubles, since modern bridge is all about discovering your fit and letting partner know about it. Once again, partner can infer a great deal about your hand from the *absence* of certain calls. Yes, there will be some hands that prove difficult to describe if you are playing support doubles, but I think it is a worthwhile trade-off.

Let’s say the auction begins:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	1♥	1♠	1♦ ?

What would you rebid with each of the following hands?

- |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| (1) ♠ J 7 3<br>♥ A Q 7 2<br>♦ K Q 10 3<br>♣ K 9 | (2) ♠ A J 7<br>♥ A Q 7<br>♦ K J 10 3<br>♣ 9 8 2 | (3) ♠ 7 3<br>♥ A Q 7<br>♦ K J 10 9 4 3<br>♣ K 3 | (4) ♠ A J 3<br>♥ Q 7<br>♦ K J 10 3 2<br>♣ A J 3 |
|---|---|---|---|

#### [To Answers 2-4](#)

With (1), you should rebid 2♥. You have four-card support and a minimum-strength hand. If you change the jack of spades to the king, you can raise to 3♥ — with that, you would have four-card heart support and extra strength.

With (2), you should make a support double to show your three-card heart support. When you opened the bidding, you planned to rebid 1NT. However, with partner responding 1♥ and your RHO interfering, you have an easy support double. You may need to communicate your hand strength to partner

later, but for now at least, he knows about your hearts. Although rebidding 1NT is an option (you hold a double stopper in spades), if you did rebid 1NT, you would deny three-card heart support.

With (3), you do not hold a spade stopper, but you still have three-card heart support. Therefore, make a support double. Although it is tempting to rebid 2♦ to show a minimum hand and six or more diamonds, it's best to tell partner about your hearts. Save the 2♦ rebid for this hand:

♠ J 7   ♥ A 9   ♦ K Q 10 8 7 3   ♣ A J 3

The characteristics of this hand are: no spade stopper; no heart support and extra length in diamonds. Since you lack a spade stopper, you cannot bid notrump at any level and since you lack three- or four-card heart support, you cannot raise partner's hearts.

With (4), you should rebid 1NT. This time you lack heart support, but you have a spade stopper and 15-17 HCP. This one was easy.

[To Questions](#)

## WHEN IS IT RIGHT TO PASS AT YOUR SECOND TURN?

Say you hold:

♠ 9 7 6 3   ♥ A Q   ♦ K J 8 3   ♣ A Q 2

You open one diamond and partner responds one heart. Your RHO bids 1♠. This is the hand on which you would like to make a descriptive double, but you have followed my advice and agreed to play support doubles. What is your most descriptive call now?

Let's go through each of your options. Can you raise partner's hearts by doubling? No, because you do not hold three. Can you bid notrump? No, because you do not have a spade stopper. Can you rebid your diamonds? No,

because you do not hold six or more diamonds. (You do not even hold five diamonds — in which case you would be free to rebid them if you choose). Can you rebid clubs? Are you kidding?

What's left is the green card. Pass and await developments. Is this so bad? No, partner will infer from all the bids you might have made (but didn't) that you might hold a hand such as this.

## OTHER CONTINUATIONS

There is a particular competitive auction that can rear its ugly head every now and then, one that the weak notrump does not leave you well placed to counter. The auction goes:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	1♥	3♠	1♣
			?

At this point in the auction, you might not have a convenient way to describe your hand as South. You don't want to be goaded into competing against this high-level preempt, but, at the same time, you want to describe your hand to partner as best as you possibly can. For example, you could very well have a strong notrump hand.

Against three-level preempts, after you have opened the bidding at the one-level and heard partner's one-level response, try this scheme:

Not to worry. The preceding auction type does not come up often enough to detract from playing the weak notrump. After all, sequences like the above are dreaded by players of any system, including strong notrump aficionados!

## HOW DO YOU COUNTER A TWO-LEVEL

## PREEMPT?

Oh, those pesky preempts! You are probably as sick of countering preempts as you are of hearing how pesky they are. The opponents will continue to preempt against you anyhow, so you may as well be prepared.

Let's look at another common auction:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♦
pass	1♥	2♠	?

Support doubles are off in this situation, because East took away the entire two-level. Support doubles only work when you have the option of supporting partner naturally at the two-level. Once that option is gone, so are support doubles. Another way of looking it is this: if the opponents interfere with 2♠ or higher, then support doubles are off.

Let's look at each of the potential calls you might make here and define each of them.

Notice that a double in this situation is a sort of 'catch-all'. You make this bid when you have a little extra strength but no convenient way of describing your hand. One such hand type is when you hold enough values to rebid notrump but lack a stopper in the opponent's bid suit.

It's time for a quiz — what better way for you to process all this information than to put you in the hot seat?

What do you rebid at your second turn to call in this auction?

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	Partner		You
			1♣
pass	1♥	1♠	?

You hold:

(1) ♠ K 5 3 2	(2) ♠ 6 5 3 2	(3) ♠ 5 3 2	(4) ♠ A Q 3
♥ Q 2	♥ Q 2	♥ K 2	♥ Q 3 2
♦ K Q 3	♦ K Q 3	♦ K J 3	♦ K 7 4
♣ A Q J 8	♣ A K J 9	♣ A K J 7 3	♣ A J 10 9

What do you rebid at your second turn to call in this auction?

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	Partner		You
			1♦
pass	1♠	2♥	?

You hold:

(5) ♠ K 8 6 2	(6) ♠ 6 5 3 2	(7) ♠ K 2	(8) ♠ A Q 9
♥ Q 8	♥ Q 5	♥ 5 3	♥ Q 8 4
♦ K Q 8 3	♦ K Q 3	♦ A K Q J 8 7	♦ K 6 5
♣ A Q J	♣ A K J 9	♣ A J 7	♣ A 8 7 4

### [To Answers 1-8](#)

What do you rebid at your second turn to call in this auction?

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	Partner		You
			1♦
pass	1♥	3♣	?

You hold:

(9) ♠ K 7 6 4	(10) ♠ A J 3	(11) ♠ A Q 3	(12) ♠ J 3 2
♥ Q 2	♥ 10 9 8	♥ K 2	♥ A Q 8 7
♦ A K Q 3	♦ K Q J 8	♦ A 10 4 2	♦ K J 3 2
♣ Q J 8	♣ A 4 2	♣ Q 9 5 3	♣ A 8

### [To Answers 9-12](#)

With (1), rebid 1NT. You show 15-17 HCP and a spade stopper. You cannot double, as that would show three-card heart support.

With (2), pass. There is nothing else to do here. All of the possible rebids have a meaning and this hand does not satisfy any of them. When not playing support doubles, you could double to show this hand.

With (3), pass. If you came to bid, make it 2♣. You should have a sixth club for the 2♣ rebid, but hey, you paid your entry fee. Otherwise, you cannot double or bid 1NT.

With (4), double. This is a support double situation and you have three-card support. That is all you require.

With (5), bid 3♠. Since you have four-card support and 17 HCP, you should make a jump rebid. This is what you planned to do had East passed, so you may as well make the same bid now.

With (6), bid 2♠. Again, you must show your four-card support for partner. However, this time you have a minimum.

With (7), bid 3♥. Your bid first asks for a stopper in the opponents' suit — in this case, hearts. If you later support partner's spades, you will be showing a big spade raise. If you later go back to your own suit, however, you will be showing a good hand without support for partner. If partner can bid 3NT (because he has a heart stopper), then you should score well.

With (8), double. You have three-card support for partner, so you should show it. If partner rebids 2♠, then you will pass since you have a minimum. If you held extras, you could try again with 2NT to show your heart stopper and interest in game.

### To Questions 1-8

With (9), double. This is not a support double situation — the opponents have taken away the entire two-level. You cannot bid spades, as that would be game-forcing. You clearly cannot raise hearts and you cannot rebid diamonds, as you have only four. Your real choices then are pass, double and 3NT. Pass would show a minimum-strength hand and you have a little extra; 3NT would show 18-19 HCP or a hand based on a running diamond suit. **What's left? Double.**

With (10), pass. As mentioned in the previous problem, there is so much you just cannot do. Since you have only 15 HCP, you should pass and see what partner can do. He will know that you may have been stuck for a rebid.

With (11), pass. You have a minimum without any other compensating distributional values.

With (12), bid 3♥. Once again you have a minimum, but this time you have four-card heart support. Partner will know that you are bidding under pressure, so he should not become too enamored with his 8-count. Still, it's winning bridge advice to support with support. Sometimes you need to stretch in order to do so.

[Questions 9-12](#)

# CHAPTER 9

## WHEN 1NT IS DOUBLED

Playing the weak notrump is effective — it simplifies your constructive bidding and allows you to preempt the opponents' bidding. However, nothing in life is free. Every so often, the opponents will be in a position to double your 1NT opening, especially when their side has a lot more points than you do. Oh sure, every once in a blue moon they will even get you for a big number (such as 800 or 1100), but usually a good runout system will make it unprofitable or just too difficult for them to double you. In addition, a good runout system allows you to double *them* when they walk into your auction at the wrong time. This chapter will take a look at one particular runout system — the DONT approach. But first, let's lay down the basics.

## WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR IN A RUNOUT SYSTEM?

At last count, there were a million different runout systems to choose from after the opponents double your 1NT opening bid. Okay, so maybe a million is an exaggeration, but it sure feels like that many. There's Guoba, Rubens, Meckwell, SWINE (yes, a treatment called Swine) . . . the list goes on. The best runout systems combine two important principles:

1. *They give you the best chance to land in a playable contract when the opponents have more values than you.*

- They give you the ability to double the opponents (or play 1NT redoubled) when you have more values than them.*

One of the best opportunities to nail the opponents happens when they double your partner's 1NT opening bid and you have a good hand (10+ points). I strongly recommend that you play a direct redouble of the opponent's double as penalty.

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	dbl	redbl	

You are saying, ‘Partner, we got ’em! Let’s see if we can get a nice telephone number to write on our scorecard.’

The reason I recommend having a natural redouble available is that it makes doubling the opponents a lot easier. Many people play that passing a double forces partner to redouble, after which the auction may go:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	dbl	pass <sup>1</sup>	pass
redbl <sup>2</sup>	pass	pass	pass

1. Forces partner to redouble.
2. Forced bid (you must redouble to see what partner does next).

Two such systems that use the redouble this way are Guoba and Rubens. This is great when the auction develops like this, but it doesn’t happen that often. Much more likely the auction will go like this:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	dbl	pass <sup>1</sup>	2♦
pass	pass	?	

### 1. Forces partner to redouble.

Oh, great! You were planning to show strength, but now partner has no idea if you are strong or you were going to run! What does a double by you — after an opponent removes their partner's double to a suit (here 2♦) — even mean? Is it for penalty? Is it takeout? Does it promise 10+ points? Does anyone know? Much better if the auction starts like this:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	dbl	redbl	2♦

Now, no matter what your agreements for follow-up doubles are (penalties or takeout), you and your partner both know that the deal belongs to your side.

The other major drawback of 'pass forces a redouble' is that these methods do not allow you to play in 1NT doubled. At matchpoints, not vulnerable, this means that on occasion you will concede a deadly 200, instead of 100 when you go one down (unluckily, of course!).

While there's no doubt many proponents of the weak notrump will have their own pet structure which they feel works best for them, the following runout system is a highly recommended treatment to adopt. As a bonus, it's pretty easy to learn.

## DONT RUNOUTS

This system will be easy for most people to remember — it's much like the DONT convention for competing over 1NT openings. Instead of DONT

standing for Disturb the Opponents' NoTrump, perhaps this DONT acronym is better remembered as Doubles over Our NoTrump.

Whatever you want to call it, the rules are ironclad: whenever you bid a suit over their double of your 1NT opening, you are showing that suit plus a higher suit. With a one-suited hand, you *pass*, and partner can either bid a suit of his own, or more commonly, redouble to learn what your suit is. With a good hand, you can start with a redouble of 1NT.

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	?	

Now the DONT bidding structure looks like this:

Knowing all of this, let's look at some example hands to see how you can wiggle out of trouble.

Each of the following auctions starts:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	?	

What do you bid with each of these hands?

(1) ♠ K964	(2) ♠ 5	(3) ♠ KQ10	(4) ♠ 9432
♥ Q10	♥ KQJ9743	♥ A943	♥ J73
♦ K9432	♦ 73	♦ K52	♦ 10943
♣ 43	♣ 972	♣ 1094	♣ J5

### [To Answers](#)

With (1), you should bid 2♦, showing diamonds and a higher suit. If partner would rather play in your second suit, he will bid the next step up, here 2♥, over which you either pass if that's your suit, or bid your other suit (here you would bid 2♠).

With (2), you could start with a pass, showing a one-suited hand. However, this is a perfect hand on which to make a preemptive jump to 3♥. The opponents will have a tough time finding a playable contract after you do this. Also, they may get into trouble — have *you* discussed bidding over opponents' jumps to the three-level here?

With (3), you should start with a strength-showing redouble. The opponents may be in serious trouble. (See below for bidding strategy after the redouble.)

With (4), you should bid 2♦, showing diamonds and a higher suit. Compared to the first example, this hand is a lot worse. However, telling partner about both your suits gives you the best chance of landing in a fit and surviving. This is the kind of hand that you least want to pick up when partner opens 1NT.

[To Questions](#)

## *Why Does Pass Show a One-Suited Hand?*

Sometimes when your partner opens 1NT, you will pick up a *really* awful hand like:

♠ Q 9 8    ♥ 9 5 3    ♦ Q 5 4    ♣ J 10 5 3

Let's say the worst happens and your RHO doubles. Blech! Technically, this is a one-suiter, but it's really a 'no-suiter'. By using pass to show a 1-suiter, you are giving partner a chance to show a five-card suit of his own. You will then land in a playable contract. For example:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	pass <sup>1</sup>	pass
2♦			

1. Nowhere to run; 'shows a one-suiter'.

Whew! You found your 5-3 fit and that means the opponents won't get rich doubling your side. If the worst happens —partner redoubles (thus denying a five-card suit) — you can bid 2♣ and pray. At least this way you get the extra chance of partner having a suit of his own when you are really in trouble.

This system does have a drawback. If you have a six-card suit, partner might bid two of a higher suit in front of you, causing you to miss your best fit. It is far more likely, however, that you will be glad to hear about partner's suit and will avoid a big number with the 5 HCP hand shown. There is also a hidden benefit — passing puts pressure on LHO. If he has some values, he may decide to bid his suit now rather than waiting and possibly having to come in at a higher level. Then you're off the hook entirely!

## *Bidding after the Redouble*

Your right-hand opponent doubled your partner's 1NT opening and you redoubled. Your left-hand opponent has run to some suit at the two-level. Now what do your bids mean?

This is an important area, one worth spending time on with your partner. First things first: your side has shown (ostensibly) 22 or more points to their 18 or fewer. It is highly recommended that you and your partner agree that you cannot sell out to an undoubled contract below the level of 2♠. Suppose the auction continues:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	dbl	redbl	2♦
?			

Now a pass will be *forcing*. A forcing pass means the auction will not quickly die. The passer's partner must bid, either by doubling or by taking a call. In the example above, partner can pass the decision around to you without worrying that you will chicken out. Similarly:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	dbl	redbl	2♣
dbl	2♥	?	

Here, a pass would still be forcing. The opponents are still at a level lower than 2♠, so your side is forced either to double them in their contract or bid on.

Once the opponents bid past 2♥ (to 2♠ or higher), it's safer to discard the 'forcing pass' concept:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	dbl	redbl	2♣
dbl	2♠	?	

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	dbl	redbl	2♠
?			

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	dbl	redbl	3♣
?			

In each case, the force is cancelled, since the opponents have bid to 2♠ or higher. This means that your side is allowed to pass out the contract without

doubling or bidding on.

## *What Do Doubles Mean after a Redouble?*

There are two main ways to play doubles in this situation: penalties or takeout. Both ways are playable, but I like this agreement: *the first double by either player in a forcing situation is for takeout*.

Since passes are forcing, you don't need to worry that partner will pass the hand out, even if you have the rock-of-Gibraltar penalty double. Also, when you have length in the opponent's suit, it makes it more likely that partner will have shortness, meaning that he will likely make a takeout double, which you can pass.

Playing doubles as takeout lets you handle deals where you don't want to double the opponents for penalties, but don't have a suit of your own to bid. Let's look at the next example deal from both perspectives — penalty and takeout. Incidentally, the takeout double does not promise any extra values — you can do it with a minimum or a maximum. The takeout double simply shows shortness in the opponents' suit.

	♠ K 9 5 3		
	♥ A 9 6 5		
	♦ A J 6		
	♣ 10 7		
♠ 6 4 2			♠ A Q 10
♥ 8 2			♥ Q J 10 4
♦ 5 4			♦ Q 10 8 7 2
♣ Q 8 6 5 3 2	N W E S		♣ K
	♠ J 8 7		
	♥ K 7 3		
	♦ K 9 3		
	♣ A J 9 4		

### Playing Takeout Doubles

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1NT	dbl	redbl
2♣	dbl <sup>1</sup>	2♦	dbl
all pass			

1. Takeout, three-card support for the other three suits.

South's double, being the *second* double for his side, is penalty. Since North implied at least three diamonds, South knows that 2♦ is getting creamed, so he doubles. Incidentally, South was planning to pass North's takeout double of 2♣.

### Playing Penalty Doubles

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1NT	dbl	redbl
2♣	pass	2♦	?
pass	?		

In this case, it is much harder for North-South to double East in 2♦, even though they are playing penalty doubles! Neither player can double with complete confidence.

Perhaps you wouldn't have doubled with the East hand, but on this deal (from real life) East did. Could you make him pay?

## *Bidding with In-Between Hands*

Let's say you pick up:

♠ A 8 5 4    ♥ Q J 5    ♦ J 10 5 3    ♣ 10 8

The auction goes:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	dbl	?	

What should you do? You know your side has anywhere from 20-22 HCP. This situation is largely a matter of judgment. Many experienced players have found that playing for penalties with these marginal hands often puts them in a bad spot. Sometimes the opponents have long suits to lead and sometimes your finesse don't work. Also, you know that at other tables this hand will be played in a partscore (since both sides have about equal high-card values), so trying to play in a doubled or redoubled contract is playing swingy bridge.

It boils down to this: if you need a big result, you can try to play for penalties, but keep in mind that it's a risky action. If your session is going well, it's probably best to use your runout system and try to get a normal result.

## *The Other Option in a Forcing Auction*

By now all of this passing and doubling and redoubling is probably beginning to make sense. Here's the final wrinkle: what if you don't double or pass in a forcing auction, but make a bid instead? For example, say the auction starts:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	dbl	redbl	2♦
pass	pass	?	

If you now bid a suit at the two-level, including 2NT, it is not forcing. It is termed 'forward going' and shows about 10-12 HCP. If you bid a suit at the three-level or cuebid the opponents' suit, it is forcing.

Just remember: *after responder's redouble, his two-level bids are not forcing, while his three-level bids are forcing.*

Here's an example:

♠ K Q 9 8 6    ♥ A 8 4    ♦ J 10 9 4    ♣ 5

Now that the opponents have butted in, you have a neat way to invite game in spades. Start with a redouble and then bid 2♠ at your next turn. The 2♠ bid is not forcing, but forward going — a perfect description of what you have. The auction might turn out like this:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	dbl	redbl	2♣
pass	pass	2♠	pass
4♠	all pass		

The full deal:

<p>♠ A J 10 3      ♥ Q J 9      ♦ A 8      ♣ J 9 3 2</p> <p>♠ 4 2      ♥ 6 5 2      ♦ Q 3 2      ♣ 10 8 7 6 4</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ 7 5      ♥ K 10 7 3      ♦ K 7 6 5      ♣ A K Q</p> <p>♠ K Q 9 8 6      ♥ A 8 4      ♦ J 10 9 4      ♣ 5</p>
	N										
W		E									
	S										

Of course, 4♠ isn't quite ice-cold, but it's an excellent contract. Notice that if somehow 1NT redoubled were to be passed out, your partner would have no trouble making eight or even nine tricks.

### ***What If the Opponents' Double is Not for Penalties?***

If the opponents' double is not strictly for penalties, there is still a significant risk that doubler's partner will leave the double in. For example, an opponent might make a DONT-style double against you, holding:

♠ J 6 4   ♥ A K J 8 7 3   ♦ 3 2   ♣ 10 7

Some folks will have the audacity to enter your auction with hands like this. Clearly this hand is nowhere near being a penalty-oriented double; rather it's a one-suiter — in this case, hearts. However, since the partner of this player might leave the double in (*he* has a 14-count), I recommend that you play your runout system. This actually makes life easier — just assume the opponent's double is for penalties and do your thing.

# TO PLAY OR NOT TO PLAY DONT RUNOUTS – THE LAST ROUNDUP

In the end, you should play whatever runout system you are most comfortable with. To be fair, the DONT runout system presented in this chapter has the flaw of not specifically identifying the higher suit of a two-suited hand.

For example:

YOU	LHO	PARTNER	LHO
INT	dbl	2♦	

In this auction, you don't know what partner's major suit is. At times, this will be a problem.

There are runout structures where both suits are always known, but these generally pay the price of giving up the natural, strength-showing redouble in order to use redouble for something else. I recommended that you retain the redouble as strength showing. If you are more comfortable with a runout system that sacrifices the penalty redouble in favor of more detailed runouts, that is okay too. Just be sure that your runout system covers the core principles:

1. *It gives you the best chance to land in a playable contract when the opponents have more values than you.*
2. *It gives you the ability to double the opponents (or play INT doubled or redoubled) when you have more values than them.*

Playing the DONT style of runouts allows you to have your cake and eat it too, and is my personal choice. Not only do you often scramble into your best fit when you are weak, but you make the opponents pay a price when they enter your auction. Perhaps when you gain more experience playing the weak

notrump you will get around to testing the other runout systems, but for now DONT is probably best.

Finally, in closing this chapter, we come to a famous bridge argument — one that caused great consternation for four Canadian bridge players traveling by car to a weekend sectional Swiss teams tournament.

One of the four players offered the opinion that it was not necessary to play a runout system if playing the weak notrump. His teammate, and partner for that matter, begged to differ — he insisted that a runout system was necessary for those playing a weak notrump structure.

The ‘discussion’ continued:

‘Now, you listen to me: they are not necessary.’

‘No, you listen to me: they are absolutely critical.’

‘No — you listen to me!’

‘*No, you listen to me!*’

So heated was the argument and so focused on it were the travelers that they ended up at the Canada-USA border before realizing they had missed their exit entirely. After a mad dash back to the playing site, arriving in the nick of time, the argument was left unsettled.

Flash forward fifteen years: it can only be hoped that you and your partner don’t argue over *whether* to play a runout system, but rather over *which* one to play.

# CHAPTER 10

## HANDLING INTERFERENCE

Opponent interference over your notrump opening bid is irritating no matter what range you are playing. You may find that the opponents will be even more eager to bid against your 12-14 range (and 10-12, too). Sometimes they have a clearcut overcall — a good hand that begs for description. Sometimes, however, opponents are worried that you are stealing with your weak opening and will look for any excuse to bid. Luckily, it is relatively easy to deal with interference over your weak notrump. In fact, you can play exactly the same system you play when they come in over a strong notrump.

### SHOULD I PLAY LEBENSOHL? WHAT IS LEBENSOHL?

I recommend playing Lebensohl (or some variation of it, depending on your present partnership agreements) if the opponents bid over your weak notrump opening bid. Lebensohl is a convention that centers on an artificial 2NT bid in this sequence:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	2x <sup>1</sup>	2NT <sup>2</sup>	

1. Any two-level suit bid.
2. Lebensohl, a relay to 3♣.

Essentially, Lebensohl makes it easier to show: a) hands with or without stoppers in the opponent's suit, b) game-forcing hands and c) competitive hands. Rebids by responder such as a cuebid, 3NT or a suit bid change in meaning depending on whether or not the 2NT relay has been used. A full discussion of the Lebensohl convention is outside the scope of this book and there are numerous variations of it available. For a simple version, you could read Barbara Seagram's *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know* (Chapter 18). It's really worth the memory work, as Lebensohl allows you to handle opponent interference much better.

Let's move on to specific examples of what happens when the opponents bid over our 1NT opening. In each case, we'll discuss what to do if the opponent's bid is 'somewhat natural' (they have the suit they are bidding) or at least 'somewhat artificial' (they don't necessarily show the suit they are actually bidding).

## THE OPPONENTS OVERCALL 2♠ (NATURAL OR ARTIFICIAL)

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	2♣	?	

When the opponents overcall 2♣, you have the option of retaining all your gadgetry and ignoring the 2♣ overcall. For instance, if you were going to use 2♣ as Stayman but your RHO beat you to the punch by bidding 2♣ first, you can simply double 2♣ to convey the same meaning. Partner knows you have enough values to bid and are interested in locating a major-suit fit. Also, over the 2♣ bid, you can make any other systemic bid you were going to make before the opponents butted in. For example, if you play transfers over notrump, *transfers are still on*. The auction will look like this:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	2♣	2♦1	

1. Transfer to hearts.

Ultimately, you aren't put out too much by the measly 2♣ interference. It doesn't really matter if the 2♣ is artificial or natural: you can comfortably ignore the opponent's bid either way. Say you hold:

♠ K 10 8 4    ♥ Q J 7 6    ♦ A 9 5    ♣ K 5

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	2♣	dbl <sup>1</sup>	

1. Stayman.

Here, you have a classic Stayman bid, so you double 2♣ to tell partner you want to hear about his majors. (Playing Two-Way Stayman, you would bid 2♦ on this hand instead of doubling.) Of course, if the 2♣ overcall shows majors, you may want to pass and double them later for penalties. At unfavorable vulnerability, simply bid 3NT.

♠ K Q 9 8 4    ♥ A 5 2    ♦ 6    ♣ 9 7 5 4

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	2♣	2♥ <sup>1</sup>	

1. Transfer to spades.

This time, you were going to transfer to spades. You ignore the 2♣ overcall and still bid 2♥, a transfer to spades.

## THE OPPONENTS OVERCALL A NATURAL 2♦, 2♥ OR 2♣

If the opponents overcall a natural 2♦, 2♥ or 2♣, I recommend that you play double as penalty. If you bid a major at the two-level, it should be natural and to play. Also, you should treat new suits at the three-level as natural and forcing to game (part of the Lebensohl convention).

In each of these examples, the opponents have bid 2♦, showing diamonds and possibly a major:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	2♦	?	
(1) ♠ K J 9 4 3 ♥ 10 8 5 ♦ 6 ♣ K 9 8 3	(2) ♠ K 9 ♥ 10 4 3 ♦ AJ 9 7 6 ♣ Q 9 3	(3) ♠ A Q J ♥ Q 9 3 ♦ 8 ♣ A Q 9 8 7 2	(4) ♠ J 9 8 4 2 ♥ J 3 ♦ 5 3 2 ♣ 9 8 7

With (1), bid 2♣ (to play).

### [To Answers 3-4](#)

With (2), double 2♦. If the opponents run to 2♥ or 2♣, partner will be well placed to double them if he has a strong holding in their suit (remember: your double promises some values). Your double should be forcing through 2♥ ([see page 104](#)).

With (3), bid 3♣. You don't know whether you belong in clubs or notrump, but further bidding will show you the way.

With (4), pass! The opponents have let you off the hook — you weren't going to be happy if they doubled partner's 1NT opening, so why bid 2♣ now? If you take a call with that rubbish, you deserve minus 800. Let the opponents bid to wherever they end up and hope the preemptive effect of your side's 1NT opening causes them to bid either too much or too little.

### [To Questions 3-4](#)

# THE OPPONENTS OVERCALL AN ARTIFICIAL 2♦, 2♥, 2♣ OR 2NT

When the opponents overcall your weak notrump with an artificial bid (bidding a suit they do not necessarily have), there are two main types of hand they can have: one-suited hands and two-suited hands. Fortunately, it won't matter to you, as you can treat them all the same way.

## *One-Suited Artificial Overcalls*

A fair number of tournament players will be playing transfers over your weak notrump, so you may run into players who bid 2♦ to show hearts, 2♥ to show spades, and perhaps 2♣ to show clubs. Defending against these bids is relatively simple, *assuming you know what the opponent's suit is*.

Let's say the opponents make a one-suited artificial overcall:

- A cuebid of the opponent's real suit is Stayman for any unshown majors.
- A double of the artificial overcall shows general values (10+ points, usually balanced) and invites partner to double the opponent's suit if he wants to. Again, the double should be forcing through 2♥ ([see page 104](#)).
- If you pass first and then double the opponents after they have come to rest, that is penalty.
- If you bid a new suit at the two-level, that is to play.
- Lebensohl applies if you are playing it.

Suppose the opponents play 2♥ to show spades over a weak notrump. Your 2♣ bid, being a cuebid of the suit they have shown, is Stayman (if playing Lebensohl, you are ostensibly denying a spade stopper). Double is

general values. If you want to make a penalty double of 2♠, you pass for now and double 2♠ later (assuming your LHO completes the transfer).

Let's look at a few examples. In each case, the auction has begun:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	2♥1	?	

1. Shows spades.

(1) ♠ K Q 5	(2) ♠ K Q J 9	(3) ♠ 9 8	(4) ♠ 5 3
♥ A 9 6	♥ A 6 5 4	♥ K Q 9 8	♥ K J 5
♦ K 8 6 5	♦ K J 9	♦ A J 8 5	♦ A 9 6 5
♣ Q 9 2	♣ Q 10	♣ K J 9	♣ K 10 9 7

With (1), you have a balanced hand and enough values to be in game. You should plan to get your side to 3NT (either with a direct jump to 3NT or via Lebensohl).

With (2), you should pass 2♥ — the first step in preparing to double your (soon-to-be-red-faced) opponent in 2♠. Using this sequence shows a pure penalty double, which is what you have: solid trump tricks and good defense on the side. Your right-hand opponent will be sorry he entered the auction by the time this hand is over!

With (3), you have a classic 2♠ cuebid. Your partner will bid 3♥ whenever he has four of them. If he doesn't, you can still get to notrump when he has a spade stopper. You do this by following up with another cuebid, this time 3♠ over partner's 2NT (which denies four hearts). The worst case scenario is when your side has no heart fit and no spade stopper. In that case, you will play in 4 or 5 of a minor or a Moysian (4-3) heart fit.

With (4), you should double, showing general values. If partner doubles 2♠, you will be delighted to defend. Even if he doesn't, you can double 2♠ again to show some extras. Note this sequence:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	2♥ <sup>1</sup>	dbl <sup>2</sup>	
pass	pass	dbl <sup>3</sup>	2♠

1. Spades.
2. Values (10+ HCP).
3. Still wish to compete.

Your first double just showed general values. Your second double is more of the same; if you had a penalty double of 2♠, you would have passed first and waited to double 2♠. This sequence shows a flexible hand with at least 10 points, asking partner to do something intelligent.

The principles are the same, regardless of the opponent's actual bid, but it is worth discussing these situations with partner.

## *Two-Suited Artificial Overcalls*

Sometimes the opponents will make an artificial overcall that shows two suits. The most common example of this is when the opponents overcall 2♦ (part of the Cappelletti defense to notrump openings) or 2♣ (part of Landy and Mohan) to show both majors. If you've decided to play a double of 2♣ as Stayman (as discussed earlier), then what follows here will only apply for you over other two-level overcalls.

The situation has changed somewhat from a one-suited overcall. This time, there are two possible suits to double, so your partnership will need more cooperation to decide when doubling the opponents is the right course of action.

## *Direct Doubles*

If you double the opponent's two-suited artificial overcall, you are showing good values (10+ points) and saying that you want to double at least one of the opponent's two suits. Partner is now free to double the opponents if he wants to. Some examples:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	2♦1	?	
1. Majors.			
(1) ♠ K Q 10 8 ♥ K 5 ♦ A 9 6 3 ♣ Q 9 2	(2) ♠ 9 5 ♥ A Q J 9 2 ♦ A 7 5 ♣ J 3 2	(3) ♠ A Q 10 5 ♥ A J 10 5 ♦ 4 3 2 ♣ 3 2	(4) ♠ K 10 8 3 ♥ Q 10 7 2 ♦ Q 7 ♣ 10 9 6

With (1), you are planning to double the opponents if they land in spades. If they land in hearts, however, it would be nice to know whether to double them or bid toward a contract of your own. Your double of 2♦ sends the message to partner that not only do you want to double at least one of the majors, but that if he has a good holding in the suit they do land in, you are also giving him a green light to double that. So, logically, if the opponents bid 2♥ and *partner does not double*, you can bid 3NT next.

With (2), you have the heart suit completely locked up. It is very unlikely the opponents will end up in hearts, but if partner wants to double 2♠, you will probably get a very large number. So go ahead, double 2♦. If partner does not want to double 2♠, nothing is lost; you can cuebid 3♠ next to see if your side has a spade stopper for 3NT.

With (3), you are planning to double either major suit, but you still start by doubling 2♦. A nice bonus to doubling 2♦ is that if your left-hand opponent decides to bid 3♣ or 3♦ instead, your partner has the green light to double either of those calls.

With (4) you should pass throughout and prepare to defend. While you have two or three potential defensive tricks, your hand isn't strong enough to get too active in the bidding. Make sure you have at least a decent 10-count

in order to suggest a doubled contract to partner, since your double is forcing through 2♥ .

### *Passing and then Doubling after a Two-Suited Artificial Overcall*

There are two reasonable ways to play a sequence when you first pass the opponents' overcall and then double later. An example sequence:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	2♦1	pass	2♠
pass	pass	dbl	

#### 1. Majors.

One way to play your delayed double is for penalty, but limited to about 10 HCP (with more, you would have doubled 2♦ immediately). A couple of example hands:

♠ A J 10 7 5    ♥ 9    ♦ K 9 3    ♣ J 8 5 3

♠ A J 10 9    ♥ K 3    ♦ J 10 9    ♣ 9 8 7 6

With either of these hands, you expect to set 2♠. On the first hand, you didn't double 2♦, because you didn't really want to hear partner double 2♥. On the second hand, you were a little light to double 2♦, but once the opponents preferred to play in spades, it seems smart to raise the stakes. You rate to have four defensive tricks.

Another way to play the delayed double sequence is to have the double show general values (8+ HCP) and be takeout oriented. Hands of this type are notoriously hard to bid after your opponents interfere with your notrump. Consequently, I recommend you play the delayed double as 'competitive takeout' (as opposed to strictly penalty, as outlined above).

Let's try some examples. In each case, the auction has begun:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	2♦1	pass	2♥
pass	pass	?	

1. Majors.

(1) ♠ K 9 3	(2) ♠ A 5	(3) ♠ Q 9 7	(4) ♠ Q 8 7
♥ 9 5	♥ 4 3 2	♥ 6	♥ 3 2
♦ A J 8 4	♦ K J 9 8	♦ K 5 4 3	♦ A Q 8 5
♣ Q 10 9 8	♣ J 9 8 7	♣ A J 9 3 2	♣ A Q 8 5

### [To Answers 3-4](#)

With (1), you have a perfect delayed double: takeout orientation and enough values that your side has safety re-entering the auction. You are happy with whatever partner does. If he passes, the opponents are almost certainly going down, and if he bids, you expect to make it.

Hand (2) is another decent reopening double. If partner leaves it in, you have excellent defense. If he bids something, you expect the contract to be playable. Note that *it would not be wrong to pass*; in fact, when you are vulnerable, you should pass to avoid getting into trouble if it's your unlucky day.

Hand (3) is also a possible reopening double. Although it would not be wrong to balance with 3♣, doubling leaves other contracts in the picture, including 2♥ doubled, 2NT, and 3♦. Do not be tempted to pass out 2♥ with this hand; your good distribution and strong high-card values indicate you should compete.

Hand (4) is another possible double. This hand has enough values for game, but there is nothing wrong with passing and then doubling to give partner a chance to defend 2♥ if he has a stack of them. A lot of the time it will be much easier to defeat 2♥ doubled than it will be to make 3NT. If partner pulls your double to 3♣ or 3♦, you can cuebid 3♥ next to ask his opinion about notrump. Note also that you did not double 2♦ the first time around because you were not expressly interested in defending against one of RHO's majors.

### [To Questions 3-4](#)

## **THE OPPONENTS OVERCALL 2NT**

Some opponents will play that a 2NT overcall shows a strong notrump. If you are playing against opponents silly enough to do this, just double them when you can tell your side has more than 20 points and pass when you know you have fewer. If you have a freakish hand, new suits at the three-level should be forcing. Texas transfers should also apply.

If the 2NT overcall is two-suited (commonly 2NT is used to show both minors), use the defense to artificial two-suited overcalls just described. Therefore, an immediate double suggests to partner that you would like to double either clubs, diamonds or both. Subsequent doubles (by you or partner) are penalty. Passing 2NT and then later reopening with a double is either takeout (recommended) or penalty.

If the 2NT overcall is one-suited (e.g. clubs), use the defense to artificial one-suited overcalls described earlier.

## **THE OPPONENTS OVERCALL AT THE THREE-LEVEL OR ABOVE**

When the opponents overcall at the three-level, it's a whole different ball game. Usually when opponents do this, they have a long suit, so it becomes far less likely that you're actually going to be dealt a clear penalty double. Much more likely is a scenario like this:

♠ K J 9 5   ♥ 5   ♦ A Q 7 3   ♣ K 10 8 6

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	3♥	?	

Do you see where this is heading? When the opponents overcall at the three-level, your double should be for takeout. Partner is allowed to pass if he wishes, but you are asking him to bid. The full deal might be:

♠ A Q 7 6		
♥ A 6		
♦ K 5 2		
♣ 9 5 3 2		
♠ 10 8 3 2		♠ 4
♥ Q 4 2		♥ K J 10 9 8 7 3
♦ J 10 9 4		♦ 8 6
♣ 7 4		♣ A Q J
	N W      E S	
♠ K J 9 5		
♥ 5		
♦ A Q 7 3		
♣ K 10 8 6		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	1NT	3♥	dbl
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

Partner has an easy 3♠ bid and you reach your game. Reverse his majors, however, and he can happily pass your double.

When the opponents overcall at the four-level or higher, a double is traditionally penalty. It is okay to agree with your partner that your doubles are still takeout, but make sure you discuss this first. Both ways have advantages, but I recommend playing a double as penalties.

## *What about Texas?*

Many players agree that Texas transfers still apply as long as the transfer is still a jump bid. For example:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	2♦	4♦	

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	3♠	4♦	

In the first auction, the 4♦ bid is still a jump, so Texas transfers apply (here, 4♦ shows hearts). In the second auction, the 4♦ is not a jump, so it is natural and forcing.

## **CAN I PLAY DOUBLES AT THE TWO-LEVEL AS TAKEOUT INSTEAD OF PENALTY?**

Some experts play that doubles of their opponents' natural overcalls are takeout. They gain when they pick up something like this:

♠ Q J 8 3   ♥ 8 6   ♦ Q 9 6   ♣ A 5 3 2

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	2♥	?	

Playing penalty doubles, you have no good call. You can either try an aggressive 2♠ bid on a four-card suit, or go quietly with a pass. Playing takeout doubles, however, you have an easy double, which shows your shape perfectly and promises a few points.

However, penalty doubles gain when the deal is something like this:

♠ K J 10 5 3    ♥ A 4    ♦ 10 9 8    ♣ Q 5 3

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	2♠	?	

Boy, did your opponent pick the wrong time to bid spades! If you don't have a penalty double available, though, you are forced to pass and take your undertricks undoubled.

Some players try to have their cake and eat it too — they say that when you pick up that hand and the opponents bid 2♠, your partner can still rescue you by reopening with a double.

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT	2♠	pass	pass
dbl <sup>1</sup>	all pass		

### 1. Takeout.

This auction allows you to play 2♠ doubled. But — and this is a big ‘but’ — there is a problem with this strategy. These experts may be right in theory, but it doesn’t always work in practice. The 1NT opener will feel all kinds of pressure to reopen the bidding any time that he has good distribution and that will often be the wrong decision. Imagine picking up:

♠ Q 5 3 2    ♥ K 5 2    ♦ 10 4 2    ♣ 10 9 5

Now, imagine hearing the auction go:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	2♠	pass	pass
dbl <sup>1</sup>	pass	?	

### 1. Takeout.

What do you do? You dare not pass, because the opponents could easily make their contract, and you know the opponents can successfully double 2NT (and probably any suit you bid as well). In fact, any call you choose to make is probably going to be disastrous! Probably the best plan is to crawl under the table until the time for the round expires.

For this reason, it is important that if you do choose to play takeout doubles, that you and your partner use the reopening double with caution. Also, penalty doubles work much better when you have too many values to risk defending the opponents' contract at the two-level undoubled. Say the auction goes:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	2♦ <sup>1</sup>	?	

### 1. Diamonds and a major.

You hold:

♠ Q    ♥ K Q 6 4    ♦ A Q 9 8 4    ♣ 9 7 2

You suspect the opponents are in big trouble. You would like to double either 2♦ or 2♥ for penalties and defend 2♠ doubled if partner wants to double that. Playing takeout doubles, however, you simply cannot risk trying for penalties. It would be a disaster if the auction continued:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	2♦	all pass	

Playing takeout doubles, you often have to bite the bullet and give up on penalties *when playing for penalties is what you want*. Holding the hand above and playing takeout doubles, you would have to take immediate action, something like this:

♠ Q    ♥ K Q 6 4    ♦ A Q 9 8 4    ♣ 9 7 2

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
1NT	2♦	3♦ <sup>1</sup>	pass
3♠	pass	3NT	all pass

1. Stayman.

Your 3♦ cuebid of RHO's suit is Stayman. Partner admits to having spades. (Playing Lebensohl, your auction would look slightly different.) Isn't that frustrating? You have diamonds and hearts wired and partner has four spades. It looks like your opponents were in big trouble on this hand, but playing takeout doubles, you just have to bid 3NT and hope it makes.

Both treatments (takeout and penalty) have validity and both are playable. The penalty double is more traditional and you will definitely be glad you are playing it when the right hands come up. Yet the hand for the takeout double will occur more often. Also, the takeout double structure will allow the 1NT opener to leave some of his partner's takeout doubles in for penalty, a nice bonus. It looks like a toss-up, and maybe it is. So again, play whichever treatment makes you feel more comfortable.

My own recommendation is that you adopt penalty doubles, if only because it is emotionally satisfying to double the opponents and get a big number — not to mention that they will think twice about coming in against your 1NT opening next time. Penalty doubles will also remove many other complications that can suddenly surface in an undiscussed auction.

## HOW DO I KNOW WHEN TO DOUBLE THE OPPONENTS AND WHEN TO BID ON

# TOWARD OUR OWN CONTRACT?

Generally speaking, it is reasonable to double the opponents when you have four-card or longer length in their suit *with some interior cards* and enough values to expect to set them most of the time. When deciding whether to double 2♥, for example, a holding of ♥A-6-3-2 is often not going to take more than one trick, whereas a holding of ♥A-J-10-8 will usually take two, or even three tricks. Also, at unfavorable vulnerability (when they are not vulnerable and you are), it's often sound strategy to bid and make a game for 600 or more, rather than set them two or three tricks for 300 or 500.

Let's try a quick quiz.

## *To Double or Not to Double*

In each case, the auction has begun:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
INT	2♥ <sup>1</sup>	?	

1. Natural.

(1) ♠ K83 ♥ AK9 ♦ A Q8 ♣ 6432	(2) ♠ 32 ♥ AJ108 ♦ A65 ♣ K876	(3) ♠ 98 ♥ AQ986 ♦ 643 ♣ A42	(4) ♠ 9 ♥ AQ10986 ♦ 643 ♣ 542
--	--	---------------------------------------	--

### [To Answers](#)

With (1), do not double. You have high expectations of setting 2♥, with your solid defensive hand and combined point count of 28-30 HCP, so a double is not unreasonable. You have only three-card trump length, however, and this is a warning sign that should steer you away from playing for penalties at the two-level. The full deal might be:

<p style="text-align: center;">♠ Q 5 4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♥ 8 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♦ K J 10 7 4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♣ A Q 9</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♠ A 10 9 7</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♥ 7 3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♦ 6 5 3 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♣ 8 7 5</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">♠ J 6 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♥ Q J 10 6 5 4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♦ 9</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♣ K J 10</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♠ K 8 3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♥ A K 9</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♦ A Q 8</p> <p style="text-align: center;">♣ 6 4 3 2</p>
--	---	--

Despite your overwhelming high-card advantage, with all the cards sitting well for declarer, he will probably scramble home and make 2♥ doubled! Meanwhile, 3NT your way makes in comfort: your side has nine tricks without needing any finesses. Admittedly, this is a lucky layout for East, but even if you were to change a few cards, he could go down one or two while 3NT makes for your side with an uptrick. Not very profitable!

With (2), yes, double. This is a classic penalty double — solid trump tricks and enough defense to expect to beat 2♥ almost 100% of the time. In my experience, 2♥ will go down four or five tricks. Aren't you glad you are playing penalty doubles?

With (3), double. There are two good reasons to double 2♥ here. The first is that it is almost certainly going down. The second is that if LHO runs to 2♠, you have decent defense, so you want to give partner the green light to double. Note that you weren't all that interested in game your way, so if they run to 2♠ and partner doesn't double, you will give up, pass and go quietly.

With (4), do not double! The opponents are sitting in a ridiculous contract and it is the only contract that you have any defense against. Your LHO is probably already nervous about a heart contract; don't give him any more

incentive to run. Compare this hand to Hand (3): if you double 2♥ here and LHO pulls to 2♠, how happy will you be if partner doubles? [To Questions](#)

Whatever you choose to play, make sure that your partnership is in agreement about all the situations presented in this chapter (and previous chapters). One of the key strengths of your weak notrump is that it makes the opponents guess. If they are not afraid to come in against your 1NT auctions because you are not good at dealing with their interference, they will come in more often. You might find that your 1NT opening is preempting your own side as much as theirs.

## WHAT IF THE OPPONENTS DOUBLE STAYMAN?

When it comes to handling interference over your systemic bids, there really isn't any right or wrong treatment. The key to every auction is to feel like you know what's going on, so keep it as simple and logical as possible. At the same time, you want to be able to take advantage if the opponents have stepped out.

A common occurrence over any notrump structure is when your right-hand opponent doubles your partner's 2♣ Stayman bid. What should you do?

Best is just to answer partner's question. Suppose you have a four-card major and the auction goes:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
2♣	dbl	1NT ?	pass

Show your four-card major as you normally would had RHO passed.

If you don't have a four-card major, bid 2♦ — the same systemic call. The tough question is, what do pass and redouble show?

Well, if you are interested in playing 2♣ redoubled, since you have four decent clubs or maybe even five, you need to avoid bidding anything at all. Therefore, a pass by you says to partner, ‘I have a four-card club suit over here; are you interested in redoubling and playing 2♣ redoubled?’

Similarly, an immediate redouble by you could say to partner, “I have a *five-card club suit* over here; are you interested in playing 2♣ redoubled?”

If partner is not interested in 2♣ redoubled, then he will take another call. His call should be descriptive, so for example, 3♣ by him would be continuing to ask about majors. 2♥ by partner would show five of that suit and a weak or invitational hand (depending on your agreements).

Playing this way allows you to make the opponents pay for frivolously entering your auction. The full deal could be:

	♠ A Q 10 8 ♥ K J 6 2 ♦ K Q ♣ 6 5 4		
♠ K J 5 ♥ 8 4 3 ♦ J 10 7 6 3 2 ♣ 2		N W E S	♠ 6 3 2 ♥ Q 10 5 ♦ 9 4 ♣ K J 10 8 7
	♠ 9 7 4 ♥ A 9 7 ♦ A 8 5 ♣ A Q 9 3		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	2♣ <sup>1</sup>	dbl <sup>2</sup>	1NT
pass	redbl <sup>4</sup>	all pass	pass <sup>3</sup>

1. Stayman.
2. Lead-directing (but somewhat misguided to say the least).
3. Four-card club suit, interest in 2♣ redoubled.
4. Let's play 2♣ redoubled!

Here, East has entered your auction in a lame attempt to get his partner off to a good lead. Fortunately, you have East out-gunned, outpointed and out-pipped. Yes, East will take two or three trump tricks, but you have so much power that 2♣ redoubled will make with uptricks. Redoubled uptricks are gold! For example, 2♣ redoubled making four is worth 960 or 1560 depending on vulnerability. These types of scores more than make up for the game bonus!

You will also come across the occasional opponent who will double your Two-Way Stayman game-forcing 2♦ bid for the lead. In this auction, you should focus on the chance to play 2♦ redoubled, since you know you have plenty of high cards. Opener should redouble with four-plus diamonds, or

pass the decision to partner (who may well have diamonds, remember). With enough high cards, even a 3-3 fit can pay dividends, but you may not want to do that too often!

## WHAT IF THE OPPONENTS DOUBLE OUR TRANSFER BID?

How you handle the double of your partner's transfer bid is slightly different than how you handle the double of a Stayman bid. In this case, partner is not asking you to show a major of your own; he is showing his own suit.

If your RHO did not double, you would have been forced to bid the transfer suit, but now you have the option of passing to say something about partner's suit.

The auction will look like this:

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
2♥ <sup>1</sup>	dbl	1NT	pass
		?	

1. Transfer to spades.

You have three options:

- 2♠ shows three or more spades (if you play superaccepts, go ahead and bid what you normally would had there not been any interference).
- pass shows a doubleton spade and a minimum.
- redouble shows a doubleton spade and a maximum.

After your pass or redouble, partner is free to do whatever he wishes. If he retreats to 2♠, it is a drop-dead bid. If he bids 2NT, it, too, is to play. If he bids 3♣ or 3♦, it is natural and forcing. If he bids 3♥, it is a re-transfer and you should then bid 3♠.

# CHAPTER 11

## THE MINI-NOTRUMP (10-12)

With a range of 10-12 HCP, the mini-notrump (or Kamikaze notrump) is so called because it is even *weaker* than the weak notrump. You're probably thinking, ‘What's next, an opening range of 5-7 high card points?’ Who knows — that could be part of the 2/1 system a couple of hundred years from now. It's safe to say though, for the time being, that the mini-notrump is about as weak as it gets. It is accepted as a legitimate opening notrump range by the ACBL and other international bridge federations.

Now, as an experienced practitioner of the mini-notrump, I can tell you it's a fun range to play. World champions Sabine Auken and Daniela von Armin play the mini-notrump and will probably tell you the same thing. You will end up opening hands that other players holding your cards will not. As we all know, bidding is much more fun than passing!

As with the weak notrump, your strategy may be that you will only incorporate the 10-12 range when you are at favorable vulnerability. It makes some sense to play it this way, since you want to obstruct the opponents' bidding as much as possible when you are non-vulnerable. When you are vulnerable, the threat of being doubled and going for a number looms larger. You may prefer to adjust your opening range to something a little higher, say to at least 12-14 when you are ‘hot’, that is, vulnerable against not.

Why exactly is the 10-12 range fun to play? Imagine for a second how you would normally treat this hand:

♠ J 10 8 3    ♥ A J 3    ♦ K J 7 3    ♣ 8 6

As dealer, you would pass in a heartbeat, wouldn't you? Maybe, just maybe, you would find an opening bid in third seat at favorable vulnerability, but for sure you would never dream of opening this hand in first or second seat. Of course not! Playing the mini-notrump, however, you get to open the bidding.

That's the key advantage to playing the mini-notrump — you open hands that would normally be passed. There are many occasions when you will reach a completely different contract than the other pair or pairs playing your cards. The mini-notrump has an uncanny ability to create swings from the get-go. Here is a full deal from a recent tournament that illustrates this point — how a deal can be won in the bidding. North-South were playing the mini notrump.

*Dealer: North  
Both vul.*

<table border="0"> <tbody> <tr><td>♠ A 10 5</td></tr> <tr><td>♥ K J 9 3</td></tr> <tr><td>♦ Q 6 3</td></tr> <tr><td>♣ 10 5 2</td></tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="0"> <tbody> <tr><td>♠ 8 6</td></tr> <tr><td>♥ A 10 6</td></tr> <tr><td>♦ A K 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♣ K Q J 6 4</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	♠ A 10 5	♥ K J 9 3	♦ Q 6 3	♣ 10 5 2	♠ 8 6	♥ A 10 6	♦ A K 2	♣ K Q J 6 4		<table border="0"> <tbody> <tr><td>♠ Q J 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♥ Q 8 5 4</td></tr> <tr><td>♦ J 9 7 4</td></tr> <tr><td>♣ 9 8</td></tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="0"> <tbody> <tr><td>♠ K 9 7 4 3</td></tr> <tr><td>♥ 7 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♦ 10 8 5</td></tr> <tr><td>♣ A 7 3</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	♠ Q J 2	♥ Q 8 5 4	♦ J 9 7 4	♣ 9 8	♠ K 9 7 4 3	♥ 7 2	♦ 10 8 5	♣ A 7 3
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♥ 7 2																		
♦ 10 8 5																		
♣ A 7 3																		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT <sup>1</sup>	pass		2♥ <sup>2</sup>
3♣	all pass		

1. 10-12.
2. Transfer to spades.

In a matchpoint event, North opened 1NT. Yes, that is correct; despite being vulnerable and despite his porous looking 4333 10-count, North opened 1NT.

South transferred to spades and West found himself with a difficult problem, likely one that nobody else in the room had to encounter: what to do with his excellent 17-point hand?

This particular West chose to bid 3♣, although perhaps doubling was his best, most flexible option. (In the case where his partner had a trump stack, defending 2♠ doubled might be the best contract for the East-West side.) However, I am just reporting the facts and the fact is that West bid 3♣. This contract could have been defeated two tricks with double-dummy defense, but after a trump lead, North-South chalked up plus 100 for defeating 3♣ one trick. Plus 100 translated to all the matchpoints for North-South!

Looking at all four hands, you can surmise that the most likely auction would be three passes *before* West opened 1NT, which would very likely be the final contract. Best defense by North-South will hold West to eight tricks. That's plus 120 for East-West. Even with a slip or two from declarer, it's hard to imagine that North-South will get a plus score. At this table though, the mini-notrump opening put enormous pressure on West and he chose wrongly. Notice that North-South can make seven tricks with spades as trumps. Sure enough, there they were — in 2♠ — before West had a chance to make his first bid.

There is a huge advantage in bridge when you can force your opponents into making decisions, especially difficult ones. The mini-notrump, akin to its bigger brother the weak notrump, has the same effect as a preemptive bid. You and your partner *combine* efforts (and preemption) in getting to your best spot while the opponents are in the hot seat trying to figure out their best spot.

So is the mini-notrump a panacea — a cure-all for any situation? Of course not. If it worked perfectly for everyone all the time, then everyone would play the 10-12. The mini-notrump has its weaknesses just like any other bridge convention. But know this: when used properly, the mini-notrump can be a very powerful weapon to add to your arsenal — the kind of result it can generate was illustrated by the previous example.

## WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER RANGES?

There is no doubt that playing a 10-12 1NT range makes it harder to show the other notrump ranges — somehow your rebids have to cover all the balanced hands from 12-19. With a little tinkering, however, you can choose a structure that allows you to convey all notrump-type hands effectively. There are several ways of doing this.

## ARTIFICIALITY

One possibility is to assign an artificial meaning to your 1♣ and 1♦ openings. Playing this way, opening 1♣ or 1♦ either shows that suit or, if followed up with 1NT, shows a balanced hand in a certain range. For example, if you open 1♣ and then rebid 1NT, you show 13-15 HCP. If you open 1♦ and later rebid 1NT, you show 16-17 HCP. The complete structure would look like this:

This structure might seem simple and logical, but it actually takes a lot of practice — you must remember that an opening bid of a minor can be a two-card suit. It might even be done holding as little as the three and the deuce.

Take this hand, for example:

♠ A Q 9 3    ♥ Q 3    ♦ K Q 10 5    ♣ 4 3 2

You hold 13 HCP and must open 1♣. This is all well and fine if you end up playing the contract. You will have effectively disguised your minor-suit holdings and the opponents will need some time to sort out where your values are. However, opening one club might lead to an atrocious result if you end up defending and it turns out partner is the one with no idea if you really have clubs or not. Perhaps the auction will get competitive and partner is understandably nervous about raising your suit. In either case, you will wish you could have opened 1♦. That is the major flaw with this kind of system: an opening bid in either minor is a completely artificial bid.

## STRETCHING THE RANGES

Let's take a look at another mini-notrump structure, one that should resemble what you already play:

Sixteen-point hands require your judgment. If you feel your 16-count is weakish-looking because of flat distribution and a lack of solid spot cards, downgrade it. However, if your distribution includes a five-card suit or two-four card suits and you possess an abundance of tens and nines, upgrade it.

Having opened 1♦ in each case, would you rebid 1NT or 2NT on these hands?

♠ A J 10 9    ♥ Q J 9 8    ♦ A J 10    ♣ K 10

♠ A J 3 2    ♥ K 4 3 2    ♦ A J 5    ♣ K 3

You should treat the first hand as a 2NT rebid based on the great spot cards. While the second hand has the king of hearts instead of the queen-jack, you should treat it as a 1NT rebid, since your spot cards are really unlikely to win a trick.

Notice that playing this structure means you must lower your 2NT opening bid by one point. Thus, you must now open all 19-point hands with 2NT. (Many players already do so anyway, so this won't pose much of a stretch.)

## THE MEXICAN 2♦ CONVENTION

There is one final structure that deserves your attention, one that makes use of an artificial strength-showing 'Mexican' 2♦ opening bid invented by George Rosenkranz. Some of the world champion Italian players are using this

convention to show balanced hands in the 18-20 HCP range — in this case, ‘balanced’ does not include hands with a strong five-card major. Here is how it would fit in with the mini-notrump:

You may choose to modify the ranges a point here or there. For example, you could make the 2NT rebids bottom out at a good 16-count and go up to a bad 18; now your 2♦ call only includes hands in the good 18 to 20 range. This is all a matter of personal style.

The advantage of adding the 2♦ Mexican convention is that you can keep your notrump rebid ranges tight without using artificial one-level openings. The disadvantage is that you lose the ability to open a weak 2♦.

After the 2♦ opening bid, which shows a strong balanced hand somewhere in the 18-20 range, responder can bid as follows:

A little research will quickly turn up other response structures. If you decide to play the Mexican 2♦, I suggest you give a good deal of thought to the follow-up auctions.

Let’s take two hands and see how the auction could go.

OPENER	RESPONDER
♠ Q 8 3	♠ A 4
♥ K Q 9 4	♥ J 8 7 3
♦ A K 8	♦ Q 10 7 3
♣ A 9	♣ Q 6 4
2♦	2♠
2NT	3♣
3♥	4♥

After the 2♦ opening bid, which shows 18-19 HCP, responder must first get the partnership back on the notrump track. So responder bids 2♠, a relay to 2NT. Opener has no other option but to bid 2NT. At this point in the auction, you can play whatever it is you play over a regular 2NT opening bid. Stayman is on and so is a transfer bid to hearts. A bid of 3♥ is available for other uses, though, since with spades responder can transfer at the two-level

with a direct bid of 2♥ over 2♦. Here, with these cards, responder rebids 3♣, which is Stayman, and the 4-4 fit in hearts is quickly discovered.

Notice you have two Stayman sequences: you can relay to 2NT by bidding 2♠ and then use Stayman. Alternatively, you can bid a direct 3♣ over the 2♦ opening. I recommend that the immediate Stayman 3♣ over 2♦ *guarantees that responder holds four spades* — you should always try to steer the strong hand into being declarer. If responder makes the relay bid of 2♠ instead, he will end up as declarer in a spade contract if you reach one. That might not be in your best interests. Suppose your partner opens 2♦ (Mexican) and you hold:

♠ A 9 7 4    ♥ Q J 8 3    ♦ J 9    ♣ 9 7 4

You should bid 3♣ immediately. If partner has spades, he will bid them first. If you make the relay bid of 2♠ first and then bid 3♣ (Stayman) over partner's forced 2NT, partner might show his four-card spade suit. This time you will be declarer. So using the two sequences available gives you the option of keeping the strong hand hidden from the opponents. This is the same logic that applies to auctions after 2♣ openings — responder tries not to bid 2NT in front of partner so that the strong hand becomes declarer in any notrump contract.

Continuing with the same logic, the direct 2NT bid over the 2♦ opening should show a hand with lots of clubs — either weak or game-forcing. Thus 2♦-2NT asks opener to bid 3♣ and responder can either pass or bid on. If responder bids a new suit at the three-level, it should show shortness. A rebid of 3NT should show slam interest, since responder 'stole' the notrump bid from opener.

This next deal is a fun one that involved the Mexican 2♦ convention. My partner, John Ross, and I were playing in an event to qualify for the Canadian National Team Championships. At the time this deal took place, our methods were 2/1 with a variable mini-notrump. We opened 10-12 notrump in first, second and third seats at favorable and equal vulnerability; otherwise, we opened 14-16 at unfavorable vulnerability and in fourth seat. To take some

pressure off the notrump range rebids, we played the Mexican 2♦ opening to show hands with 18-19 HCP.

*Dealer: West*

*Both vul.*

♠ K Q 7 4 ♥ 8 2 ♦ A 2 ♣ A Q 10 7 2  ♠ A J ♥ K Q 6 ♦ K Q J 7 4 ♣ K 9 3		♠ 8 3 2 ♥ A J 7 5 4 3 ♦ 8 3 ♣ 8 6  ♠ 10 9 6 5 ♥ 10 9 ♦ 10 9 6 5 ♣ J 5 4
---	--	---

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
John		Andy	
2♦ <sup>1</sup>	pass	2♠ <sup>2</sup>	pass
2NT	pass	3♦ <sup>3</sup>	pass
3♥	pass	4♥	all pass

1. Artificial, showing a balanced hand with 18-19 HCP.
2. Artificial relay to 2NT.
3. Transfer to hearts.

Much to North's chagrin my partner opened in front of him. Not only did my partner open, but he also promised close to a 2NT opener! North wisely kept his nose out of the auction and passed throughout. I arranged for John to play the hand in the heart game and from his side, it could not be defeated.

Certainly, it was lucky for us that South was kept off lead throughout — switch a few of the North-South cards around and maybe we wouldn't have won 10 IMPs. The pair with our cards at the other table bid

and made 3♥ from the East side. But this hand does illustrate the advantage of getting the strong hand to declare. Notice that a club lead by South (perhaps after a club overcall by North) through West will defeat the heart game.

## MINI-NOTRUMP BIDDING PRACTICE

Let's look at some common bidding situations from responder's perspective, as it will help you to digest the full mini-notrump structure. You may choose to play transfers or Forcing Stayman directly over the 10-12 notrump opening.

Partner opens the bidding with 1NT (showing 10-12 HCP); what is your call with each of the following hands?

(1) ♠ Q 10 8 4 3	(2) ♠ Q 10 8 4	(3) ♠ Q 10 8	(4) ♠ Q 10 8 4
♥ A 10 4	♥ A 10 4 2	♥ A 10 7 4 2	♥ A 10 7 2
♦ K 9	♦ K 5	♦ K 6	♦ K 7
♣ 9 8 3	♣ A J 3	♣ A 8 3	♣ Q 8 6

With (1), you should transfer to spades or bid 2♠ to play, depending on your system. Whatever your system, you want to play this contract in 2♠.

With (2), you should bid 2♣ Stayman no matter what system you are playing. If partner bids 2♦, denying a major, you will follow up with 2NT, which is invitational to game. The key to remember here is that partner might have a mere 10-count, so your 14 points are not quite enough to bid game!

With (3), you should transfer to hearts and then bid 2NT, invitational to game. If you are playing Forcing Stayman, you should start with 2♣ and then follow up with 2♥ over partner's 2♦ (or 3♥ over a 2♠ rebid). This sequence promises five hearts and an invitational hand.

With (4), you should pass! This is the perfect hand with which to sit in the bushes. If partner is left to play 1NT, he will be happy to have all those high cards to work with; if the opponents get frisky and enter the fray, you can

have the red card ready. Reopening doubles by you can be takeout (showing values and a willingness to compete) or they can be penalty. Best is to play our standard agreement: after responder's first double, all subsequent passes are forcing and subsequent doubles are for takeout through 2♥ ([see page 104](#)).

On the next set, partner opens the bidding with 1♣ and you respond 1♥ with each of the following hands. What is your rebid after partner's 1NT rebid (showing 13-16)?

(1) ♠ QJ83	(2) ♠ Q8	(3) ♠ A32	(4) ♠ K42
♥ A1062	♥ KJ983	♥ QJ76	♥ AQ10843
♦ 83	♦ K983	♦ Q873	♦ 8
♣ J74	♣ A10	♣ A8	♣ J104

With (1), you should pass. You don't have enough to go looking for a spade fit. While partner may have bypassed his four-card spade suit to show his balanced hand, you don't have quite enough values to go looking. To check for a major-suit fit, you should have at least invitational values.

With (2), you should check for three-card support by bidding 2♦, which is New Minor Forcing (or whatever Checkback method you prefer). Partner will now describe his hand further by bidding 2♥ to show three-card heart support, 2♠ to show four spades or 2NT to deny either of the first two possibilities. If partner rebids 2♥, you have enough to jump to the heart game. If partner denies three hearts, then you will rebid 3NT.

With (3), jump to 3NT. This hand brings up the question: when do you invite? Well, since you want to be in game whenever partner holds a maximum of 15 or a bad 16 HCP, you should invite when you have 10 HCP. With anything less, you should strive for partscore, unless your hand has extra distributional values.

With (4), you should jump to 4♥. If you are the conservative type, you could initiate an invitational sequence. The game in hearts should play well, though, especially with your singleton diamond. Put it this way: partner will have to provide a really shabby 13-count to make game a bad contract.

Finally, let's look at some Mexican 2♦ hands. This time partner opens 2♦, showing a balanced 18-20 HCP. What do you bid as responder?

(1) ♠ A 9 7 3 2	(2) ♠ A 9 7 3	(3) ♠ A 9 7	(4) ♠ A 9
♥ Q J 10	♥ K 4 3 2	♥ 10 9 4 3	♥ K J 10 8 3
♦ 10 8 6	♦ J 9 8	♦ A 8 7 2	♦ K 8 5 4
♣ J 4	♣ 8 4	♣ 10 2	♣ Q 3

### [To Answers](#)

With (1), bid 2♥, a transfer to spades. Now comes the tricky part. You prefer not to follow up with a bid of 3NT — that puts you on play should partner pass — but what else can you do? New suits by you would be natural and forcing. Since your shape is 5332, you are stuck and must rebid 3NT. If partner has three or four spades, at least he will play the contract.

With (2), bid 3♣, Stayman promising four spades. Notice how you cleverly stay away from bidding 2♠, which is the relay to 2NT.

With (3), bid 2♠ in order to get partner to bid 2NT. Then you will follow up with 3♣, which is Stayman, denying four spades. (Some players of the Mexican convention play Puppet Stayman — if partner now bids 3♠ to show five spades, you can retreat to 4♠). Obviously, this ‘delayed Stayman’ sequence promises four hearts or else you would not have any reason to use Stayman at all.

With (4), bid 2♠ to get partner to bid 2NT. Then you will follow up with 3♦, a transfer to hearts. From there, you can bid 4♦, which is natural and forcing. You are hoping to play in 6♦ or 6♥, but not before checking for keycards. If it turns out you are missing two keycards, then you can still stop at the five-level.

### [To Questions](#)

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS AND TACTICS

The 10-12 mini-notrump opens up a whole spectrum of possibilities. Imagine hearing (or seeing) partner open 1NT when you hold:

♠ 5 4 3 2   ♥ 5 4 3 2   ♦ 5 4 3 2   ♣ 2

Okay — this hand is definitely an exaggeration, so let's upgrade it to:

♠ 6 5 4 3   ♥ 6 5 4 3   ♦ 6 5 4 3   ♣ 3

No deuces! Huge improvement! The point is you have 0 high card points and partner has just shown 10-12. Take a wild guess at what the opponents can make. That's right, game for sure and who knows, maybe even a slam, especially if partner opened something like:

♠ Q 8 7   ♥ K 8 6   ♦ Q J   ♣ Q 9 8 6 5

Admittedly, this example hand is also an exaggeration, but you get the picture. You have 0, partner has 10, and the opponents can make at least a game.

Let's say a miracle happens: you hold one of the above puffs of cheese and your partner opens 1NT, which your right hand opponent passes. Now you know your left-hand opponent is sitting on the world's fair. What do you bid with your 0-count? You pass faster than the speed of light, right?

Wrong. You bid. If you are really sporting you will bid 3NT (I'm joking), but typically you will bid 2♣ Stayman. This little ruse sometimes keeps the opponents from entering the auction at all; if it isn't overused, it's a great opportunity to steal a contract. Of course, it would never work *against* you, because you play a double of 2♣ Stayman to be value-showing.

On the flip side of the coin is the strategy you saw earlier where you pass holding a good hand. If partner opens a 10-12 1NT, you should pass as responder holding any of these hands:

♠ A Q 10 8  
♥ K J 9 3  
♦ 10 9 8 3  
♣ 8

♠ K 10 8 3  
♥ 9  
♦ A J 10 7 4  
♣ K J 2

♠ 5 3  
♥ A K 9 3  
♦ A 10 8 7  
♣ J 9 5

Why do you pass with good hands and bid with bad ones? Mostly to fool the opponents — and to keep them guessing. Passing with any of the hands shown may garner you a big number should the opponents enter the auction later. Conversely, by feigning strength with bad hands, you may avoid having the opponents carve you up.

While bidding with bad hands is rolling the dice and upping the ante (pick your gambling cliché), passing with good hands is sound strategy. The reason is this: if you can't envision game, then there is no need to bid. With 12 HCP or fewer, game is not in the picture. Your system has allowed you to diagnose that your side belongs in partscore. It is the opponents who must guess what to do. When they guess wrong, you'll be entering numbers that end in two zeros on your scorecard.

## ETHICAL ISSUES

You must be ready to respond when your partner trots out an agreed-upon partnership convention. Playing the mini-notrump, it is imperative that you know your system after RHO doubles your partner's 1NT. You must not sit there at the table wondering what to do; you should have begun your thought process upon seeing partner's 1NT opening. For example, say you hold:

♠ 9 8    ♥ J 10 8 4 3    ♦ Q J 8 3    ♣ 4 2

Your partner opens 1NT. What are you thinking?

First of all, you should be thinking, 'The opponents likely have a game'. Perhaps you are gearing up for a transfer to 2♥ or perhaps you are about to

make a signoff bid of 2♥ yourself.

You might also reason, ‘If my RHO doubles, I am going to run’. It is to be hoped that you are playing a system like the one described on page 102, whereby you can show diamonds and a higher-ranking suit, in this case hearts. At least 2♦ doubled or 2♥ doubled won’t be as bad as 1NT doubled.

The main point is that you need to be alert and thinking. You cannot allow a lengthy period of time to pass after the auction begins 1NT- (dbl). Just stay calm and play your system. A long hesitation may bring a shriek for the Director. Plus, the more in tempo you bid, the more competent you will look. The more competent you look, the less likely you will be to give the opponents any extra grounds for complaint.

Put it this way. You hold a yarborough and partner’s 1NT has just been doubled. If you take more than 30 seconds to make a call, well, as Ricky said to Lucy, ‘Luuu-cy, you have some explaining to do’. Be alert: the world needs more Lerts.

Another ethical issue is this: if you are playing the mini-notrump must you automatically open every flea-bitten ten-count? Let’s say you are playing a knockout match and you are nearing the end. You were up at the half and you feel like you are having a good second half. It’s the penultimate board and nobody is vulnerable. You are the dealer and pick up:

♠ Q 4 3 2    ♥ A 9 3    ♦ K 7 6    ♣ J 5 2

Do you open or don’t you? If you open 1NT and the opponents double, you might go for a number. On the other hand, if you don’t open, partner might not play you for a balanced hand with 10-12 HCP. Some say that you should always follow your system; others say that you should use judgment. So the question remains: must you open the above hand?

The answer is no. You can and should use judgment. Just as you can treat a four-card suit of A-K-Q-J as a five-bagger, you can choose to treat your doggy 10-count as a 9-count. Why not? The objective is not to give anything away, so why chance a bad score?

Now let's look at the flip side of this arrangement. This time you feel you are behind in the match and you need a good, if not a great, result to get back into it. Holding the following hand, do you open 1NT?

♠ Q 10 8 3   ♥ A 9 3   ♦ K 10 7 6   ♣ 5 2

The answer is no, you do not. You have a 9-count. You must not treat it as a 10-count. It doesn't work that way. No judgment is required here. A four-year old child can tell you the strength of the hand. You have 9 high-card points. Why shouldn't you try to swing a result in your favor? Because the ACBL (and probably every other international bridge governing body) says so, that's why.

Years ago, Jeff Meckstroth wrote an article for the ACBL *Bulletin* outlining the ethical perils of opening hands with fewer than 10 HCP. Primarily, it's not fair to your opponents. There has to be a limit to your ability, by agreement, to open weak hands and continue the auction on nothing as responder. Ten points is the legal limit — below that, you are deemed to be playing systemic controlled psyches. Just because you are playing a system that gives you the opportunity to open 10-counts does not give you the right to open 9-counts. If you don't believe me, try it some time and see what kind of reaction you get from your opponents when they discover that you hoodwinked them out of a game contract. Nobody wins when the rules are broken.

## TWO MORE DEALS FEATURING THE MINI IN ACTION

Here are two more full deals from real life in which two different pairs playing the mini-notrump achieved good results. Warning: this first deal does not feature a pretty auction and it also highlights the difficulty in playing bridge perfectly. Still, it's worth including here, because the result would not

have been possible had North-South not been playing the mini. It took place at the 1996 Alcatel Worldwide Bridge Contest.

*Dealer: North*

*Neither vul.*

<p>♠ 7 6 ♥ J 9 8 4 2 ♦ A 5 ♣ K Q 4 3</p> <p>♠ Q 10 8 4 2 ♥ — ♦ Q J 10 9 2 ♣ 9 7 6</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ A K J 9 3 ♥ Q 10 7 5 3 ♦ 6 3 ♣ 2</p> <p>♠ 5 ♥ A K 6 ♦ K 8 7 4 ♣ A J 10 8 5</p>
	N										
W		E									
	S										

<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
2♠	1NT <sup>1</sup>	2♦ <sup>2</sup>	2♥ <sup>3</sup>
pass	3♥ <sup>4</sup>	3♠	4♠ <sup>3</sup>
	5♣	all pass	

1. 10-12 high card points.
2. Majors.
3. Cuebid.
4. Natural (probably should have bid clubs).

Notice that North decided to open the bidding with 1NT, despite being only semi-balanced. Most practitioners of the 10-12 notrump will open any reasonably balanced hand, since the main purpose of the bid is to deny the opponents their bidding room.

East had no problem interfering with his constructive 2♦ bid that showed both majors. South made a cuebid with her 2♥ call. Not only does this bid say to partner, ‘This is our hand’, but it can also be stopper-showing in

case 3NT is the best spot. West bid a natural 2♠, but might have chosen 3♠ to jam the auction further, since it appears the hand belongs to North-South.

North chose to bid 3♥, despite East's having shown majors! Perhaps he had a lapse and thought he was bidding naturally or perhaps he was also showing a heart stopper while denying a spade stopper. East competed with 3♠ — a practical bid — and South decided to play the hand in a minor by making another cuebid, this time 4♠. North bid his better minor and there they landed.

East-West had a chance to defeat the contract, but as it so often goes for the defense, they did not. It required a heart lead from East and then, after West ruffed it, a spade return and another heart back. In fact, the opening lead (the normal lead) was a top spade honor and pretty soon North-South were chalking up 93 out of 100 instant matchpoints. As North put it, 'Just getting to 5♣ was worth all the goodies'.

It's interesting to note what might have happened had North not opened. If North had passed, South most likely would have doubled a 1♠ opening by East. West would bounce to 4♠ — an untouchable contract — and now if North bids 5♥, he's getting a minus score. The club suit would never be mentioned, as North is probably closer to doubling 4♠ than bidding 5♣.

While this hand is definitely a system triumph for the mini, you should ask yourself, 'What would I have done if I were in the East or West chair?' The 2♦ call is good, even though I prefer using 2♣ to show both majors. Perhaps the fault lies with West, who could have and should have made life difficult for his opponents by jamming the auction after South's strength-showing bid. Then North-South would need to judge very well to bid on to 5♣ instead of doubling 4♠ for penalties.

The next deal again illustrates how the mini-notrump opening, in conjunction with the opposite hand response, can take up enough bidding space to keep the opponents from entering the auction.

*Dealer: South*

*E-W vul.*

			♠ 10 7 5
			♥ 7 5
			♦ 8 6
			♣ A J 8 7 6 3
♠ A J 9 6			♠ Q 8 4
♥ K J 8 3			♥ A 10 9 6 2
♦ Q 9 7			♦ A 4 2
♣ 9 5			♣ K 2
	N		
W		E	
	S		
			♠ K 3 2
			♥ Q 4
			♦ K J 10 5 3
			♣ Q 10 4

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	2♠ <sup>2</sup>	pass	1NT <sup>1</sup>
all pass			3♣

1. 10-12.
2. Transfer to clubs.

This deal occurred at a club duplicate game. East-West were not world-class players (who is at the club duplicate?), so they sold out to 3♣. Perhaps both needed an extra jack or so in order to compete. In any case, East-West's score of plus 150 (for beating 3♣ three tricks) did not sufficiently compensate them for the normal East-West result of plus 170 or plus 420. Even plus 500 was available for East-West if they had found a way to double 3♣. Simple 'nothing' deals such as these can swing many matchpoints.

Are you and your partner confident in how you presently counter opponents playing the mini and weak notrump? Well, if you aren't already, you should be after digesting some of the ideas in the next section . . .



# HOW TO PLAY AGAINST IT

SECTION TWO

# **CHAPTER 12**

## **BEST DEFENSES AGAINST THE WEAK NOTRUMP**

Let's talk for a moment about your general philosophical approach to bidding in bridge. There are two schools of thought when it comes to defending against the opponent's opening of 1NT. One strategy can be described as timid in nature, while the other is a bolder approach. Like your parents when you tell them about your first job interview and they tell you to 'just be yourself', the best advice I can give you and your partner is to be yourselves in the bidding.

You should be yourselves, especially when it comes to competing against the weak notrump; you should do what feels most comfortable. If you prefer 'normal' results, you should make sound overcalls; if you like to stir things up, then by all means, come on in and have some fun. As you will observe (or perhaps already have), there is no quick-fix for properly handling the opponent's weak notrump. Let's look at the two overcalling styles before focusing in detail on two recommended conventions.

### **LIVING BY THE SWORD**

One modern stratagem is to get in there when your opponents open the bidding. The reasoning is that you should try to find your fit or at least punish them for entering your auction. Now, this is not to say that every time the opponents open a weak notrump it's your contract. Rather, it is just a strategy that you may choose to adopt. Or, as the saying goes, don't get pushed around. If you have a close decision between bidding and passing, tend to

bid. Although you will encounter the odd disaster in which you get doubled and partner is unable to help you out (either with a fit or with high cards), in the long run, you become a better, tougher and more fearless opponent by aggressively overcalling their 1NT. Well, that's the rallying cry of this school of overcalling.

## MAKING GOREN PROUD

There is nothing wrong, however, with old-fashioned sound defensive bidding. This means that you should have decent strength to directly overcall 1NT and not only in the direct seat. There is a theory that whatever strategy you employ in the direct overcall position, you should also employ in the balancing position. For example, say you are South in the following auctions:

*Direct Position*

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	pass	1NT	?

*Balancing Position*

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	pass	pass	?

What do you bid with these cards?

(1) ♠ AK10973	(2) ♠ AQ10973	(3) ♠ A109
♥ K2	♥ 873	♥ KQ94
♦ A874	♦ J8	♦ J108
♣ 3	♣ 109	♣ K73

### [To Answer 3](#)

With (1), you would always enter the auction, whether you were overcalling aggressively or soundly. If you feel you and your partner consistently take all your tricks on defense, then you might be up to a penalty-oriented double, or you may just want to show your interest in a spade contract. Whatever the case, be sure to take a call in the direct position or the balancing position.

With (2), you should pass in all seats. Perhaps there is some reason to bid spades in the balancing position, since partner is marked with some strength. However, this is where the danger of competing against the weak notrump is revealed. What do you know about the strength of each of the four hands? Opener has 12-14 and responder has 0-11. If responder holds a 12-count, he would probably have taken a call, either to invite game or to bid game. So if responder has a good 9 to 11 and opener has a maximum, your two spades contract could go for a number. Yes, opener may have only 12 points and responder only 4. In that case, it is your contract, because your side has the greater balance of strength. But which is it? It's so difficult to know what to do. While exuberant bidding says, 'Bid and take your lumps — maybe,' long experience says, 'Pass and take your tricks.'

With (3), you should pass in both the direct and balancing position. Your 13 HCP are certainly nice, but what kind of fit do you think you have with your partner? You will be lucky to find even an eight-card fit. The odds are that you will be scrambling to locate your seven-card fit and even then your hand does not have any ruffing values. To enter the auction you really want to have a (guaranteed) better hand than the 1NT opener. With (3), your hand may be better than opener's or it may be worse. Best to save your penalty-oriented doubles for two types of hands: when you have at the very minimum a solid 14-count and when you hold a hand such as the first

example (1), in which you have a suit that is almost ready to set up and an outside entry or two.

### [To Question 3](#)

Dozens of defensive systems have been devised to attempt to counter notrump openings effectively. Some of these work better than others against the weak notrump. In fact, some partnerships change their strategy depending on the opponent's notrump range. The ACBL convention card allows you extra space to differentiate your approach to defending against weak and strong 1NT openings. Whichever defense you and your partner agree on will most likely be best for you, since comfort is the top priority. In the next few pages you'll be presented with a couple of decent defenses that are especially good against the weak notrump.

Before we continue though, here is one rock-solid piece of advice: When you compete against the weak notrump, doubles should be *strength showing and penalty oriented*; doubles should not be single-suited.

## DON'T PLAY DONT

The DONT convention is especially useful against strong notrump openings. Its main advantage is contained within its acronymic title which stands for 'Disturb the Opponents No Trump'. The key word here is 'disturb'. By disturbing the opponents' notrump system, you nudge them out of their comfort zone; you prevent them from playing Stayman and, oftentimes, transfers. The thinking is that once the opponents open the bidding with a 15-17 notrump, your side does not have a game. From your perspective, it becomes a partscore battle, or, even better, a chance for you to jostle them out of locating their fit and best spot. DONT uses a double to show single-suited hands. All suit overcalls show the suit bid and at least one higher-ranking suit. The idea is to get into the auction on shape, without necessarily having values, protected by the Law of Total Tricks, as long as you can land in an eight-card fit somehow.

The whole premise changes when the 1NT opening is weak: not only could the hand belong to you, but it's not impossible for you to be on for a game. Defending against the weak notrump requires good bidding judgment and, as a rule, your bids over the weak notrump opening should be *constructive* in nature. Compare this to the *destructive* nature of entering the auction over the opponent's strong notrump.

Why, then, is the DONT convention so much less useful over the weak notrump? Let's look at a deal:

<table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>10 8 3</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>9 6 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>J 6 4 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>8 6 5</td></tr> </table> <table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>A Q 7</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>K 5 4</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>9 3</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>A Q 10 9 2</td></tr> </table>	♠	10 8 3	♥	9 6 2	♦	J 6 4 2	♣	8 6 5	♠	A Q 7	♥	K 5 4	♦	9 3	♣	A Q 10 9 2		<table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>9 6 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>A J 7</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>K Q 10 5</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>7 4 3</td></tr> </table> <table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>K J 5 4</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>Q 10 8 3</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>A 8 7</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>K J</td></tr> </table>	♠	9 6 2	♥	A J 7	♦	K Q 10 5	♣	7 4 3	♠	K J 5 4	♥	Q 10 8 3	♦	A 8 7	♣	K J
♠	10 8 3																																	
♥	9 6 2																																	
♦	J 6 4 2																																	
♣	8 6 5																																	
♠	A Q 7																																	
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♣	7 4 3																																	
♠	K J 5 4																																	
♥	Q 10 8 3																																	
♦	A 8 7																																	
♣	K J																																	

South opens 1NT, showing 12-14. You are West; what is your call? Remember: in the DONT convention, a double shows any single-suited hand. Playing DON'T, you would pass and await developments or you would double to show your single-suited hand, such as it is. Are either of those options what you really want?

No, what you really want available (on this deal) is a penalty-oriented double. Even if South holds a maximum, your hand is still better than his. In fact, on this example deal, South does have a maximum, but North is caught with a near-yarborough. The opponents don't have anywhere to go. They are

unlikely to run to a suit contract; instead, they will most likely pass out 1NT doubled and accept their fate.

You will probably lead a club and declarer will probably take two, maybe three, tricks. A double-dummy lead such as the nine of diamonds will see declarer take one, possibly two tricks. Clearly, you want the opportunity to make the opponents pay for stepping into *your* auction. Therefore, don't play DONT as a defense to weak notrump openings. Keep the penalty double and give yourself a chance to make the opponents pay.

## **DEFENSE TO THE WEAK NOTRUMP I: KEEPING IT SIMPLE WITH LANDY**

Landy may be old-fashioned and simple, but it is still an effective tool. In its original version, a bid of 2♣ shows both majors and asks partner to pick his better major (or bid diamonds if he has a long suit there and little tolerance for either major). Overcalls of 2♦, 2♥ and 2♠ are natural. Doubling the 1NT bid shows an 'equal hand or better', so that you can penalize the opponents when your side has the balance of power.

### *Agreements over the Double*

Before showing the complete follow-ups to Landy, I need you to discuss something with your partner. How should you handle the auction after it goes like this?

<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
1NT	Overcaller dbl	pass	Advancer ?

The old-fashioned method is for advancer — the overcaller's partner (in this case, South) to stand for the double with any hand, because the double was Penalty (with a capital P). Nowadays, however, the double is not 100% penalty; rather, it shows a minimum of 14 high card points, and the advancer is allowed to run to a suit if he is weak. Therefore, when partner doubles a weak notrump opening, you should sit for the double and defend with any fairly balanced hand containing 5+ points. If the opponents then run to a suit (in an attempt to escape a bigger penalty), either you or your partner can double that contract. It is advised, however, that when you do double a partscore contract, you hold at least four trumps.

The Landy convention can be used in both the direct and balancing seats. Here it is as devised in its original form:

The Landy convention is not without its flaws. There are many hand types that it cannot show. Fortunately, there are numerous modern approaches that incorporate Alvin Landy's original idea (showing both majors after a 1NT opening) that feature better follow-ups. Some of these conventions, worthy of further research but beyond the scope of this book, include: Aspro, Apstro, Astro, Becker, Brozel, Cansino, Cappelletti (also known as Hamilton in North America and Pottage in Britain), Hello, Ripstra and Suction.

## **DEFENSE TO THE WEAK NOTRUMP II: A MODERN APPROACH WITH MOHAN**

Researching all of those conventions will have your head spinning! My advice is to study Mohan (invented by US expert John Mohan), which tweaks Landy and features more constructive follow-up bidding. Mohan may seem a tad complicated at first, but once you understand its follow-ups, Mohan makes a lot of sense. Actually, the only thing that might be considered difficult (and thus require discussion with your partner) is how to follow up a double of 1NT. Some suggestions can be found below that, with luck, will

get your side to the best contract. Like Landy, Mohan works very well against the weak notrump and can be used in either the direct position or the balancing seat. Initial actions are sound — you shouldn't be bidding on air.

## *The Double of 1NT*

Before we get into the meanings of various suit overcalls when playing Mohan, let's talk about a double and what happens in the auction after your side has doubled the 1NT opening.

In Mohan, a double has the same meaning as in Landy. It shows a good hand, a hand that is better than the opponent's 1NT opener. Typically, it contains a balanced 15+ HCP, but your hand may have only 14 with an easy lead, such as an honor sequence, or perhaps a source of tricks, such as a five-card (or longer) suit. The balancing double in fourth position should have the same high-card strength as the direct double. So if the auction proceeds (1NT)-pass- (pass) to you, double still shows a very good 14 HCP or better.

Now, what is advancer to do after the double? The auction goes:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	dbl	pass	?

It's important to feel comfortable at the table when this auction comes up. Why? You probably already know why. *It comes up a lot!*

Here is where the Mohan approach differs from Landy. Advancer pretends his partner (the doubler) opened the bidding with a strong notrump and *responds as he would to a INT overcall*. It's as simple as that — your systems are on! (This agreement also works very well versus the mini-notrump range of 10-12, as you'll see in the next chapter.)

Let's look at some example hands. The auction has been:

<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
1NT	dbl	pass	?

You are South and hold the following hands. What is your call in each case?

(1) ♠J97543	(2) ♠ J975	(3) ♠ 32	(4) ♠ AJ9
♥964	♥ 9643	♥ 432	♥ 96
♦Q9	♦ Q9432	♦ 8	♦ Q943
♣32	♣ —	♣ Q1087532	♣ KJ83

With (1), bid 2♥, a transfer to spades. If you decide to retain Two-Way Stayman, you can just bid 2♠, but it is usually better to play a transfer system over a strong notrump. The point to remember here is that you are responding to partner as if he had opened the bidding 1NT.

With (2), bid 2♣ (Stayman) and pass partner's response.

With (3), don't sit for a contract of 1NT doubled; you are too weak. Therefore, make a bid that allows your side to play in clubs. If you play a transfer system, bid 2♠. If you do not play transfers, bid 3♣ or Stayman followed by 3♣.

With (4), pass. Oh, and try not to salivate too much.

#### What Happens When the Opponents Run?

With regards to the last example, what do you think you should do if East runs to two hearts? Or what if East redoubles to announce he has a single-suited runout? Let's take each of those possibilities one at a time. Suppose the auction goes:

<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
1NT	dbl	2♥	?

You hold:

♠ A J 9   ♥ 9 6   ♦ Q 9 4 3   ♣ K J 8 3

As the advancer, South, you can handle a double in a few ways. One possibility is to make it card-showing. Here, you would double with that agreement, which says to partner, ‘I have a good hand over here and am interested in bidding or defending a low-level contract.’ Now, if West (or East) runs to another suit, either you or partner can double for penalties.

Another possibility is that advancer’s double is strictly penalty. The problem with doubling 2♥ with your hand is that you have only two trumps (hearts) and partner might play you for four. Your partner will pass and the opponents will play 2♥ doubled with a potential nine-card (maybe even ten-card) fit. They will probably still go down, but will it be enough to compensate for your game bonus? Not likely.

To handle this problem, let’s go back to partner’s double. As soon as partner doubles 1NT, we need to have an agreement whereby we are forced to bid to a certain level. Then we can make strategic passes to see what our partner has to say about the opponents’ runout bids. Many pairs play that after they double a weak notrump, their side cannot sell out to an undoubled contract below the level of 2♠. Does this sound familiar? It should. It’s from Chapter 9 ([see page 104](#)) and is also the recommended strategy for when you open 1NT and the opponents double you.

Don’t worry that the opponents may be using the same strategy as you — what matters is how well you bid *your* cards. Let’s review these so-called forcing passes. One of two things will happen after the auction goes:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	dbl	2♥	?

Either you and your partner will bid to a contract of at least 2♠ or your side will defend 2♥ doubled.

Let’s get back to the problem. While the easiest agreement is to play all doubles as penalties, it is important to give advancer a double to say, ‘I have a good hand over here (7+ points) and I have shortness in the suit they are running to.’ This is a takeout double. The strategy you should adopt is this: *the first double by either player in a forcing situation is for takeout.*

Here are your possible actions:

If you double 2♥ in our example, partner will either sit if he has length in hearts or he will pull the double if he has shortness in hearts. When either you or your partner has length in the opponent's runout suit, you will pass partner's card-showing takeout double.

A quick review:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	dbl	2♣	?
<b>pass</b>	<b>waiting to see if partner can double again</b>		
<b>dbl</b>	<b>takeout, shortness in clubs</b>		
<b>2♦</b>	<b>to play, weak</b>		
<b>2♥</b>	<b>to play, weak</b>		
<b>2♠</b>	<b>to play, weak</b>		

Another auction that comes up frequently starts like this:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	dbl	redbl	?

Your hand is again:

♠ A J 9   ♥ 9 6   ♦ Q 9 4 3   ♣ K J 8 3

Here, East's redouble is a conventional bid that says, 'Partner let's play at the two-level in a suit, because I am pretty sure we are going down in 1NT doubled.' (Many weak notrumpers out there play a rescue system that incorporates this type of redouble.) South is obligated to bid 2♣ and then North will either pass or bid his suit. What should you do as East with a good hand?

You should re-redouble. If you are playing with bidding boxes, place two blue cards on the green baize... I'm kidding of course — if only there were such a bid. In all seriousness, you should pass. If you bid directly over the redouble, you will be showing weakness. So pass for now and see if you can double the opponents later in a low-level contract. Since West is forced to take another call, you, as South, will have another opportunity to bid. Remember you have the agreement with your partner that you are forced to at least a contract of 2♠ — you can afford to be patient.

Let's look at a full deal and see how we can make the opponents pay for their weak notrump opening.

♠ 6 5 2		
♥ 8 7 3		
♦ 10 8 7 6 5		
♣ 4 2		
♠ Q 8 7 4		♠ A J 9
♥ A Q 10 5		♥ 9 6
♦ A		♦ Q 9 4 3
♣ A 9 7 5		♣ K J 8 3
	N W     E S	
♠ K 10 3		
♥ K J 4 2		
♦ K J 2		
♣ Q 10 6		

The full auction should proceed:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
dbl <sup>1</sup>	redbl <sup>2</sup>	pass <sup>3</sup>	1NT
pass <sup>5</sup>	2♦ <sup>6</sup>	pass <sup>7</sup>	2♣ <sup>4</sup>
dbl <sup>8</sup>	pass	pass <sup>9</sup>	pass

1. 15+ HCP, forces East-West to bid 2♠ or higher or else to double North-South in a contract, lower than 2♠.
2. 'Let's play in a suit; please bid 2♣ and I will either pass or bid my long suit.'
3. Awaiting developments, inferentially shows values (5+ HCP).
4. Artificial, a forced response to North's systemic redouble.
5. Length in clubs, so must pass and await partner's reopening double.
6. Natural.
7. Length in diamonds, pass and await partner's reopening double.
8. Takeout, shortness in diamonds.
9. Let's play here ('Thank you for the takeout double, partner!').

To say the least, 2♦ doubled is not a happy contract for North-South. East-West will be more than compensated for not playing in 3NT. Even if East-West are vulnerable and North-South are not, 800 will be a top board at matchpoints and will definitely win some IMPs if playing a team game.

## MOHAN OVERCALLS

Let's go on to the overcalls of 1NT so I can show you that Mohan isn't really all that horribly complicated. If you're feeling confused about the previous few pages, you are not alone. All bridge players at some point or another face the challenge of improving their system. The price we pay for that is burning some brain cells. The good news is that Mohan is straightforward from here on in.

Your possible overcalls over an opening 1NT:  
Let's look at each in turn.

## **2♣ shows both majors.**

Just as in Landy, a 2♣ *overcall shows both majors*. However, where Landy allowed responder a natural 2♦ response to say, 'Let's play here,' Mohan stipulates that a 2♦ response asks overcaller to bid his longer (or better) major. Typically, advancer will be 2-2, 3-3 or 4-4 in the majors and can stand either one. Sometimes, advancer will have three spot cards in one major and two top honors such as K-Q in the other. Again, advancer can bid 2♦ to get overcaller to bid his better or longer major. The auction will look like this:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	2♣ <sup>1</sup>	pass	2♦ <sup>2</sup>

1. Majors.
2. Pick your better major.

Typical hands advancer will have for a 2♦ bid are:

(1)	♠ 9 5 4 ♥ J 6 3 ♦ A Q 8 7 3 ♣ J 3	(2)	♠ K 5 ♥ Q 9 ♦ Q J 8 7 ♣ J 10 9 3 2	(3)	♠ K J ♥ 4 3 2 ♦ Q 10 9 3 ♣ Q 10 6 3
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### [To Answers](#)

With (1), advancer bids 2♦ to be sure of reaching an eight-card major-suit fit (in case overcaller has only nine cards in the majors).

With (2), advancer bids 2♦ to reach the best 5-2 fit.

With (3), your strength is in spades but your length is in hearts. You may feel more comfortable bidding 2♥ in an attempt to reach an eight-card fit;

however, a 5-2 spade fit could be the right spot, especially if partner has only a four-card heart suit. It's a guess, really.

### [To Questions](#)

The best feature about playing the 2♦ bid this way is that the overcaller may choose to enter the auction with a decent 5-4 hand in the majors. Yes, ideally overcaller will be 5-5 in the majors, but it's a good strategy if the overcaller has some leeway and can bid 2♣ on:

♠ A 10 8 7 6   ♥ K Q 10 8   ♦ K 7 2   ♣ 4

or

♠ A 10 8 7   ♥ K Q 10 8 6   ♦ 2   ♣ K 7 4

Say advancer is 3-3 in the majors. He can now bid 2♦ and the partnership will be pretty much guaranteed to get to their 5-3 fit. A 2♦ bid eliminates the guesswork and silliness of playing in a 4-3 fit when a 5-3 fit (or better) is available.

Advancer's other options over a 2♣ overcall are as follows. A bid of 2♥ or 2♠ is a clear preference for that suit and denies interest in game. 2NT is a natural and non-forcing bid. 3♣ and 3♦ are natural and to play (note that these two bids will show shortness in both majors, so they won't come up very often). Jumps to 3♥ and 3♠ by advancer are natural and invitational to game; advancer will usually have a fourth trump for this bid, as he must be prepared for meager four-card support from the overcaller.

Finally, we come a full circle to the follow-ups to advancer's 2♦ bid. After advancer hears his partner's better major, he can bid 3♦. This bid agrees on overcaller's major preference and creates a game force. The auction will have started like this:

<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
1NT	2♣1	pass	2♦2
pass	2♥3	pass	3♦4
pass	?		

1. Both majors.
2. No preference; pick your longer one.
3. Heart preference.
4. Artificial and game-forcing; agrees hearts.

Advancer's 3♦ bid at this point allows both players to know they are on their way to a heart game (or even slam if the hands are extremely distributional). After this, the overcaller can bid whatever he likes to describe his hand further. He can cuebid a suit to show a first-round control or he can simply bid game to show minimal values and no slam interest. Having this agreement will pay off on a deal such as this:

♠ 4 3		
♥ 3 2		
♦ 5 4 3 2		
♣ J 7 6 5 4		
♠ Q J 10 8 6		♠ A K 5
♥ A Q 9 8 7		♥ K J 10 6
♦ A		♦ J 9 8 7 6
♣ 8 2		♣ 9
	N W     E S	
♠ 9 7 2		
♥ 5 4		
♦ K Q 10		
♣ A K Q 9 3		

The auction might go:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♣ <sup>1</sup>	pass	2♦ <sup>2</sup>	1NT
2♥ <sup>3</sup>	pass	3♦ <sup>4</sup>	pass
4♦ <sup>5</sup>	pass	4NT <sup>6</sup>	pass
5♠ <sup>7</sup>	pass	6♥	all pass

1. Both majors.
2. Asking for preferred major.
3. Better or longer hearts.
4. Artificial, agrees hearts, invites a cuebid.
5. First-round control.
6. Roman Keycard Blackwood.
7. 2 keycards, with the trump queen.

Granted, this type of deal won't come up very often, but it is possible for East-West to be on for a slam their way, even after a 12-14 notrump opening. It is to your advantage to have the tools to investigate for it.

That was the Mohan 2♣ overcall. Now let's move on to the other overcalls you have at your disposal after a 1NT opening.

## ***2♦ is a transfer to hearts.***

Advancer accepts the transfer bid unless he is very long in diamonds. He should also be weak and short in hearts if he chooses to pass the 2♦ bid. Advancer is at liberty to jump to 3♥ after his partner's transfer bid; this jump is invitational to game. All other bids such as 2♠ and 3♣ are natural and to play. Again, advancer should be short in hearts to insist on a different strain. 2NT by advancer is invitational to game. The power of transfer overcalls is that after transferring to hearts, overcaller may bid again with good hands.

## ***2♥ is a transfer to spades.***

Again, advancer will accept the transfer most of the time.

## ***2♠ shows spades and a minor.***

This bid guarantees five or more spades and at least four cards in an undisclosed minor. Advancer may bid 2NT as an enquiry for overcaller's minor.

## ***2NT shows both minors.***

This bid usually promises 5-5 shape in the minors. With a decent hand containing an 11-14 count and 5431 distribution (5-4 in the minors), it's best to pass and await developments. For example, if the opponents settle at the two-level in your singleton suit, you might choose to back in with a takeout double.

Notice that there is no immediate bid to show 5+ hearts and 4+ of a minor. So how would you describe this type of hand to partner? You could show your hearts by transferring (bid 2♦) and then show your minor at the three-level. You will want to have a good hand for this sequence. The original Mohan convention had an immediate 2NT overcall bid to show a hand with five hearts and four or more of a minor. Of course, you still need a decent hand for this bid as you are forcing partner to make a decision at the three-level. However, a bid of 2NT in competition is already imprinted on all our brains — it screams 'Minors!', and it's best to keep 2NT to show both minors. Less brainwork that way.

Just for completeness, let's talk briefly about three-level overcalls.

## ***3 of a minor is natural.***

About 99% of the time overcaller will have a six-card suit. This is not a preemptive bid, so be sure to have your values.

## ***3 of a major is natural and preemptive.***

Treat this bid the same as you would if your RHO opened the bidding with one of a suit. Here are some typical hands in which you would overcall three of a major:

♠ K Q J 10 9 7 6	♠ J 2	♠ Q J 10 9 6 5 4 2
♥ J	♥ A Q 10 9 7 3 2	♥ —
♦ 10 8 3	♦ 10	♦ 9 7
♣ 9 7	♣ 5 3 2	♣ Q J 3

To repeat, your best tactic is to overcall the weak notrump and *have your bid*. So when you preempt, try not to have any strength outside your trump suit. If you do you might preempt your partner from making the right decision.

*Mohan over INT*

- When bidding against the weak notrump, your bids should be *constructive*. (When competing against a strong notrump, your bids tend to be *destructive*.)
- A double guarantees a better hand than the opening bidder (14+).
- If you double with 14 HCP, you should have an easy lead to make and/or a source of tricks.
- After a double of 1NT, passes by your side are forcing. Your side will do one of two things: 1) try to buy the contract as cheaply as possible (because *the opponents* have the balance of power); or 2) double the opponents in 1NT, 2♣, 2♦ or 2♥ (because *you* have the balance of power and a trump stack). If the opponents run to 2♠ or

higher you do not have to penalize them, and passes are no longer forcing.

- Balancing-seat doubles should be as strong as direct seat doubles (14 HCP).
- Advancer's double of responder's runout suit is a value-showing takeout double. It shows a singleton or doubleton in responder's runout suit and at least 7 HCP.
- Bidding immediately or in the balancing seat promises at least 10 HCP. However, if you are 6-5, by all means, come alive! (This means a very shapely 8-count is enough.)
- If you show both majors with a bid of 2♣, partner's 2♦ response asks you to bid your better or longer major. If partner follows up with 3♦, he is creating a game force, agreeing trumps and asking for more information.
- Overcalling 2♦ is a transfer to hearts.
- Overcalling 2♥ is a transfer to spades.
- Overcalling 2♠ shows spades and a minor; 2NT by advancer asks for the minor.
- Overcalling 3 of a minor shows a decent hand and a good six-card (or longer) suit.
- Overcalling 3 of a major is preemptive. You should not have an ace or king outside.

## FOURTH SEAT IN A LIVE AUCTION

Playing against a weak notrump, you will frequently find yourself with a good hand and both opponents bidding. The typical situation is where LHO opens 1NT and RHO bids something — perhaps Stayman, perhaps a transfer, perhaps a natural suit bid to play. RHO could be very weak, but also may not be. Again, you face a dilemma. Let's look at your options.

## *Competing over Stayman*

Let's say you are in fourth seat and the auction has proceeded:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	pass	2♣	?

Your LHO, in this case West, is showing 12-14 and your RHO (East) is asking about majors. If your opponents are using Two-Way Stayman as their response system to 1NT openings, then the 2♣ bid could be Crawling Stayman. This means that East might be planning to pass whatever West rebids. Then again, the 2♣ bid could be the start of a legitimate invitation to game. This is another headache for you, especially if you are dealt one of these hands:

(1)	♠ A K 4 ♥ K J 9 7 5 ♦ K J 3 ♣ 10 8	(2)	♠ K Q 10 9 8 3 ♥ A ♦ J 10 9 3 ♣ K 9	(3)	♠ — ♥ A Q 10 9 7 ♦ K J 8 6 3 ♣ K 7 4
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In a situation like this, if you are going to bid, you absolutely must have a good hand. It must be something you don't mind bidding on, even if you get doubled as a result. Think for a moment of the danger of entering this auction type: the opponents have exchanged some information already, partner is silent, and RHO especially knows a lot about the hand already. The bottom line is that you need to make your overcall on a decent hand.

With (1), pass. Although it could be right to bid 2♥, you rate to get punished. LHO has at least two hearts and RHO is asking about majors. In addition, you hold the worst possible overcall pattern with that 5332 distribution — the most balanced distribution an overcaller can have. If the opponents steal one from you, you can congratulate them on their system. However, if you stay out of the auction and find your partner holds a 1-count, you can pat yourself on the back.

With (2) you have enough to bid 2♠. You have 6-4 shape and a strong playing hand, especially with those great spade spots. Yes, you may still get doubled and go down in 2♠, but it's a calculated risk.

Finally we come to (3). If only you had a bid to show hearts and diamonds. That said, I would be surprised if any pair in the world had a convention to show this hand type in this sequence. Here, you can bid two hearts or you can pass and see what happens. The opponents probably have a spade fit, so a 2♥ bid by you will get your partner off to a good lead... or you will get doubled. If you do decide to bid, make sure you bid 2♥. Don't double.

Why shouldn't you double here? In this auction, a double of 2♣ (or of any bid by responder for that matter) should show a good hand and willingness to compete. You should have at least 14 HCP. The opponents may be stealing from you, as many pairs play Crawling and Garbage Stayman. You may even want to have a better hand than a good 14-count. In any case, you should play the double of Stayman (and transfer bids, as we'll see shortly) as value-showing. Follow the same principles as outlined previously in regard to the direct double of 1NT. If you are uncomfortable with this idea, you could choose to play all doubles of artificial bids as lead-directing.

## *Competing over Transfers*

It is possible that you won't encounter too many weak notrumpers out there who are playing a transfer system over their 1NT openings. Instead they will be playing what this book recommends — Two-Way Stayman. Occasionally, however, you will come up against a pair who plays transfers. In that case, the auction will proceed like this, for example:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	pass	2♥ <sup>1</sup>	?

1. Transfer to spades.

As South here, your double should be value showing. This is the same strategy as mentioned above when doubling a 2♣ Stayman bid. Again, follow the same principles and you should be okay. Typically, you will have a very good hand with 15+ HCP. Sometimes, however, you will be privileged to hold something like:

♠ A 4   ♥ K Q J 10 8 6 3   ♦ A 9   ♣ A 7

You could start your side's bidding with a double and then continue on to 4♥ if and when the opponents compete in spades. Or you could bid an immediate 3♥ or 4♥.

Thankfully, most pairs that play weak notrump will have reverted to a quaint old Goren-era system where, after their partner's 1NT opening, 2♥ and 2♠ are . . . wait for it . . . natural and to play! You should play the same way should you decide to give the weak notrump a whirl. With Two-Way Stayman, both these bids are natural. Here is the auction:

<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
1NT	pass	2♥	?

Here, 2♥ is to play. It can be amusing when it comes up at the table. Oftentimes, South looks up and around for an alert that never comes. ‘Natural?’ asks South. ‘Yep. Natural, and to play,’ replies West. So what do you think South’s double should mean in this sequence?

Too easy — it’s takeout, of course. It is as if the auction has gone 1♥-2♥ and now your double is obviously takeout. If you have a heart stack and are happy with a 2♥ contract, then you must pass. You need doubles in this sequence to show a good hand and willingness to compete. You might be stuck with something like:

♠ Q J 9 4   ♥ 10   ♦ A J 8 3   ♣ A K 8 4

or

♠ A K 9   ♥ 4   ♦ K Q 10 3   ♣ K J 9 4 3

The 2♥ response to 1NT can be made on a 0-count and six hearts, maybe even only five hearts, so it's imperative that you enter the auction when you have the appropriate hand type. The double of a natural two-level response to 1NT should be value-showing and indicate shortness in the bid suit.

Indeed, you should be fearless entering any auction when the response to 1NT is known to be 'to play'. Yes, you must have your values, but don't be afraid, even at the three-level. An example auction is:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	pass	3♣ <sup>1</sup>	?

1. Natural, to play.

You, as South, might hold any one of the following:

♠ A Q 9 2	♠ Q J 9 4	♠ A J 7 4
♥ K J 10 8	♥ A Q 5 4	♥ A 9 3
♦ A J 8 3	♦ K J 9 7 3	♦ A K 10 4 2
♣ J	♣ —	♣ 8

In all cases, you should double. On all these hands, you have a textbook takeout double of 3♣.

You might think of it like this: *double natural and 'to play' bids in the same way that you would double an opening preempt*. This means you have enough strength to force your partner to compete. You should be able to stand partner converting your takeout double to a penalty double.

## EVALUATION OF WEAK NOTRUMP DEFENSES

To sum up a few points from the previous pages, make sure your system for countering the opponents' weak notrump allows you to *double to show a better hand than the 1NT opener*. For this reason, don't play DONT, but do play Landy or Mohan or one of the many alternatives that allows you to retain a penalty double.

It's not known precisely how long the weak notrump has been around, but it's safe to say it's been around for a very long time. After all those years, you would think the top players would have come up with a universal defensive system to play against it. Well, they haven't. If you were to conduct a survey, you would discover that the consensus amongst good players is that Landy is highly effective and Mohan is even more so.

Mohan, although it requires some effort to learn, allows you to compete soundly. You can get to your fit most of the time and you will stay out of the auction when it's the opponents' hand. It's not perfect, but no system is — it's just the best of the lot.

Landy is a little old-fashioned. For example, take advancer's 2♦ bid (over 2♣), which is to play. It seems silly to ignore partner after he has stepped into the auction to show his two suits and then you turn around and say, 'Thanks, but let's play in diamonds.' You should give the diamond suit up in order to ask partner to focus on his majors. This is definitely one of the advantages of playing Mohan.

Other excellent features of Mohan are the immediate overcalls of 2♦ and 2♥ — bids that transfer partner to your real suit (showing hearts and spades respectively). You get the 1NT bidder on lead and you have the opportunity to bid again when you have extra values.

Landy, however, gets points for simplicity. With Landy, there is a lot less memory work involved. Alas, not too many club-level players have ever discussed what to do after their side has doubled the 1NT opening. I hope you will take the extra time to discuss this with your partner and land on your feet in the bidding. That is to say: defend when you should be defending and 'bid 'em up' when you should be declaring.

# CHAPTER 13

## DEFENDING THE 10-12 NOTRUMP

Every so often you'll come up against an adventurous pair — a pair who like to play the 10-12 notrump. Although defending against an opening notrump in this range is similar to defending against the 12-14 notrump, there are some subtle differences that are worth taking a look at.

### WHEN TO DOUBLE, WHEN TO OVERCALL

Just because the opponents are opening lighter doesn't mean that you should enter the auction whenever you have any excuse. In fact, and perhaps ironically, your bidding needs to be *even sounder* against a 10-12 notrump.

To double the opponents' 10-12 notrump, you should have almost the same hand strength that you require to double a 12-14 notrump — either a good 14, or a *very* good 13 with a strong lead. As you can see, the high-card strength is shaded by about only one point. The reason for this is twofold: not only do you want to avoid entering the auction when your opponents will be able to double you successfully, but you also want to be sure that partner has his bid. There's nothing worse than not knowing the general soundness of partner's overcalls. Imagine picking up a hand like

♠ K 9 5   ♥ A Q 5   ♦ Q 9 3 2   ♣ 4 3 2

and hearing the auction:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
			1NT <sup>1</sup>
2♠	pass	?	

1. 10-12 HCP.

If your partner is a carefree bidder in this situation, you may guess to pass 2♠, expecting him to make eight or nine tricks. This could be a great decision or unlucky for you when partner's hand is

♠ A Q J 10 8 2   ♥ K 4   ♦ K 8 6   ♣ 9 8

and you have ten easy tricks. You could call this an embarrassing plus 170.

Then again you could get red-faced in another way. If you bid 4♠, you might find that another horror story is about to unfold. The auction may proceed:

<b>PARTNER</b>	<b>RHO</b>	<b>YOU</b>	<b>LHO</b>
			1NT <sup>1</sup>
2♠	pass	4♠	pass
pass	dbl	all pass	

1. 10-12 HCP.

The full deal may look like this:

<table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>A Q 10 8 7 4</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>7 4 3</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>8 7 4</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>Q</td></tr> </table> <table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>3 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>K J 10 9</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>K J 5</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>K J 9 6</td></tr> </table>	♠	A Q 10 8 7 4	♥	7 4 3	♦	8 7 4	♣	Q	♠	3 2	♥	K J 10 9	♦	K J 5	♣	K J 9 6		<table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>J 6</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>8 6 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>A 10 6</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>A 10 8 7 5</td></tr> </table> <table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>K 9 5</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>A Q 5</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>Q 9 3 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>4 3 2</td></tr> </table>	♠	J 6	♥	8 6 2	♦	A 10 6	♣	A 10 8 7 5	♠	K 9 5	♥	A Q 5	♦	Q 9 3 2	♣	4 3 2
♠	A Q 10 8 7 4																																	
♥	7 4 3																																	
♦	8 7 4																																	
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♣	A 10 8 7 5																																	
♠	K 9 5																																	
♥	A Q 5																																	
♦	Q 9 3 2																																	
♣	4 3 2																																	

This time, bidding 4♠ leads to three down. Doubled. Ouch.

The point is that if you let their 10-12 opening provoke you into bidding on almost anything, your partnership will be doing a lot of guessing. Meanwhile, their side will know almost exactly how many points it has thanks to the limited opening notrump. This is not a good situation to be in. The moral of the story is: *make sure your overcalls are sound*.

Does this mean you require a take-it-to-the-bank opening bid every time? Not exactly; it's okay to overcall on a hand like

♠ A Q 10 8 4    ♥ A 9 7 5 3    ♦ 8 3    ♣ 2

even though it has only 10 HCP. Notice all the positive features: powerful 5-5 distribution; the points in the long suits; two aces. Generally speaking, a worthwhile rule to follow is this: *if you weren't going to open your hand at the one-level, you should lean towards passing the opponents' 10-12 notrump*. When holding a powerful two-suiter, however, you should lean towards taking action.

The same idea applies to doubling their notrump. You still need a sound 14 points to double. The only exception is if you have a very good 13 points and a strong lead. What is a strong lead? Something like K-Q-J-10-x or Q-J-10-9-x. Why is that you can double with as few as 13 HCP?

Well, as long as you have the strong lead, you will find that these hands often take as many (sometimes even more) tricks on defense than stronger hands without such a good lead.

By adopting a sound approach to defending the 10-12, you gain doubly: not only do you make it harder for your opponents to double you when your partner is broke (since you will be doubling less often and with better hands), but partner will continue to trust your doubles. This means much better auctions and a happier partnership. Put yourself in partner's shoes — don't you want to instill trust so that he feels confident?

Remember: just because their notrump opening is weak (or miniature) does not automatically mean they are stealing. Sometimes it is their hand to declare, and when it is, *the partner of the INT bidder already knows it*. He might be waiting to double you. Don't feel compelled to compete for the partscore. If it's their deal, stay out of trouble and wait until they pick the wrong time to open the weak notrump. Then you can penalize them.

Here are some example hands. On which of these hands would you double the opponent's 10-12 notrump opening?

PARTNER	RHO	YOU	LHO
1NT <sup>1</sup>		?	

#### 1. 10-12 HCP.

(1) ♠ K Q J 5	(2) ♠ K J 5	(3) ♠ K J 5	(4) ♠ K Q J 9 8
♥ A J 9	♥ A K 9 7	♥ A Q 9 7	♥ A 6 2
♦ K 10 9 5	♦ J 5 3 2	♦ K 5 3 2	♦ K 9 3
♣ 6 3	♣ Q 10	♣ Q 10	♣ 4 3

With (1), double. This hand is slightly above the minimum values needed to double their notrump opening. You have a nice 14-point hand with a promising opening lead and good spots. Compare this hand with the second hand, which has no lead and no spots.

With (2), pass. This hand does not qualify as a good 14. You have no good lead, a short club queen and not much in the way of spot cards.

Hand (3) doesn't look much better than the second hand, but here you have too much to pass. When holding 15 HCP of your own, you should certainly double a 10-12 notrump. If partner has 11 or 12 HCP, you will likely miss a good game by passing. Don't be surprised if this double backfires, though. That's one of the dangers of playing against a weak notrump.

With (4), you can double, even though this hand has only 13 points. It fulfills the requirements of a solid 13 with a strong lead. Notice that this hand has  $5\frac{1}{2}$  defensive tricks against notrump, whereas Hand (3), despite the extra points, has only about  $2\frac{1}{2}$ .

## UNFAVORABLE VULNERABILITY

When the opponents open a non-vulnerable 10-12 notrump and you are vulnerable, a unique situation develops. Often against a weak notrump you will be faced with a choice between doubling the opponents at the two-level (because they run) or bidding on toward a game of your own. At any other vulnerability, it is reasonably profitable to take the money against whatever shaky two-level contract the opponents stumble into. When you are vulnerable against non-vulnerable opponents, however, the value diminishes. You may achieve only plus 500 or plus 300 (for defeating the opponents two or three tricks) instead of plus 600 or plus 630 (for bidding and making your vulnerable game). Then there is the Murphy's Law factor — you know, whatever can go wrong, will. Sometimes your opening lead or defense will blow a trick. Sometimes the penalty for misdefending is more severe — you let two or even three tricks slip. Conceivably you could end up plus 100 instead of plus 600.

Let's say that your side has nine stone-cold tricks available in notrump. The opponents are currently in 1NT doubled (after opening a 10-12 notrump). Let's do the math: if your opponents take the four tricks they are entitled to, they will be down three for a net score of plus 500 to you.

However, had you bid 3NT and taken your nine top tricks, you would have scored plus 600. You can see that the arithmetic suggests that bidding 3NT will sometimes be more profitable than defending 1NT doubled.

Theoretically, this is the only situation where bidding 3NT instead of defending 1NT doubled is superior. In real life, however, we all know that defending is hard and that most of us blow a trick (or two) from time to time. So if you are certain that your side has enough values for 3NT, it is no crime to forego a penalty, since the margin for error on defense may be slim or non-existent. You can just bid 3NT when you are vulnerable and the opponents are not. I don't recommend that you try this tactic at other vulnerabilities; your partner may wonder what you had for breakfast.

It is true that sometimes your game contract will fail. This means that you could have chalked up plus 300 or plus 500 against the opponent's low-level contract, but instead you are writing minus 100 on your scorecard. For this reason, I don't recommend that you *never* double them. If you have the requisite penalty-oriented double hand, then go ahead and begin your side's bidding with a double.

Now let's hop over to the other side of the table. Let's say your partner has doubled the mini-notrump. If it is clear to you that your side is favored to defeat their contract to the tune of plus 800, then by all means go ahead and defend. However, when the situation seems very close and the vulnerability is unfavorable, you should lean toward bidding your own contract more often than you would at all the other vulnerabilities.

## MATCHPOINT CONSIDERATIONS

At IMPs, taking plus 500 when you have a potential plus 600 available in 3NT is no big deal. In fact, in the long run, you may actually come out ahead, since sometimes the 3NT contract will fail. When this happens, it is better to defend and take the sure plus 300 or plus 500. At least you will have a plus score instead of a minus score. At matchpoints, however, it's a different story. Playing matchpoints, getting plus 500 when the field is

scoring up an easy plus 600 or plus 630 is a complete disaster. Therefore, at matchpoints, you should tend not to defend their low-level contracts at unfavorable vulnerability.

When should you choose to defend? Here are three instances:

1. When the auction suggests that the field *will not* be bidding game. If you can glean from the auction that other pairs in your direction will not be bidding game, then go for the plus 300. This result will be superior to all partscore results.
2. When you are fairly certain game your way will not make. If you judge that your side has the values for game but that it may not make, then double the opponents — take the money.
3. When the opponents' contract is so bad that you expect plus 800 at least half the time. Surely you've experienced blood at the table. Well, when it's the opponents' blood at stake, pardon the pun, don't look to rescue them from their plight. Show no mercy and let the carnage begin.

## INFERENCES IN THE PLAY

Let's say you compete over the opponents' mini-notrump and you buy the contract. Since their high-card range is so well defined, you can often declare the hand double dummy. As the 10-12 opener shows up with more and more of his allotted points, you should know where to find a missing card. Sometimes you can take this as far as finessing for a stray jack or dropping a doubleton queen offside, because you know where it is.

You will find that playing against the 10-12 notrump isn't so cumbersome after all. Not only will you be declaring more often (since their range is weaker), but it's easier to pinpoint 10-12 points than it is 12-14. You can also

draw negative inferences, which can be equally valuable. If an opponent with a balanced distribution has failed to open his mini-notrump, then he has fewer than 10 HCP. The fact that he could have opened a 10-12 notrump and didn't gives you more information than the simple fact of his being a passed hand.

Let's take a look at a full deal and see how declarer should find a missing high card. You are South and hold:

♠ K J 10 8    ♥ 6 3 2    ♦ K 4 3    ♣ K 10 9

The auction goes:

<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
1NT <sup>1</sup>	dbl <sup>2</sup>	2♦ <sup>3</sup>	pass <sup>4</sup>
pass	dbl <sup>5</sup>	pass	3♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

1. 10-12 HCP.
2. Penalty-oriented.
3. To play.
4. Forcing pass.
5. Takeout of diamonds.

Partner has made a penalty-oriented double and your RHO has run. Your pass over 2♦ was forcing, just as in the defense to the 12-14 notrump that we discussed earlier. To review, you and your partner cannot defend against an undoubled contract of 2♣, 2♦ or 2♥. This means you will either double the opponents or you will bid on yourselves.

Partner's second double is takeout. (After the initial double of 1NT, either partner has a takeout double available to show shortness in the opponent's runout suit.) You have a pretty good hand, so you invite with 3♠ and partner raises to 4♠. Take away one of your kings and you would have bid only 2♠.

The final contract is 4♠ and you are the declarer. The opening lead is the heart king. Here is what you see:

♠ Q 9 5 4
♥ A 9 5 4
♦ A 5
♣ A J 7
♠ K J 10 8
♥ 6 3 2
♦ K 4 3
♣ K 10 9

You win with the ♥A and lead a spade to the ♠K, which West takes with the ace. West cashes the ♥Q and the ♥J, East discarding on this trick. West then switches to a trump. You win in hand as East follows. You cash two high diamonds, ending in hand. West follows with a low diamond and then the queen. You ruff your losing diamond in dummy and draw the last trump. Time to play the clubs; where is the queen?

Easy. Your LHO, who showed 10-12 points in the bidding, has already shown up with the ♠A, ♥K-Q-J and the ♦Q. That's 12 points, the most he is supposed to have. Play East for the ♣Q. If you want to be fancy, you can draw trumps and claim, stating you will finesse clubs through East. Show off!

The full deal:

<span style="font-size: 1.5em;">♠</span> Q 9 5 4 <span style="color: red;">♥</span> A 9 5 4 <span style="color: red;">♦</span> A 5 <span style="color: black;">♣</span> A J 7  <span style="color: black;">♠</span> A 3 2 <span style="color: red;">♥</span> K Q J 10 <span style="color: red;">♦</span> Q 9 <span style="color: black;">♣</span> 8 6 4 2	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100%; height: 100%;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.5em;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.5em;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.5em;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.5em;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<span style="color: black;">♠</span> 7 6 <span style="color: red;">♥</span> 8 7 <span style="color: red;">♦</span> J 10 8 7 6 2 <span style="color: black;">♣</span> Q 5 3  <span style="color: black;">♠</span> K J 10 8 <span style="color: red;">♥</span> 6 3 2 <span style="color: red;">♦</span> K 4 3 <span style="color: black;">♣</span> K 10 9
	N										
W		E									
	S										

To sum up: when the opponents start with a 10-12 notrump, it makes the bidding more difficult for you and your partner. Don't make things harder for yourselves by being goaded into super-light overcalls or sub-par penalty doubles. Keep your bidding sound and remember to take advantage of the extra information you've gained when you are declaring the hand. In the long run, this is your best counterattack to the 10-12 notrump.

# CHAPTER 14

## WHY PLAY THE WEAK NOTRUMP?

Now that you have read though most of this book, you can hopefully see that there are numerous reasons for adding the weak notrump to your bidding arsenal. Edgar Kaplan summed up the philosophy behind the weak notrump as: ‘high, preemptive bidding for weaker hands; keep-it-low, precise bidding for stronger hands.’

Another well-known and understood implication of the weak notrump was best described by the internationally renowned bridge theoretician and coach, Eric Kokish. He is on record as saying, ‘Weak notrumps bury *your* fit but they also bury *their* fit.’ So while sometimes you are at a disadvantage for not discovering your fit, other times you gain an advantage by preventing the opponents from finding their fit (not to mention their level.) The weak notrump opening will occasionally buy the contract when the opponents are cold for game — go back to [page 10](#) and check out the highway robbery committed by Silver and Gitelman.

These next few pages will promote in detail some of the main advantages of playing the weak notrump.

### FREQUENCY

Look at any convention card. Just below your names and general system style you will see your notrump range and your corresponding system of responses. Such importance is given to the 1NT opening! It seems to be the number one convention on the card. There’s no question that we all (including convention card designers, even if only subconsciously) love an opening 1NT bid. Therefore, if you can play a range that allows you to

open 1NT as often as possible, then shouldn't you work that into your system?

Would you believe that playing the weak notrump allows you to open the bidding 1NT *twice as often* as you would if you played the strong notrump? Well, you can look it up for yourself, but here it is: you will be dealt a hand with 12-14 HCP just over 20% of the time. Meanwhile, the percentage of hands falling into the 15-17 range is slightly more than 10%. This means that weak notrumpers will, on average, open the bidding with 1NT approximately twice as often as the strong notrump players.

Regarding that figure of 20%... it doesn't mean that you will open the bidding 1NT one-fifth of the time, since we must take into account unbalanced hands. Rather, the probability table illustrates how you will get to open the bidding 1NT significantly more often compared with playing a strong notrump. For most of us, opening 1NT starts a very smooth and well-discussed auction. While it may be true that you will open all hands with a good 12+ HCP no matter what notrump range you are playing, there is a degree of comfort in being able to open 1NT and play all your pet conventions over it. Opening 1NT sets us at ease; we've memorized a great deal of system over it. Doesn't it make sense to try to open 1NT as often as possible?

## AGGRESSIVE GAME BIDDING

While on the topic of probabilities and statistics, let's look at two typical notrump contracts: one with 12 HCP opposite 12 HCP and the other with 16 HCP opposite 8 HCP. In both cases, as declarer, you have a combined point count of 24 HCP. Which of those two (on average) allows you to take more tricks?

Would you believe 12 opposite 12? This is why the best strategy with 12 HCP is simply to bid game rather than inviting when partner opens 1NT. The play of the hand should not be challenging for lack of entries, since each hand has its fair share. Another way to look at it: 24 HCP

opposite a yarborough (0 HCP) is often hopeless, because declarer is continually playing out of the strong hand. However, when the points are distributed evenly (such as 12-12 or 13-11), declarer can usually create an extra trick or two in the play of the hand — entries are not an issue.

What does all of this have to do with the weak notrump? Put yourself in the defenders' shoes. There is nothing pleasant about having to lead and defend against a 1NT-3NT auction. If no suits are bid, the defenders have no clues — well, *fewer* clues, that's for sure. It won't take long for you to realize that 1NT-3NT will be a favorite auction of yours. The opening leader will face more headaches. Should he lead passively or aggressively? The more headaches your opponents have, the more often they will go wrong. The more often they go wrong, the more often you will feel comfortable bidding tight game contracts.

## PREEMPTIVE POWER

Many experts will tell you that it is for preemptive reasons alone that they love to play the weak notrump. Of course, with one bid, you quickly describe your hand to your partner. Partner knows your hand within 3 HCP — you have 12, 13 or 14. Also, partner knows the general nature of your hand, usually within two cards of each suit — you have (typically) two to four spades, two to four hearts, two to four diamonds and two to four clubs. Yes, you may have a five-card suit, but if you do, then partner knows you hold two or three cards (occasionally four, but only if your shape is 5-4-2-2) in each of the other three suits. So much information is delivered with one bid!

The above is all true no matter what your notrump range; so what, precisely, is the advantage here? The advantage is that the opponents are forced to enter the auction at the two-level. Experience suggests that if we give the opponents enough rope, eventually they will hang themselves. When you open a weak notrump, it is theoretically possible that each of your

opponents holds a better hand than you do and here you have preempted them.

The preemptive power of the weak notrump cannot be emphasized enough: it gets the hand off your chest with one bid and, with luck, gives the opponents a problem. Here is a classic example. South opens the bidding 1NT (12-14) and West holds:

♠ Q 4    ♥ A Q J 9 7    ♦ J 10 8 5    ♣ 10 7

Should West compete? Even if East-West are playing some kind of convention that allows them to show two-suiters over the opponent's notrump, West must enter the auction at the two-level in order to show his hearts. For example, West could bid a Cappelletti 2♥ to show hearts and an unspecified minor or he could bid a DONT 2♦ to show diamonds and a major. (See Chapter 12 for the best conventions to play.)

Obviously, if South opens the bidding with one of a minor, West will enter the auction freely with a one-heart overcall. Does West have an easy bid over 1NT? It could be dangerous. Jot down a few minus 500s on your scorecard, perhaps the odd minus 800, and you will soon understand the perils of bidding here. The preemptive power of opening with a weak notrump provides you and your partner with more of what you like — uncontested auctions.

You say that you would always enter the auction over a weak notrump with the example hand? Okay, then make the hand a tad weaker; take away the queen of spades. Now would you enter the auction over a weak 1NT opening? It doesn't really matter what example hands are provided; the point is that over your weak notrump openings, your opponents will eventually have more difficult decisions to make. Here's a full deal. This was Board 3 from the 19th Worldwide Bridge Contest.

*Dealer: South*

*E-W vul.*

<p>♠ 9 5 ♥ 9 8 7 2 ♦ K 10 8 4 2 ♣ A 4</p> <p>♠ 10 8 3 ♥ A Q 10 3 ♦ J 6 5 ♣ 8 5 2</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ A K 6 4 2 ♥ J 4 ♦ Q 9 3 ♣ K 7 3</p> <p>♠ Q J 7 ♥ K 6 5 ♦ A 7 ♣ Q J 10 9 6</p>
	N										
W		E									
	S										

This deal was played all around the world on the evening of June 3, 2005. Commentator Eric Kokish wrote in the official hand record booklet that South, if playing a weak notrump, will open the bidding 1NT. Note that if East decides to pass out 1NT, hoping to score some spade tricks, South will make his contract on the normal lead of a fourth-best heart from West. In order to do well on this board, East must bid 2♠. In order to do *very* well on this board, East must double 1NT. A double in the balancing seat shows a decent hand, usually 12+ HCP. West must leave the double in and then lead a spade or a diamond. While a heart lead clearly gives declarer his seventh trick, it gets very interesting on a club lead. Kokish points out that declarer will usually succeed against, say, the lead of the ♣8. However, East can counter by shifting to a low diamond after winning his king of clubs. How tough is that?

There are myriad outcomes possible with this deal but one thing is for certain: if North-South are playing a strong notrump system, East will have an easier time entering the auction at the one-level. Playing the strong notrump, South will open 1♣, North will respond 1♦ or 1♥ and East will make a no-brainer 1♠ bid. This deal appears to be a system triumph for the weak notrump, as it puts the opponents in a guessing position.

Often, your 1NT opening and partner's response is just enough to keep both opponents out of the bidding. Let's look at another full deal.

*Dealer: South*

*Both vul.*

<table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>K 10 8 6 4</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>7 5</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>5 4 3</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>7 6 5</td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td>♠</td><td>J 9</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>A 9 8 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>A J 10 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>J 10 4</td></tr> </table>	♠	K 10 8 6 4	♥	7 5	♦	5 4 3	♣	7 6 5			♠	J 9	♥	A 9 8 2	♦	A J 10 2	♣	J 10 4		<table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>7 5 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>K J 10 6 3</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>Q 9 8</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>A Q</td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td>♠</td><td>A Q 3</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>Q 4</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>K 7 6</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>K 9 8 3 2</td></tr> </table>	♠	7 5 2	♥	K J 10 6 3	♦	Q 9 8	♣	A Q			♠	A Q 3	♥	Q 4	♦	K 7 6	♣	K 9 8 3 2
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♣	K 9 8 3 2																																					

**WEST**

pass

**NORTH**

2♠

**EAST**

all pass

**SOUTH**

1NT

South opens with a weak notrump and West passes. For obvious reasons, he doesn't feel comfortable entering the auction at the two-level. North bids two spades to play and East is under pressure. With no assurance of a heart fit opposite, entering the auction at the three-level is just too risky, so he makes a disciplined pass. Suddenly the auction is over and North-South score up a good result, even for going down two. How is going down two a good result for North-South? East-West can make a game in hearts if the diamond king is onside and they can pick up the heart queen (both odds-on given the auction).

Notice that nobody at the table made a bad bid. Each of East and West's passes are acceptable and often the percentage play. For example, imagine sitting in the West seat and considering some action over South's 1NT. While an aggressive takeout double might work or even a bid to show diamonds and hearts, West cannot help but think, 'What if the bulk of the missing HCP are

directly on my left?’ West must pass. Taking a bid might see him taken out on the proverbial stretcher.

East, too, must pass. East knows that North has anywhere from 0 to 10 HCP to go along with South’s 12-14. If North has 0 points, then East wants to bid. What if North holds more than his fair share of HCP (9-10 say) and South holds his maximum of 14? Then East will get his side into trouble, especially if he doesn’t buy a good fit from partner. In effect, what is East’s best long-term stratagem? He should pass, defend 2♠ and take all the tricks coming his side’s way. (Notice, by the way, that bidding 2♠ to play works better for North-South than transfers; East may be able to get into the auction by doubling a 2♥ transfer.)

By adopting a weak notrump structure into your system, you can preempt the opponents out of their fit — without making a daring bid yourself. You are simply following your system. The opponents won’t know whether or not to compete for fear of overbidding and going for a number.

Does preemptive power always work out for the best? No, sometimes the opponents will compete and get to their best spot. Sometimes they will compete, but you will brush aside their interference and get to your best spot. Sometimes you will ‘bare your fangs’ (as Edgar Kaplan and Alfred Sheinwold wrote in their book, *The Kaplan-Sheinwold System of Winning Bridge*) and collect a big number, because the opponents will enter the auction when they should not. It’s a maxim worth repeating: *the more often you give your opponents tough bidding decisions, the more often you will score good results.*

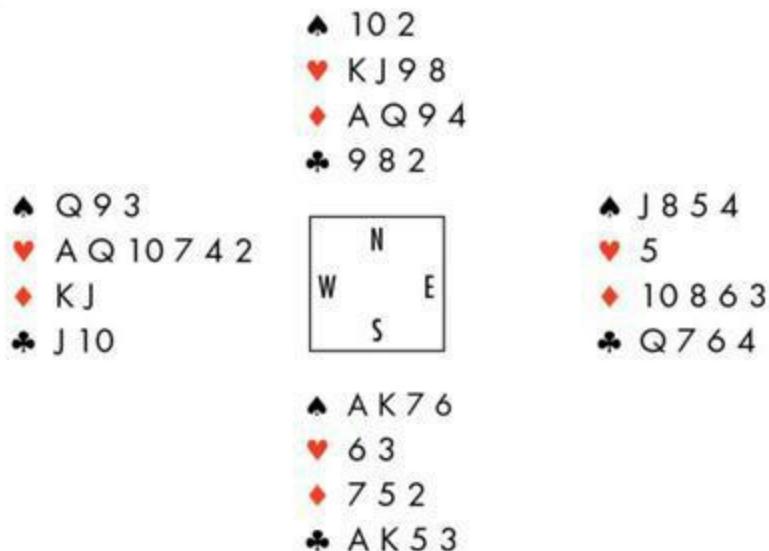
## BECOMING A DIFFICULT OPPONENT

The pesky weak 1NT opening seems to automatically qualify you as a difficult opponent. Good results don’t come your way just in the form of keeping the opponents out of the auction; occasionally, your 1NT opening is

enough to propel the opponents into a disastrous result. Put yourself in the West chair on this deal and see if you can feel his pain.

*Dealer: North*

*Neither vul.*



<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
pass	pass	all pass	1NT
2 $\heartsuit$	dbl		

After South's third seat 1NT opening, West ventured a reasonable 2 $\heartsuit$  overcall. On a good day his partner would give him stuff to work with and 2 $\heartsuit$  would be a decent contract. On this particular day, bidding 2 $\heartsuit$  was like stumbling into a wasp's nest. North doubled and North-South got all their tricks for a three-trick set. West chalked up a stinging minus 500.

Even at a tournament level, many opponents seem to feel they have to get in on almost anything over a weak notrump. After one such auction a few years ago, a famous world champion was heard to chastise a student partner: 'That's why I like playing a weak notrump myself — because people like you double it with hands like that!' If you have confidence in your defensive game, you will find many luscious numbers ending in double-zero landing in your lap.

# REMOVING THE TOUGH REBIDS

Anyone who has played the popular modern 2/1 Game Forcing system will know that it makes some auctions easier compared to Standard, but that there are others that become more difficult. Many of these involve a rebid problem for opener after a two-over-one response when he holds a minimum balanced hand, especially if reverses are played to show extra values. However, most of the problem hands cease to be an issue when you add a weak notrump opening to a 2/1 approach. Once all the minimum balanced hands are removed from the equation, what's left is much easier to handle.

## REBID STRUCTURE AND COMPETITIVE BIDDING

Over time, you will begin to absorb and appreciate the rebid structure. As you saw in earlier chapters, when your partner opens the bidding with one of a minor, you know immediately that he holds either:

1. **a strong balanced hand containing 15-19 HCP, or**
2. **an unbalanced hand with 11+ HCP.**

If opener holds the strong balanced hand, his notrump rebid will be either 1NT, showing 15-17 points, or a jump to 2NT, which shows 18-19 points. If the opening bidder rebids his minor or if he rebids another suit systematically, he is unbalanced. The opening bidder will have 11+ HCP, but his hand will contain a void, a singleton or multiple doubletons.

Suppose you open one of a minor and your partner responds with one of a major. If you rebid two of partner's major, it has the same meaning as if you were playing a strong notrump. That is, you have a minimum-strength hand and four-card support (or three by partnership agreement). This structure

differs from that of the original Kaplan-Sheinwold structure, but it is simple to use and easy to remember. Additionally, as a modern tactic, you are free to open hands such as:

♠ 9 7 4   ♥ K Q 10 5   ♦ A Q 10 8 4   ♣ 9

You should have no qualms opening one diamond since you can raise partner's 1♥ response to two; alternatively, if partner responds 1♠ or 2♣, you plan to rebid diamonds.

Now let's see how the structure works in competition. You open 1♦ with the above hand and partner responds 1♥; so far so good. East butts in with 2♣ and you have an easy 2♥ call. The auction has been:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	1♥	2♣	1♦
			2♥

What does all this have to do with why you should play the weak notrump? The advantage is that your partner in the above sequence knows from the get-go that you are likely to be unbalanced; you also are guaranteeing a real diamond suit. If you are balanced and minimum, you would not have opened with 1♦. In a pair playing strong notrump, responder would not have this information. As the auction progresses, this information often becomes relevant for making a close decision. For example, if the opponents bid to 3♣ or 4♣, partner should be able to make the right decision as to whether to bid on, pass or double.

## LIGHTER RESPONSES

Sometimes you can make a good logical bid or play depending on what your partner *does not do*. This is an important point to digest here. Playing the weak notrump allows you to make certain inferences. You have seen one such inference when your partner opens with one of a suit. He will either be

minimum and unbalanced or (if balanced) he will have more high card points — at least 15. This knowledge allows you to respond to partner's opening bid with slightly less values than if you had not been playing a weak notrump.

Let's say you pick up the following hand:

♠ A 9 7 4    ♥ 5    ♦ 10 9 6 3    ♣ 8 7 5 4

You hear partner open the bidding with 1♦. You can now bid one spade without a care in the world. (Change the spades so that you hold K-x-x-x and you can still muster up a response.) Forget the fact you do not have the requisite 6 HCP to respond to partner's opening; your system will ensure that you stay out of trouble. Ask yourself, 'What's the worst that can happen?'

Suppose partner rebids 1NT, showing 15-17 HCP. You will try to sign off in two diamonds. However, if the opponents compete for the partscore, you are prepared to bid to three diamonds, knowing about the (minimum) eight-card diamond fit. Your partner cannot hold a three-card diamond suit. If partner held only three diamonds in a balanced 15-17 hand, then he would be 4-4 in the majors, and if he had four spades, he would have supported you.

What if partner rebids two diamonds after your 1♠ call? Then you can freely compete to the three-level if you have to. You know partner holds at least five diamonds and often six, giving your side at least a nine-card diamond fit. Not only that, but since partner did not open a weak 1NT, you know he does not hold a balanced minimum hand. Ergo, if opener has minimum strength, his distribution is unbalanced. If he is balanced, he has a strong notrump rebid (15-19 HCP). Therefore, if partner makes a jump rebid to 2NT, showing 18-19 HCP, you will pass or sign off in three diamonds. One final way of looking at it: when partner opens one of a minor and you have four-card support for that minor, you can become an aggressive bidder without worrying about being punished.

## BALANCED OR UNBALANCED? FIND OUT FAST.

Over the years, some improvements have been made to Kaplan and Sheinwold's original system. (Even they made adjustments from time to time.) The original weak notrump philosophy had the opener rebidding four-card suits up the line in order to introduce his major (s) cheaply. Responder, however, was still temporarily in the dark regarding the nature of opener's hand — was it balanced or unbalanced?

Today's bidding has opener's rebid immediately describe the nature of his hand. A notrump rebid shows a balanced hand and a suit rebid promises an unbalanced hand — usually meaning a hand with a singleton or void somewhere. Yes, this means opener might bypass a four-card major (or even two four-card majors) to show his balanced hand. The following auctions illustrate South's unbalanced hands:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	1♥	pass	1♣ <sup>1</sup>

1. Unbalanced, shortness in either hearts or diamonds.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	1♥	pass	1♦ <sup>1</sup>

1. Unbalanced, shortness in either hearts or clubs.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	1♦	pass	1♥ <sup>1</sup>

1. Unbalanced, shortness in either diamonds or spades.

Responder does not know where the singleton or void is immediately, but further bidding will be most revealing. For example, look at this next auction — opener's bids are all natural, so North knows South is short in hearts.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♣
pass	1♦	pass	1♠1
pass	2♥2	pass	3♦3

1. Unbalanced, shortness in either diamonds or hearts.
2. Fourth suit forcing to game.
3. Natural, delayed support; shortness in hearts becomes known.

An example of how much you will go out of your way to show a balanced hand can be seen with this hand type:

♠ K 9 7 4   ♥ A Q 7 4   ♦ J 3   ♣ A Q 9

You will begin with 1♣ and then rebid 1NT over responder's 1♦ call. If responder wants to find out more about your hand, he can use a Checkback convention — New Minor Forcing or Two-Way Stayman (see Chapter 2).

This approach works especially well when partner is an unpassed hand. You get the general nature of your hand off your chest and make life difficult for your opponents. When you make bidding notrump to show a balanced hand your priority, you can get a defender to make an opening lead right into your (surprise!) four-card major.

When partner is a passed hand, however, you may choose to bid your four-card suits up the line, since a one-level contract might be the last making spot for your side. Plus, if you are playing IMPs, it may be imperative that you find your best fit as quickly as possible. Playing matchpoints, it isn't as crucial, because you score higher in a notrump contract.

A whole other book could be written on the topic 'Bidding with Unbalanced Hands'. Suffice to say that there is a lot of power in knowing

when your partner holds an unbalanced hand. For example, subsequent bidding will quickly pinpoint partner's shortness, allowing you to reach good games and slams. Plus, if you end up on defense, you might know to give your partner ruffs and which suits to play on. The list goes on.

A corollary of this structure is that 2-2-4-5 hand patterns with 12-14 HCP may be opened 1NT, especially when the five-card suit is lower ranking than the four-card suit. For example, open 1NT with:

♠ K 3    ♥ Q 2    ♦ J 10 5 3    ♣ A Q J 9 7

If your minors are switched, however, you may want to open one diamond and rebid two clubs.

## THE FEAR FACTOR: FORM OF SCORING AND VULNERABILITY

Certainly, the move from a 15-17 notrump range to a 12-14 range is not without its bumps on the road. While it may produce some surprisingly good results, it also comes with the odd undesirable result. It would be hard for any bridge player to accept a steady string of telephone numbers scored up against them. The most common situation in which the weak notrump opener is full of trepidation is when he is dealer in first seat at unfavorable vulnerability.

This fear is justified, especially when you are the dealer and looking at a motley collection such as:

♠ K J 3    ♥ Q J 4    ♦ K Q 8 7    ♣ 9 7 5

or

♠ J 10 7 3    ♥ A 9 7 6    ♦ Q J    ♣ K J 2

We have two balanced hands containing 12 HCP and the best word I can come up with to describe them is garbage (other, less polite terms come to mind, too). There is one simple solution to the problem and that is to pass. You do not have to open every ugly 12-count that comes your way, especially if the vulnerability dictates caution.

Playing matchpoints at favorable vulnerability, you are better placed if you enter the auction as soon as possible, even with a shoddy 12-count. At unfavorable vulnerability, however, you might choose to use your judgment to pass the absolute bare-bones minimums and await developments. For example, with the two example hands, there is nothing wrong with passing as dealer. If partner can then open one of a major in third seat, you have a clear-cut Drury bid. If you and your partner do not play Drury, you will have to catch up some other way.

Once you and your partner have decided to adopt the weak notrump structure, you can decide together how good your hand must be to open it. There are some very good 11-counts that should be opened 1NT. Typically, those hands can be described as ‘meaty’. They may have a chunky five-card suit and thus provide a source of tricks. They will definitely have a good number of tens and nines, those critical foot soldiers in any notrump contract. Here are some example hands on which you should consider opening 1NT — at any form of scoring, in any seat and at any vulnerability:

♠ A 6   ♥ J 10 8   ♦ K Q J 10 9   ♣ 10 9 8  
♠ Q J 10 9   ♥ 9 8   ♦ K J 10   ♣ A 10 9 7  
♠ 10 3   ♥ K Q J 10 8   ♦ A J 10   ♣ 10 9 7

Notice that each of these hands contains a combination of at least five tens and nines. A five-card suit is an asset, too. You and your partner can decide what the absolute minimum bid should look like — and that will be good enough, no matter what anyone else tells you. As a starting point though, be aggressive when non-vulnerable; be practical when vulnerable.

While this strategy is true for both matchpoints and IMPs, you may want to be more cautious at IMPs when sitting in third seat at unfavorable

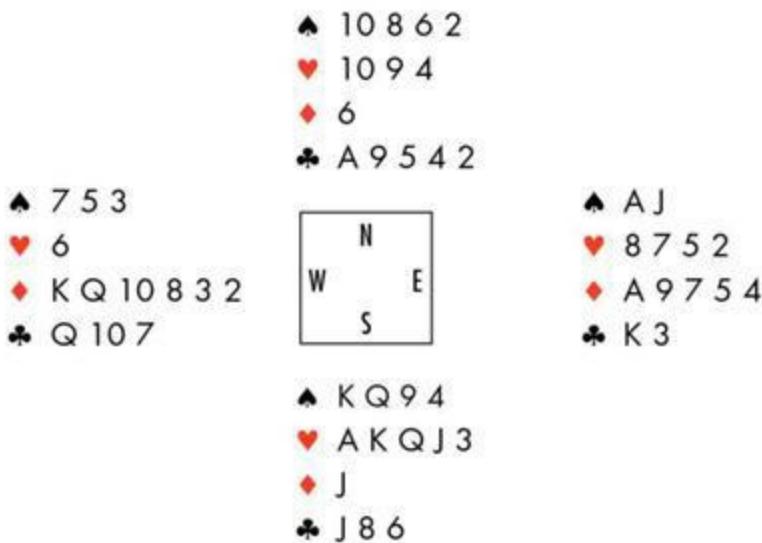
vulnerability. This uncomfortable situation is no doubt what caused some weak notrumpers to play the three-quarters weak notrump described in Chapter 1. They would play strong notrump in third seat vulnerable. The reasoning is that you are most at risk of being penalized in this situation — partner is a passed hand, while your left-hand opponent is not. Whatever you decide to do, you should be very careful at IMPs when in third seat vulnerable. Have your full values.

## EXAMPLE DEALS

I'm going to end this book with some real-life deals involving the weak notrump. This first one involved two world famous players in the Blue Ribbon Pairs.

*Dealer: East*

*Neither vul.*



WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
3♦ pass	pass 4♥	1NT <sup>1</sup> pass	dbl <sup>2</sup> 3♥
		all pass	

1. 12-14 HCP.

2. Penalty.

East was Gaylor Kasle and West was Zia. Notice the effect of Zia's 3♦ bid. Thanks to his six-card diamond suit, he could put further pressure on North-South by jumping to the three-level after his partner's 1NT bid was doubled for penalty. South did the best she could by competing to three hearts and North was pretty well forced to continue to game. Really, if sitting in the North seat, how could you ever pass 3♥?

This deal exemplifies what was referred to as a 'momentum effect' — the enormous pressure a weak notrump range can put on the opponents. By arriving quickly at your best spot, you often force the opponents to take an extra call that takes them past their last making contract. Such is the case on this deal. The defense scored two clubs, a spade and a diamond for a nice plus score. There was just enough bidding by East-West to push the opponents one level too high.

This next deal was played at a Sectional tournament. Yes, it will seem too good to be true but if this isn't the perfect advertisement for the weak notrump, I don't know what is.

*Dealer: North*

N-S vul.

<table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>K 10 4</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>K 7 6</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>K 6 5</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>Q J 10 8</td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td>♠</td><td>Q J 9 6</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>10 4</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>8 7 4 3</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>6 4 3</td></tr> </table>	♠	K 10 4	♥	K 7 6	♦	K 6 5	♣	Q J 10 8			♠	Q J 9 6	♥	10 4	♦	8 7 4 3	♣	6 4 3	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>			N		W			E			S		<table border="0"> <tr><td>♠</td><td>A 7 3 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>A Q J 8 5</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>—</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>A K 5 2</td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td>♠</td><td>8 5</td></tr> <tr><td>♥</td><td>9 3 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♦</td><td>A Q J 10 9 2</td></tr> <tr><td>♣</td><td>9 7</td></tr> </table>	♠	A 7 3 2	♥	A Q J 8 5	♦	—	♣	A K 5 2			♠	8 5	♥	9 3 2	♦	A Q J 10 9 2	♣	9 7
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		SOUTH all pass																																																

My partner, North opened 1NT (12-14) and East doubled to show his good hand. Not playing anything fancy, I passed and so did everyone else (yes, West should probably bid, but one can sympathize with his reluctance to do so).

*Deep Finesse*, the software that instantly tells you what contracts can be made with perfect play and defense, tells you that North can always make seven tricks in a notrump contract. Interestingly, South cannot as long as West leads the ♥10. At this table, East was on lead and found he had no good continuation after the club king held the first trick. Anything East did presented my partner with his seventh trick. Needless to say, plus 180 was worth all the matchpoints!

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## THE WEAK NOTRUMP

Did you know that the weak notrump works extremely well with many natural systems, especially the popular modern 2/1 style? If you want to play it, this book will show you how it affects the rest of your system. If you have had poor results playing against it, you can find out what the best methods are for countering it. Among the topics covered here are:

- The best bidding structure after your side opens a weak notrump
- What to do when the opponents double you
- What to do when the opponents overcall
- How the rest of your system changes
- 10-12 notrump openings — playing them and playing against them
- The advantages of playing a weak notrump  
*and many more*



**ANDY STARK** is an expert bridge player, writer and teacher, and contributes to various bridge magazines. He currently lives in Toronto and this is his third book.



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