

Keeping Up With Conventions

Overcalls - Part II

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This series of articles looks at how to fill out the standard convention card. Previous articles can be found by visiting the Better Bridge News section at www.AudreyGrant.com.

In last month's article we started to look at the sections on the convention card dealing with partnership agreements on overcalls. Let's continue the discussion.

The Direct Cuebid

The opponent on your right opens 1♣ and you have this hand. What call do you make? One thing you shouldn't do is think for a long time and pass. You also shouldn't ask any questions or pick up the opponent's convention card to look at the area under MINOR OPENING to see how many clubs are promised by a 1♣ bid. Such actions are frowned upon because everyone at the table will be aware that you have a fistful of clubs, whether you bid or pass.

In today's game, you should be aware that a 1♣ opening can occasionally be made on a three-card suit. However, it won't be fewer than three clubs unless the opponent on your left alerts the call. So, there's no need to inquire.

That doesn't solve the dilemma of what to do with this hand. You might still want to overcall 2♣. Bidding the same suit as your right-hand opponent is called a *direct cuebid* and is covered in this section:

DIRECT CUEBID			
OVER:	Minor	Major	Artif. Bid
Natural	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strong T/O	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Michaels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If your partnership agreement is that you could overcall 2♣ with this hand to show clubs ... and similarly bid 2♦ over 1♦ to show diamonds ... you would check the box beside "Natural" in the column under "Minor." If you would also bid 2♥ over an opponent's 1♥ opening to show hearts, you would check the box beside "Natural" in the column under "Major."

It's unusual to want to play in the same suit as the opponent. After all, a 1♥ opening usually shows a five-card or longer suit. Even a minor suit opening shows a three-card suit *or longer*. As a result, the checked boxes for this approach are both marked in red. This means you must alert if your partner makes such a call and, likewise, your partner must alert if you make such a call ... to warn the opponents. (This is a recent change to the regulations. Cuebids are not usually alertable. This is an exception.)

If most players don't treat an direct cuebid of the opponent's suit as a natural bid, what would they do with this hand? Pass. You don't mind if the opponents want to play in your long suit. If the opponents start bidding other suits, you can overcall in clubs later and this would then be interpreted as a natural bid. (Some partnerships would use an immediate jump to 3♣ to show clubs, but that isn't a standard agreement.)

If the opponent's opening bid is artificial, such as a Precision 1♣ which could be made with zero clubs, many players would treat an overcall of the same suit as natural and would check the appropriate box:

OVER:	Minor	Major	Artif. Bid
Natural	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Strong Takeout Double

What would you do with this hand if 1♥ is opened on your right? At one time, it was popular to bid 2♥ with this type of hand, showing a hand too strong for a normal takeout double. If that's your style, you check the boxes on the line beside "Strong T/O" (strong TakeOut) under each column for which this applies ... over minors, majors, and/or artificial opening bids.

This approach isn't common today. Most players would make a takeout double on the above hand, planning to show the extra strength by jumping a level or by cuebidding the opponent's suit on the next round of the auction.

The Michaels Cuebid

If the direct cuebid isn't used as a natural bid or a strong takeout, what is it used for? Many partnerships have adopted the Michaels convention. A cuebid of the opponent's minor shows a distributional hand with at least five cards in both majors.

For example, if the opponent on your right opens 1♣, you could bid 2♣ with this hand, asking partner to bid a major. If the opening is 1♦, you would bid 2♦. Michaels doesn't promise a strong hand. The advantage is that you show two suits at once.

What if the opening bid is 1♥ or 1♠? Then the cuebid shows five or more of the other major suit and a five-card or longer minor suit. For example, over 1♥ you could cuebid 2♥ with this hand. If you use Michaels, check the appropriate boxes:

OVER:	Minor	Major	Artif. Bid
Michaels	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Notrump Overcalls

Suppose you hold this ♠ K 4
hand and the bidding ♥ K J 10
is opened 1♥ on your ♦ A Q 7 2
right. What call do ♣ K J 8 3
you make? The standard agreement
is that a *direct* overcall of 1NT
shows the hand similar to that for an
opening bid of 1NT. This is entered
in this section:

NOTRUMP OVERCALLS	
Direct:	_____ to _____ Systems on <input type="checkbox"/>
Conv.	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
Balancing:	_____ to _____
Jump to 2NT: Minors	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 Lowest <input type="checkbox"/>
Conv.	<input type="checkbox"/> _____

A slight difference is that you want strength in the opponent's suit, especially if it is a major. Left-hand opponent is likely to lead that suit if you do win the auction. Another consideration is to be a little more conservative when overcalling 1NT. After all, the opponent on your right likely has most of the missing strength. If your range is 15–17 for an opening 1NT, you might want to use a range of 15+ to 18 ... the + indicating a hand that includes some 10's and 9's or a five-card suit.

Many partnerships like to use the same conventions when advancing (responding to) a 1NT overcall as they use after an opening 1NT bid. For example, 2♣ would still be Stayman. If that's the case, you would check the box marked "Systems on":

NOTRUMP OVERCALLS	
Direct:	15+ to 18 Systems on <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Balancing 1NT

Suppose you have this ♠ Q 7 5
hand as South and 1♥ ♥ A Q 9
is opened on your left. ♦ K 10 8 3
The auction continues: ♣ Q 7 5

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	Pass	Pass	?

You are in the *passout*, or *balancing*, position. If you pass, the auction is over. In this position it is common to take action with about 3 points fewer than directly over the opening bid.

The reasoning is that partner is marked with some of the missing strength because the opponents stopped in partscore. Holding only 13 points, many players would make a balancing overcall of 1NT at this point. If this is your agreement, you might indicate it like this:

Balancing:	12 to 14
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The Unusual Notrump

If a direct overcall of 1NT shows about the same strength as an opening bid of 1NT, why not use a jump to 2NT to show the same strength as an opening bid of 2NT, say 20–21 points? The reason is simple. You'll rarely get a hand with that much strength after your right-hand opponent opens the bidding. If you do, you can start with a takeout double and then bid or jump in notrump.

Instead, most partnerships use a jump overcall to 2NT over an opening bid of one of a suit to show a two-suited hand ... similar to the Michaels cuebid. This is referred to as the *unusual notrump*. Over 1♥ or 1♠, a jump to 2NT shows at least five cards in both minor suits. Over an opening bid of 1♣ or 1♦, a jump to 2NT shows the two lower unbid suits: diamonds and hearts over an opening bid of 1♣; clubs and hearts over an opening bid of 1♦.

For example, over an opening 1♥ bid on your right, ♠ 6 3
you might make an ♥ —
unusual jump over- ♦ A J 10 8 5
call of 2NT with this ♣ K J 9 7 6 3
hand, asking partner to bid a minor suit. If you have this agreement, you would check the appropriate boxes:

Jump to 2NT: Minors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 Lowest <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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Defense Against 1NT

Suppose the opponent on your right opens 1NT, 15–17, ♠ K J 4
and this is your ♥ K 10 8 7 3
hand. What call ♦ Q 8 5
would you make? ♣ A 6

Although you have 13 high-card points ... enough to open the bidding ... it is very risky to come into the auction over an opponent's a strong

1NT opening with a poor five-card suit. Responder on your left is well placed to double for penalties with some length and strength in your suit and the knowledge that opener has a strong balanced hand.

It is much safer to come in with a good one-suited hand, or with a two-suited hand so you have a better chance of finding a fit. As a result, many conventions have been invented to show a combination of one- and two-suited hands over an opponent's 1NT opening. The partnership's agreement is indicated on this section:

DEFENSE VS NOTRUMP	
vs:	_____
2♣	_____
2♦	_____
2♥	_____
2♠	_____
Dbl:	_____
Other	_____

If your partnership doesn't have any conventional agreements on the meaning of overcalls over an opponent's 1NT opening bid ... a 2♥ overcall simply shows hearts ... leave this section blank.

There are two columns because some partnerships use different defenses depending on the notrump range their opponents are using. They might have one agreement if the opponents are using a range of 15–17 points and a different agreement if the range is 12–14.

A relatively simple agreement is the Landy convention. An overcall of 2♣ shows both majors. Playing this convention, you might overcall 2♣ with this hand if ♠ Q J 10 8 7
the opponent on ♥ K Q 9 7 3
your right opens ♦ 6 4
1NT. Hopefully, you ♣ 3
can find a safe landing spot in a major suit.

You might indicate this agreement by marking your card like this:

DEFENSE VS NOTRUMP	
vs:	_____
2♣	H + S

"H + S" is typical bridge shorthand for hearts and spades. 