

NOTRUMP DEFENSE (PART – 1)

One of the most frequently occurring opening bid is ONE NOTRUMP. Whether 1NT is weak or strong, they have a preemptive effect. The opponents have to enter the auction at two level. Also since, the responder to 1NT opening has the advantage of knowing his partner's strength and distribution, the life is difficult for the defender in second seat who doesn't know his partner's hand at all. Marginal or doubtful bids are more likely to be punished. The responder to the notrump opening will usually know when to double for penalties and when to ignore the intervention. Even a timid opponent can summon up the courage to double when he knows that his side has the balance of strength and that he can rely on partner for at least two trumps. Therefore, one NT is the most difficult bid to compete against.

This doesn't mean that you simply sit idle and allow opponents a free ride every time they open 1NT. You have to take some risks. To avoid the blade, to punish the opponent when your side does own the balance of power, and to reach best partial or games, many defensive conventions have been devised by bridge experts all over the world.

Defending against Strong Notrump:

When an opponent opens with a strong 1NT (15-17 HCP), approximately 40% of high cards have been accounted. Thus your side's prospect of game are remote and it is very well possible that the enemy holds the balance of strength. Therefore, to successfully compete after a strong 1NT opening bid, you will need a long strong suit and good distribution, not just a modicum of high-card strength.

As strong 1NT opening seldom permits the defenders to reach game, main objectives of defense are either obstructive tactics, to find own part score, a good sacrifice or penalizing the opponents.

Defending against Weak Notrump:

When an opponent opens with a weak 1NT (12-14 HCP), only 33% of high cards are accounted for. Thus since opener has less, the chances are greater that the hand belongs to your side and there is always hope for the game. Therefore, constructive tactics are more appropriate.

A word of caution. Against weak NT, your hand is no stronger just because the opener is weaker. Your LHO may have the high cards you expected with your partner. In which case, you will need good judgement to keep out of trouble. Therefore, main objectives of defense here are penalizing the opponents or to find own part score or even game.

In balancing position, it is safer to compete over any kind of notrump opening. Once responder passes, his hand is limited and your partner is **more likely** to hold his share of the high cards.

Defensive Conventions over One Notrump Opening:

Many defensive conventions have been developed to allow the defensive side to enter the auction and/or penalize the opponents. The following are some of the popular ones:

- ASTRO
- BROZEL
- CAPPELLETTI
- DONT - Very popular against strong notrump.
- LANDY - The most popular convention.
- RIPSTRA
- TRANSFER OVERCALLS
- WOOLSEY – Strongly recommended by us.

Which Notrump defense is best? A very difficult question to answer. However the convention which can effectively handle various two suiters on which interference is desirable, should be preferred.

We will discuss in our next couple of bulletins in detail about the above notrump defenses and you can choose the one you like the best for your partnership. An effective notrump defense is very important in today's highly competitive bridge world for any partnership.

(Contributed by Sudhir Aggarwal)

NOTRUMP DEFENSE (PART – 2)

As discussed in last month's bulletin, to enter the bidding after your RHO has opened the bidding with 1NT needs both courage and good hand. Therefore, it is much better to enter the bidding holding a two suited suit. One of the first such conventional method which was devised is LANDY.

A) LANDY:

Landy convention was devised and developed by Mr. Alvin Landy of United States. Landy convention uses a bid of 2C after 1NT opening bid, to show at least 9-cards in both majors (5-4 min). The strength required for Landy depends to a large extent on the vulnerability. However other factors like hand pattern, location of high cards and suit textures must be taken into account. By partnership agreement, the Landy convention can be used in the direct position, the balancing position or both, and may be employed after a strong No Trump opening and/or a Weak No Trump opening.

The hand should have opening values unless it is 5-5 in the majors, in which case the convention can be used on weaker hands because of the power of the distribution. It is important that the majority of your high cards are in the major suits. We would not generally recommend using Landy with only 4-4 in majors. However with favourable vulnerability and 3-suited good hand, you may consider it. The Landy convention is the most popular convention for defense against 1NT opening bid.

Responses and Rebids after Landy 2C Bid:

After partner has made a Landy 2C bid, it is advancer's duty to select the trump suit or make an inquiry. Most of the time advancer will bid 2H/S to play. With good hand, he can make an enquiry via 2NT. With equal length in both majors, advancer can use 2D relay. We prefer the following response structure:

- Pass – Shows a weak hand, poor support for Major suits, and a long Club suit of at least 6 cards.
- 2D – Relay (asks Landy bidder to bid his longer major) is used when responder has equal length in both majors or has a good hand with both minors and want to play 2NT or has a very long minor. Over 2D, Landy bidder bids his longer major or bids 2H with equal length. Over 2H/S, then advancer re-bids 2NT showing a good hand or 3C/D to show a weak hand with long suit or invite game by raising the major.
- 2H/2S – Sign-off, indicates a preference with no interest in game.
- 3C/D shows invitational hand in H/S respectively.
- 3H/S invitation with good suit, shortness in the other major.
- 2NT – Relay with game prospects:
 - 3C – shows minimum hand with 5-4 in majors, after that 3D is further relay for longer major
 - 3D – shows minimum hand with 5-5 in majors
 - 3H – shows better hand with 5-hearts and 4-spades
 - 3S – shows better hand with 5-spades and 4-hearts
 - 3N – shows better hand with 5-5 in majors
 - 4C/D – shows 6-5 hands with 6 hearts/spades respectively
- 3N is to play and Landy 2C bidder is expected to pass.
- 4C/D are transfers to H/S respectively.
- Jump to 4H/S is sign-off either with pre-emptive hand or with game values.

The above set of responses although are complicated but easy to remember.

Defending against Landy 2C:

As Landy 2C is a popular convention, you often encounter it when your partner opens the bidding with 1NT. Therefore, you need a defense against Landy. We recommend the following:

- Double – Penalty oriented in one of the major.
- 2D – Natural to play.
- 2H – Both minors, atleast invitational hand. Difficult hand to show otherwise.
- 2S/2N – Transfer to C/D.
- 3C/D Invitational hand with 6-card suit with 2 of the top 3 honours.
- 3H/S – Can be played as Natural forcing.

(Contributed by Sudhir Aggarwal)

NOTRUMP DEFENSE (PART – 3)

We discussed the most popular defense against one notrump opening – LANDY in last month's bulletin. We continue our discussion further with another two suited defense.

B) ASTRO:

The ASTRO convention has been named after its inventors – Paul Allinger, Roger STern and Larry ROSler. Unlike Landy convention which shows the majors only, ASTRO is designed to describe most two-suited hands. ASTRO overcall shows a specific Major plus a second undisclosed suit of lower rank. This convention is much more complicated than Landy as the overcaller's second suit is not known initially. The following is the mechanisms of this convention:

- 2C – Shows Hearts plus one of the minor suits.
- 2D – Shows Spades plus another suit (can also be hearts).

Astro convention shows at least 9-cards in the two suits. The shown major is called the Anchor suit. Generally the anchor suit should be of 5-cards. If the anchor suit is of 4-cards then it must be of good quality. Similar to Landy, the strength required for Astro depends to a large extent on the vulnerability. However other factors like hand pattern, location of high cards and suit textures must be taken into account. It is important that the majority of your high cards are in both the suits. By partnership agreement, the Astro convention can be used in both the direct position and balancing position, and may be employed after a strong No Trump opening and/or a Weak No Trump opening.

Responses and Rebids after Astro 2C/2D Bid:

In responding to ASTRO – 2C/2D bid, advancer's first duty is to consider Astro bidder's known suit (anchor suit). We recommend the following response structure:

- Pass – Shows a weak hand of atleast 6-cards in the bid suit and no support for the Anchor suit.
- 2 of the Anchor suit – Shows atleast 3-cards support and no interest in game.
- 3 of the Anchor suit – Shows atleast 4-cards support and invitational hand.
- 4 of the Anchor suit – To play.
- New suit other than Partner's Anchor suit (except the next step bid) – Shows atleast a 6-card suit and denies support for the Anchor suit. Non forcing.
- Jump in a New suit – Shows atleast a 6-card suit, no support for the Anchor suit and Invitational hand.
- 2D (over 2C) and 2H (over 2D) – Denies 3-cards in the Anchor suit and is called Relay response. After the Relay response, the partnership must scramble to a playable trump suit. The following are the options available to the Astro bidder:
 - Pass – Indicates that relay suit was Astro bidder's second suit.
 - Two of the Anchor suit – shows atleast 5-cards in the Anchor suit. Responder can pass or bid 2NT to ask for Astro bidder's second suit.
 - 3 of his second suit – shows atleast 5-cards in the suit bid.
 - 2S (after 2C – 2D) – As 2C bid has denied Spades, this bid shows exactly 3-cards in Spades. This gives responder an opportunity to pass or bid 2NT to ask for the second suit.
- 2NT – The only forcing response to Astro bid. This asks Astro bidder to show his second suit. With a minimum or 5-4 pattern, the Astro bidder bids his second suit at 3-level. With a maximum hand and 5-5 or better distribution, he may jump in his second suit.
- 3N is to play and Astro bidder is expected to pass.

The ASTRO convention is more complicated than LANDY and requires firm partnership understandings. One of the main drawbacks of Astro convention is that the advancer can't know at the outset if Astro 2D bidder has a major two-suiter, the most important feature when defending against 1NT opening.

There are many variations of this convention. Some of them are:

- Roth – Stone Astro
- Pinpoint Astro
- Aspro
- Asprou – combination of Astro and Aspro

(Contributed by Sudhir Aggarwal)

NOTRUMP DEFENSE (PART – 4)

We have so far discussed LANDY and ASTRO. We continue our discussion further with other popular defenses.

C) BROZEL:

Similar to ASTRO, BROZEL convention is used to enter the auction after opponents open the bidding with 1NT. The Brozel convention was developed by Mr. Bernard Zeller of New Jersey, United States, and can be used either in the direct or balancing position. The conventional method can be employed to show a two-suited holding and also a three-suited holding. The following is the mechanism of this convention:

- Dbl – Shows a single suiter hand of atleast 6-cards. Doubler's partner may either pass converting the double to penalty or bid 2C asking partner to pass or correct to his suit.
- 2C – Shows Clubs and Hearts.
- 2D – Shows Diamonds and Hearts.
- 2H – Shows Hearts and Spades – both major suits.
- 2S – Shows Spades and a minor suit.
- 2N – Shows both minors.
- 3C/D/H/S – Shows singleton or void in the bid suit and 3-suiter strong hand .

The strength requirements and other factors are similar to Astro and Landy. The Brozel convention is very flexible, allowing the intervening side to play in any suit at the two level generally. However it does not allow for penalizing the opening side when the overcaller has a strong hand. This was one of the main reason for the birth of CAPPELETTI according to Mr. Michael Cappelletti.

D) CAPPELETTI:

CAPPELETTI convention has its name after its originator Mr. Michael Cappelletti of Virginia, USA. However other bridge authors and experts have devised same conventional methods which are known after their surnames. Therefore, this method is also known as Hamilton after Mr. Fred Hamilton of California, USA. In England it is also known as Pottage after Mr. John F. Pottage of London. The following is the mechanism of this convention:

- Dbl – Penalty (it is preferable that doubler has a good suit).
- 2C – Shows a single suiter hand of atleast 6-cards.
- 2D – Shows both major suits.
- 2H – Shows Hearts and a minor suit.
- 2S – Shows Spades and a minor suit.
- 2N – Shows both minors. However with strong major-minor two suiters also 2N can be bid as 2H/S are non-forcing. With such a hand intervenor bids his major suit after expected 3C/D bid.

By partnership agreement, the Cappelletti convention can be used in both the direct position and balancing position, and may be employed after a strong No Trump opening and/or a Weak No Trump opening.

Responses and Rebids after Cappelletti 2C/2D/H/S Bid:

Over overcaller's 2C bid, responder can use the following structure:

- Pass – Although rare but possible. Shows weak hand with clubs.
- 2D – Pass or correct.
- 2H/S – Responder's own suit
- 2N – shows a good hand with game interest.

In responding to Cappelletti 2D bid showing both majors, responses can be same as over Landy 2C. Over 2H/S – 2N asks for the minor suit. After a passed hand overcaller can't have a hand strong enough for penalty double. So double can be used to show either single suiter hand with clubs or a red two suiter.

Although Cappelletti convention is very popular, the main disadvantage of this convention in my opinion is using 2D as majors. Partner with equal preference for both majors can't ask for the longer major.

(Contributed by Sudhir Aggarwal)

NOTRUMP DEFENSE (PART – 5)

One of the most popular convention for Notrump defense against strong NT is DON'T. We continue our discussion further with this popular defense.

E) DON'T (Disturbing Opponents' No Trump):

DONT convention was devised by Marty Bergen and was published by Larry Cohen. DONT is designed to be used against opponents' strong 1NT opening bid only. This is because DONT convention doesn't use a penalty double and you certainly want penalty double available against weak NT. The basic fundamental principle behind DONT is to find a playable partscore at 2 level. Game contracts are seldom reached after a DONT overcall.

DONT as the name suggests definitely disturbs opponents and makes life hard for them. It allows you to bid against the strong notrump with weak distributional hands. A DONT bid does not show high cards but shows shape. The following is the mechanism of this convention:

- Dbl – Shows a single suiter hand of atleast 6-cards. Usually the responder relays with 2C asking for the overcaller's suit. However with a good suit of his own, he can bid his suit or even pass the double with a very good hand converting the double into a penalty double.
- 2C – Shows a two suiter hand, clubs and another suit. Generally 5-5 shape is preferable. However for most of the players 5-4 distribution either way is acceptable. The idea is to show your both suits and it does not matter which suit is longer.
- 2D – Shows a two suiter hand, diamonds and a major suit.
- 2H – Shows both majors atleast 5-4 distribution.
- 2S – Natural. Spade suit can be shown by doubling and then bidding 2S or by bidding 2S directly over 1NT. The direct 2S bid shows a weaker hand.

DONT can be used in direct as well as the balancing seat as per the partnership understanding. Most of the time after DONT overcall, the defense looks for a partscore only. However with exceptional distribution the responder can explore for game.

Responses and Rebids after DONT 2C/D/H Bids:

If 1NT opener's partner is quiet, the responder can use the following structure:

- Pass – To play, says we have found our partscore.
- Next suit (over 2C/D) – Pass or correct. Asks overcaller for the second suit.
- Any other suit – Responder's own suit.
- Raise of overcaller's known suit - Preemptive
- 2N – shows a good hand with game interest and asks for the description of the hand.
 - After 1N – 2C – Pass – 2N – Pass – ? overcaller shows his hand as follows:
 - 3C shows minimum hand.
 - 3D/H/S shows Clubs and Diamonds/Heart/Spade, maximum hand.
 - After 1N – 2D – Pass – 2N – Pass – ? overcaller shows his hand as follows:
 - 3C shows minimum hand with Diamonds and Hearts.
 - 3D shows minimum hand with Diamonds and Spades
 - 3H/S shows maximum hand with Diamonds and Heart/Spade.
 - After 1N – 2H – Pass – 2N – Pass – ? overcaller shows his hand as follows:
 - 3C shows minimum hand with Hearts better or longer than spades.
 - 3D shows minimum hand with Spades better or longer than hearts.
 - 3H/S shows maximum hand with longer or better Heart/Spade.

If 1NT opener's partner bids over DONT overcall, a dbl or redbl by DONT overcaller's partner asks for the second suit. A suit bid shows the suit of the responder and also indicates that he has no interest in knowing overcaller's second suit. However after DONT overcall of 2H as both suits are known, the double by overcaller's partner is for penalty.

(Contributed by Sudhir Aggarwal)

NOTRUMP DEFENSE (PART – 6)

Last month we discussed one of the popular convention for Notrump defense against strong NT - DONT. We continue our discussion further with another very popular defense - **WOOLSEY**.

F) WOOLSEY DEFENSE TO 1NT:

Woolsey defense to 1NT was devised by Mr. Christopher Woolsey (popularly known as Kit Woolsey) who is the author of many bridge books and originator of many bridge conventions. Woolsey defense is generally played against opponents' strong 1NT opening bid. This is because Woolsey defense doesn't use a penalty double and you certainly want penalty double available against weak NT. Woolsey defense can be used in direct seat and/or balancing seat as per the partnership understanding.

Woolsey defense allows you to enter the auction with many single suiter or two-suiter hands with distinction in suit lengths for major and minor suits. This is the main reason that we prefer Woolsey against strong NT. The following is the mechanism of this convention:

- Dbl – Shows a 4-card major and a longer minor.
- 2C – Shows both majors (same as Landy 2C), generally 5-5 but minimum 5-4.
- 2D – Shows a single suiter major, 6-carder H/S.
- 2H – Shows two suiter hand with 5+ hearts and a minor suit of 4+ cards.
- 2S – Shows two suiter hand with 5+ spades and a minor suit of 4+ cards.
- 2N – Shows both minors or strong hand with any two suits.
- 3 any – Natural.

Responses and Rebids after Woolsey Double:

If 1NT opener's partner is quiet, the responder can use the following structure:

- Pass – rare, to play for penalties.
- 2C – Pass or correct. Asks overcaller to bid 2D with diamond suit otherwise pass. Over 2D, 2H is pass or correct, to play in doubler's major suit.
- 2D – asks doubler to show his major suit. After 2H/S bid showing the major suit, 2NT bid by doubler's partner is a game try with good support for the major suit.
- 2H/S/3C/D – Natural to play.
- 3H/S – Natural, good suit and invitational to game.
- 2N – Artificial relay, shows a good hand with game interest and asks for the description of the hand:
 - 3C/D shows minimum hand with the minor suit.
 - 3H/S shows the major suit and maximum hand, minor suit is not known.

If 1NT opener's partner intervenes, 2NT bid asks for the minor suit and double says desire to defend.

Responses and Rebids after Woolsey 2C/D/H/S bids:

- After 2C – showing both majors, we suggest same structure as for Landy 2C.
- After 2D – showing one major, response structure can be same as for multi 2D opening bid.
 - 2H, is pass or correct. After overcaller bids 2S, 2NT shows a good hand and game try.
 - 2S to play, if the major suit is spade. However has a good heart fit and can play 3H/4H.
 - 2NT relay, overcaller bids 3C to show good hand and 3D/H shows H/S suit with minimum.
 - 3H, preemptive to play in overcaller's major suit.
- After 2H/S – showing H/S and a minor suit, following response structure can be used:
 - 2S after 2H, is natural to play.
 - 2NT asks for the minor suit.
 - Rest natural.

Woolsey defense to 1NT is becoming very popular and is highly recommended for all serious partnerships.

(Contributed by Sudhir Aggarwal)

NOTRUMP DEFENSE (PART – 7)

So far we have discussed popular defenses against strong NT. We conclude our discussion with defenses which are less popular but still used by many players.

G) MECKWELL OVER STRONG NT:

Meckwell convention has been devised by Jeff Mecksroth and Eric Rodwell, one of the best pairs in the world. Like Woolsey, this convention is also designed to compete over 1NT with various one-suited or two-suited hands. As this convention doesn't use a penalty double, it is used over strong NT only.

The following is the mechanism of Meckwell defense to 1NT Opening:

- Dbl – Shows any of the three types of hand, single suiter hand with a minor or both majors or strong balanced hand with 18+ HCP.
 - After 1N – Dbl – Pass – 2C (pass or correct) – Pass – ? overcaller shows his hand as follows:
 - Pass/2D shows 6-card minor.
 - 2H/S shows both majors with minimum / maximum hand.
 - After 1N – Dbl – Pass – 2N (relay) – Pass – ? overcaller shows his hand as follows:
 - 3C/D shows 6-card minor suit.
 - 3H/S shows both majors with minimum / maximum hand.
- 2C – Shows two suiter hand, clubs and a major.
- 2D – Shows two suiter hand, diamonds and a major.
- 2H/S – Single suiter hand, 6-cards in Heart/Spade.
- 2N – Both Minors.

H) RIPSTRA:

Ripstra convention was devised by Mr. J.G. Ripstra. This conventional defense generally shows a 3-suited hand. Ripstra can be used in direct or balancing seat and against a weak or strong NT.

The Ripstra convention is generally similar to Landy convention. Ripstra convention uses an overcall of 2C/D or 2NT. The strength requirement depends on the vulnerability, shape and texture of the hand.

- 2C or 2D Ripstra overcall shows:
 - Both major suits atleast 4-4 distribution.
 - Which ever minor suit is bid, is better than the other minor.
- 2N Ripstra overcall shows a good two-suiter hand with atleast 5-5 in both the suits.

I) LANDY WITH TRANSFERS:

Transfers can be effectively used against NT in combination with Landy. The double can be reserved for penalty making this defense suitable against weak NT.

The following is the mechanism for this convention, similar to four suit transfers after 1NT opening:

- Dbl – Penalty.
- 2C – Landy, both majors.
- 2D/H – Transfer to hearts/spades.
- 2S/3C – Transfer to Clubs/Diamonds.
- 2N – Both minors atleast 5-5.

Transfers allow overcaller a second chance to show a second suit or a single suiter good hand.

There are many more defenses devised and developed by experts for defending against One Notrump Opening. Landy with transfers is a good method for not so serious partnerships. However we strongly recommend Woolsey for its ability to cover various two-suited hands. In balancing seat DONT seems to be a good choice just to disturb opponents' notrump for a playable partscore at 2-level.

(Contributed by Sudhir Aggarwal)