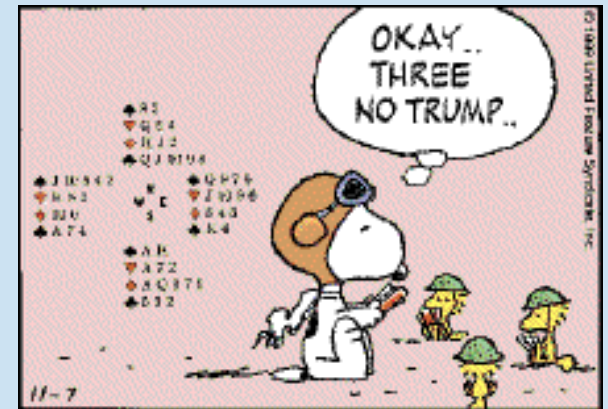


# Eliminate Bidding Confusion in Competitive Auctions with the Lebensohl Convention

ACBL Unit 503 Lecture Series

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# Considerations when adopting a Convention

- Can I be as successful without the convention?
- Is this a highly used/adopted convention by my peers?
- What alternatives are there to using this convention?
- What bids do I lose by adopting this convention?
- What are the dangers of this convention?

# The Opponents Overcall Partner's 1NT Opener at the 2 level

The bidding has gone: 1NT-(2S)-?

Your hand:

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

You certainly don't want to defend against 2S, but what are your options? 3c is game forcing, so that doesn't work. Partner will likely bid 3NT with a spade stopper, you can then bid 4c and hope partner gets the message and passes, Yuk! You want to play 3c, period, but can't.

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

1NT-(2S)-2NT\*-(P)

3c\*-(P)-(P)-(P)

Here's the same hand reprinted to show you how Lebensohl works in this application. 2NT\* is the conventional bid which creates a puppet or relay to 3c. Note that both 2NT and 3c are alerted, 2NT requesting partner to bid 3c and 3c bidding as requested by partner. At this point neither bid promises anything in clubs. Responder is now in control and can get out in 3c or 3d or 3H for that matter if those were responder's suit. Responder would merely correct 3c to their suit with the difference being that responder would be declarer. Responder's 3d or 3H bids are drop dead bids and could be made on a zero count when appropriate.

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

With Lebensohl in your arsenal, when you have a hand like this you can investigate 3 possible game contracts: 5c, 4H and 3NT. When the same auction occurs: 1NT-(2S)-3c is now natural and forcing. If partner follows with 3d then you can bid 3H to show your second suit. Without 4H and spades stopped partner can now choose to bid 3NT or raise clubs when that is correct. If partner bids 3H over your 3c you are thrilled to raise to 4H.

# Do We Have Their Suit Stopped?

**D**

**N North**

♠ 65  
♥ A43  
♦ K543  
♣ A632

**W West**

♠ AKJ1094  
♥ J109  
♦ J109  
♣ 5

W	N	E	S
			1NT
2♠			

**E East**

♠ Q87  
♥ 8765  
♦ 876  
♣ J87

**S South**

♠ 32  
♥ KQ2  
♦ AQ2  
♣ KQ1094

1NT		NOTRUMP OPENING BIDS		2NT	
<u>15</u> to <u>17</u>		3♣	<u>Puppet</u>	<u>20</u> to <u>21</u>	
<u>    </u> to <u>    </u>		3♦	<u>5-5 Minors, forcing</u>	<b>Puppet Stayman</b> ■	
5-card Major common ■		3♥	<u>4-1-4-4 or 4-0-4-5</u>	<b>Transfer Responses:</b>	
System on over <u>  </u> X/2C		3♠	<u>1-4-4-4 or 0-4-4-5</u>	<u>Jacoby</u> ■ <u>Texas</u> ■	
2♣ Stayman ■ <b>Puppet</b> □				3♠ <u>Minor suit stayman</u>	
2♦ <u>Transfer to</u> ♥ ■		4♦, 4♥ <u>Transfer</u> ■			
<b>Forcing Stayman</b> □		<b>Smolen</b> ■		<b>3NT</b> <u>    </u> to <u>    </u>	
2♥ <u>Transfer to</u> ♠ ■		<b>Lebensohl</b> ■ ( <u>fast denies</u> )		<u>Gambling, no outside A/K</u>	
2♠ <u>Transfer to clubs</u>		<b>Neg. Double</b> ■ <u>    </u>		<b>Conventional NT Openings</b>	
2NT <u>Transfer to diamonds</u>		<b>Other:</b> <u>    </u>		<u>    </u>	

On the Convention Card that we fill out with each partner, in the No Trump opening bid section there is an area for Lebensohl with a blank line in front of the word “denies.” While this can be played either way, a large majority of bridge players follow this mnemonic: “SLOW SHOWS, FAST DENIES” and thus I have inserted the word fast on my convention card. For the current hand in question, North, with values for game but no spade stopper (the suit the opponents bid) takes the fast route to 3NT by going directly to 3NT. North’s alternative, if they held a spade stopper, would be to take the slow route as follows:

1NT-(2S)-2NT\*-(P)  
 3c\*-(P)-3NT\*-(P)  
 P-(P)

After using the Lebensohl relay to 3c, North now bids 3NT, the slow route, slow shows!

**D**

**N North**  
 ♠ 65  
 ♥ A43  
 ♦ K543  
 ♣ A632

**W West**  
 ♠ AKJ1094  
 ♥ J109  
 ♦ J109  
 ♣ 5

**E East**  
 ♠ Q87  
 ♥ 8765  
 ♦ 876  
 ♣ J87

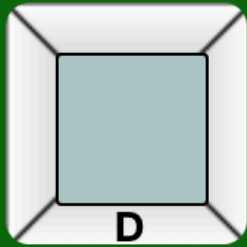
**S South**  
 ♠ 32  
 ♥ KQ2  
 ♦ AQ2  
 ♣ KQ1094

W	N	E	S
			1NT
2♠	3NT	Pass	

☰

What should South Do Now?





**N** North

♠ 65  
 ♥ A43  
 ♦ K543  
 ♣ A632



**W** West

♠ AKJ1094  
 ♥ J109  
 ♦ J109  
 ♣ 5

W	N	E	S
			1NT
2♠	3NT	Pass	4♣
Pass	5♣	Pass	Pass
Pass			

**E** East

♠ Q87  
 ♥ 8765  
 ♦ 876  
 ♣ J87

**S** South

♠ 32  
 ♥ KQ2  
 ♦ AQ2  
 ♣ KQ1094

5♣ South

0 0

# Do We Have Their Suit Stopped with Stayman?

**D**

**N North**

♠ 43  
♥ A843  
♦ K654  
♣ AJ4

**W West**

♠ AKJ1092  
♥ 765  
♦ 103  
♣ Q2

**E East**

♠ Q8  
♥ J109  
♦ 987  
♣ 98765

**S South**

♠ 765  
♥ KQ2  
♦ AQJ2  
♣ K103

W	N	E	S
			1NT
2♠	3♠	Pass	

## Handling Artificial Overcalls

Our opponents don't always play nice. To challenge our use of this tool they counter with gadgets of their own to interfere with our 1NT opening auctions:

**2d overcall to show 1 Major:** This is a popular use but it doesn't really get in our way. Transfers are off so we can still bid a Major at the 2 level to show a less than invitational hand and expect partner will pass. On a bad day our opponents' Major is the same as ours. It usually will be the other Major! We can still get out with a bad hand with a long minor by starting with 2NT (Lebensohl) and then either passing the 3c relay or converting to 3d if that is our suit.

**2c or 2H to show both Majors:** When they interfere showing both Majors we give up on finding our own major fit and focus on the minors or whether 3NT is playable. With less than invitational values and a long minor we use Lebensohl as above to get out in 3c or 3d. With game values and a good minor suit we can bid the minor directly at the 3 level (forcing since we did not use Lebensohl 2NT), partner, now with one of the Majors stopped can bid 3 of the Major they have stopped and pass the buck to us. With the other Major stopped we can bid 3NT and if not we can retreat to 4 of a minor. Note that over our 3 of a minor forcing bid, partner would simply bid 3NT with both Majors stopped.

**General Principles here:** If we can bid 2 of a suit naturally, it is intended as a signoff. If we want to signoff and the cheapest we can bid our suit is at the 3 level, go through Lebensohl 2NT to show a weak hand.

## Quiz time!

The Auction has started: 1NT(partner)-2H(RHO)-?

You hold the following hands:

- #1- KJxxx,Jx,xxx,xxx
- #2- KJTxx,xx,AQx,Jxx
- #3- Axxx,KJx,QJxx,xx
- #4- KQxx,xx,QJxx,Axx
- #5- Kxx,Kxx,AQxx,xxx
- #6- KQx,xx,AJxx,Qxxx
- #7- Kxx,x,QJTxxx,xxx
- #8- Kxxx,x,KQJxxx,Kx

## Lebensohl After We Double Their Weak Two-Bid

N North				
♠A4				
♥AQJ10				
♦K432				
♣J109				
W	N	E	S	
2♠	Dbl	Pass	3♣	
Pass				

Here's a second use case for Lebensohl. North has a typical double of an opening weak 2S bid and South has responded 3c which is very wide ranging in standard bidding. South would normally take a strong action here with 11+ points or even a bit less with good distribution, especially with Heart length. But the 3c bid can be made on a zero count or with a decent 10-11-point hand.

North is on a complete guess as to whether to try 3NT or pass.

**N North**  
 ♠A4  
 ♥AQJ10  
 ♦K432  
 ♣J109

**W West**  
 ♠KQJ832  
 ♥76  
 ♦76  
 ♣Q32

**E East**  
 ♠109  
 ♥98543  
 ♦A98  
 ♣K87

**S South**  
 ♠765  
 ♥K2  
 ♦QJ105  
 ♣A654

2♠ Dbl Pass 3♣  
 Pass

**N North**  
 ♠A4  
 ♥AQJ10  
 ♦K432  
 ♣J109

**W West**  
 ♠KQJ832  
 ♥76  
 ♦76  
 ♣Q32

**E East**  
 ♠109  
 ♥5432  
 ♦AQJ1098  
 ♣A

**S South**  
 ♠765  
 ♥K98  
 ♦5  
 ♣K87654

2♠ Dbl Pass 3♣  
 Pass

Both are possible layouts given the auction to this point. With the left layout, the winning action by North is 3NT, but with the right layout the winning action is pass. We need a little science here to help with this decision and Lebensohl is the tool for this!

Note also that the South hand on the right could be much, much worse! Imagine xxx,xxx,xxx,xxxx! While 3c rates to be down several tricks, 3NT might take only 2 tricks for down 7!

The similarities in the two use cases for Lebensohl is that both require giving up the natural 2NT bid. In the previous hands where the auction started (2S)-X-3c-P-? Our North player who doubled initially is in the dark and must guess what to do with no idea about South's values.

With any weak hand, typically defined as 0-7 HCP, the partner of the doubler starts with 2NT\* which requests the doubler to puppet or accept the relay to 3c. Now, the South hand is in control of the auction as they can pass 3c if clubs is their suit with a weak hand, or continue with 3d or 3H, also showing a weak hand with a long suit and strongly suggesting that the doubler pass.

S	South
♠	32
♥	432
♦	Q32
♣	QJ1032

S	South
♠	32
♥	952
♦	QJ10432
♣	54

S	South
♠	32
♥	K10952
♦	32
♣	5432

The hand on the left would bid 2NT as a puppet to 3c, then pass.

The hand in the middle would also bid 2NT as a puppet to 3c but would then bid 3d showing a weak hand

Finally, the hand on the right would bid 2NT as a puppet to 3c and then bid 3H, also weak/non-forcing. In these examples, all hands had 5+ card suits but in practice they could easily be a 4-card suit if 4333 shape.

We have seen in the previous slide, how the responder of the doubler of the weak two bid can get out with a bad hand or at least convey to partner that they hold less than 8 HCP and/or lack extreme distribution  
 The important inference to be taken here is that when responder does not go through the 2NT Lebensohl bid with requested relay to 3c, they are showing 8+ HCP. Often that is enough for the doubler to move towards or bid a game directly

	<b>N North</b>	♠AQ ♥AK32 ♦KQJ32 ♣54	
	<b>W West</b>	♠KJ10765 ♥7 ♦876 ♣QJ3	
	<b>E East</b>	♠98 ♥J10986 ♦A109 ♣1098	
	<b>S South</b>	♠432 ♥Q54 ♦54 ♣AK762	
	W N E S	2♠ Dbl Pass 3♣ Pass 3NT Pass Pass Pass	
			3NT North 0 0

	<b>N North</b>	♠A4 ♥AQJ10 ♦K654 ♣A65	
	<b>W West</b>	♠KQJ1076 ♥76 ♦87 ♣Q72	
	<b>E East</b>	♠98 ♥985 ♦J109 ♣KJ1098	
	<b>S South</b>	♠532 ♥K432 ♦AQ32 ♣43	
	W N E S	2♠ Dbl Pass 3♥ Pass 4♥ Pass Pass	

On both hands, South's positive bids provided all the information that North needed to bid game.



## Overriding the Puppet/Relay to 3c

Sometimes the doubler will have such a huge hand they can almost see game in their own hand and don't think that a likely final contract of 3c is the correct spot. In such cases, doubler can ignore the requested relay to 3c and bid something else (usually 3NT)!

The image shows a bridge hand simulation interface. At the top left is a diamond symbol in a box. The interface is divided into four main sections: North, West, East, and South. North's hand is shown with spades AK, hearts AKJ4, diamonds AKQ54, and clubs 54. West's hand is shown with spades QJ10932, hearts Q32, diamonds 32, and clubs 32. East's hand is shown with spades 87, hearts 1098, diamonds J109, and clubs AK1098. South's hand is shown with spades 654, hearts 765, diamonds 876, and clubs QJ76. In the center, a bidding sequence is shown: West bids 2♠, North bids Dbl, East bids Pass, and South bids 2NT. A red box highlights the 2NT bid. To the right of the bidding sequence, a box contains the text '2NT' and 'Requests relay to 3c' with an 'Explain' button. At the bottom right, there are two buttons: '3NT South' and a score display showing '0' and '0'.

W	N	E	S
♠ QJ10932	♠ AK	♠ 87	♠ 654
♥ Q32	♥ AKJ4	♥ 1098	♥ 765
♦ 32	♦ AKQ54	♦ J109	♦ 876
♣ 32	♣ 54	♣ AK1098	♣ QJ76

2NT  
Requests relay to 3c  
Explain

3NT South  
0 0

North sees the handwriting on the wall! South is intending to drop North in 3c. On a bad day North may be down 2 in 3NT (diamonds don't break heart finesse is off, and/or South's clubs are bad, and the opponents take the first 5 clubs) but 3NT seems like a great contract. In fact some North's might bid 3NT directly over 2S but this sequence keeps Hearts and diamonds in the picture, as well as NT, also leaving open slam exploration when appropriate.

## Showing a stopper (or lack of) in the opponent's suit

Revisiting the first case use of Lebensohl when the opponents interfered with our 1NT opening bid at the two level, we can use Lebensohl when we double their weak two bid to find out about stoppers in their suit and at the same time, show or deny four cards in the other Major

- (2H)-X-(P)-3H\* Again using the principle of “slow shows, fast denies” we took the fast route to 3H. We are showing a game forcing hand with 4 spades and denying a heart stopper.
- (2H)-X-(P)-2NT\*-(P)-3c\*-(P)-3H\* The cue bid of their Hearts shows a game forcing hand. Here we took the slow route as opposed to the first example, showing four spades but now with a Heart stopper. Be careful, though, the opening lead is coming through your Heart stopper.
- (2H)-X-(P)-3NT\* This bid denies 4 spades and denies a Heart stopper, at the same time showing values for game. Doubler can bid an aggressive 3NT even with as little as Qxx in Hearts since their holding is behind the opening bidder.
- (2H)-X-(P)-2NT\*-(P)-3c\*-(P)-3NT\* Finally, this sequence shows game going values with a Heart stopper. Once again, caution urged as the lead will come through your Heart holding.

## Special Case when we hold Spades, and they preempt in a red suit at the two-level followed by direct seat double by our side

We should take advantage of the fact that Lebensohl allows us to show 4 different types of Spade holdings in this case

- (2H)-X-(P)-2S Our weakest action. Less than 8 HCP with 4+ Spades
- (2H)-X-(P)-2NT\*-(P)-3c\*-(P)-3S\* As seen previously, we can simply bid a slow or a fast 3H here to show exactly 4 spades with or without a Heart stopper, but those cue bids showed a GF hand. Since we can't show an invitational hand and communicate our heart stopper status, the next best thing we can do is differentiate between 4 and 5 card Spade holdings to go with invitational values. I suggest this sequence shows exactly 4 spades, 8-11 HCP
- (2H)-X-(P)-3S\* As a corollary to the second sequence above, I suggest this sequence shows 5+ Spades, 8-11 HCP
- (2H)-X-(P)-4S Should show 5+ Spades and opening values