

THE LEBENSOHL CONVENTION—Part I
(June 28, 2021)

1. Designed primarily to deal with the bidding problems encountered when an opponent overcalls your partner's 1NT opener. For the purposes of our discussion: 1NT = 15 – 17 HCP (High Card Points).

Example: Partner RHO You
 1NT (2H) ???

2. Another use of the convention is in bidding after your partner has made a take-out double of a weak-two opening bid, i.e., (2D), (2H), or (2S).

Example: LHO Partner RHO YOU
 (2H) Dbl (Pass) ???

3. Another use of the convention is in bidding after your partner has reversed and you are holding a very weak hand.

Example: Partner YOU
 1D 1S
 2H ???

Today's lesson will focus on the bidding after your partner has opened 1NT and an opponent has overcalled with 2D, 2H or 2S. In our next lesson on Lebensohl, we will see how the convention handles a 2C overcall by an opponent.

Let's begin by looking at the following situation:

The bidding:	Partner	RHO	YOU
	1NT	(2H)	???

Suppose you hold either of the two hands below:

- a) 52 74 KJ10653 984
- b) AJ3 52 AQ10984 95

Two very different hands. In a) you would like to bid 3D and hope your partner keeps his mouth shut and passes. In b) you want to reach game in either 3NT, 5D, or possibly a 6D slam.

Obviously, you cannot make the same bid with each of the above hands. At the close of today, we will revisit these two hands and let you tell me what you would bid with each. Several questions arise after an overcall of partner's 1NT opening:

1. Which bids are forcing?
2. Which bids are non-forcing?
3. Which bids are invitational?
4. Which bids are natural?
5. How do you find out if you and your partner have a 4-4 major suit fit?
6. What does "double" mean?
7. How do you SHOW or DENY stopper(s) in the enemy's suit if you think your side needs to be in notrump?

Today, most experts use **Lebensohl**, a convention which enables a partnership to cope effectively with any overcall after their side opens with 1NT.

The connerstone of the Lebensohl Convention is the use of two notrump (2NT) by responder as an artificial bid:

After an opponent overcalls your partner's 1NT opening, 2NT by you forces your partner to bid 3 clubs, after which you will further clarify your hand.

NOTE: Both the 2NT (responder's bid) and the 3C (opener's bid) must be alerted!

After a two-level overcall (2D, 2H, or 2S) of partner's 1NT opening, responder bids as follows using Lebensohl:

- (1) A **DOUBLE** is for penalties.

Example:	Partner	RHO	YOU
	1NT	(2H)	???

Your Hand: K106 A952 K1087 95

With this hand, you want to double the (2H) overcall for penalty. Your side has a minimum of 25 HCP, plus at least 6 hearts between the two hands. The opponents are going down big time, especially if they are vulnerable! Note that your side will probably make 3NT; but, the bigger score will be in setting the opponents several tricks.

- (2) A two-level suit bid is to play.

Example:	Partner	RHO	YOU
	1NT	(2H)	???

Your Hand: AQ986 86 974 872

With this hand, you would bid 2S to play. Note that if the opponent had not bid 2H, you would have bid two hearts, transferring your partner to 2S and then passed.

- (3) A three-level suit bid is forcing to game.

Example:	Partner	RHO	YOU
	1NT	(2H)	???

Your Hand: AJ5 52 AQ10984 95

With this hand, you would bid 3D, a game-forcing bid. Your side may want to explore a 6D slam.

- (4) A **two notrump** bid is artificial, forcing your partner to bid 3C. Both bids **MUST** be **ALERTED!**

The responder's rebids after the "forced 3C" bid are:

- (a) Pass with a weak hand and long clubs.

Example: Partner RHO YOU
1NT (2H) ???

Your Hand: Jxx x Jxx QJ10xxxx

With this hand, you would pass partner's 3C bid, showing a weak hand with a long club suit.

- (b) Any suit bid below the rank of the overcalled bid is a sign off.

Example: Partner RHO YOU
1NT (2H) ???

Your Hand: 52 74 KJ10653 984

With this hand, bid 2NT which forces 3C from partner. After which, sign off in 3D. Note that 3D is below the rank of the overcalled suit of (2H).

- (c) Any suit above the rank of the opponent's suit is game invitational.

Example: Partner RHO YOU
1NT (2H) ???

Your Hand: AQJxx xx Qxx xxx

With this hand, first bid 2NT and then bid 3S after the forced 3C bid by your partner. This bid shows an invitational hand with at least 5 spades. Note that the 3S bid is above the overcalled suit of (2H). It is an invitational bid. Partner may pass, bid 3NT with a heart stop and only 2S, or bid 4S if he has three spades and a maximum NT opener.

***In addition to the basic machinery of Lebensohl, if the responder has game going values, he has ways to :

- (a) Ask partner if s/he has a four-card major.
(b) Show a stopper in the opponent's suit.
(c) Tell his partner that he has NO stopper in the opponent's suit.

- (5) An **Immediate cue-bid** by responder is Stayman. It promises at least one four card major and **DENIES** a stopper in the opponent's suit.

Example: Partner RHO YOU
1NT (2H) ???

Your Hand: J1098 xx AQJ Q10xx

With this hand, bid 3H which is Stayman without a heart stopper.

- (6) A **Direct** jump to three notrump over an opponent's overcall **DENIES** a stopper in the opponent's suit; but, it shows values for game.

Example: Partner RHO YOU
1NT (2H) ???

Your Hand: Ax xxx AQx Jxxxx

With this hand, bid 3NT, which is game force with no heart stopper.

- (7) A 2NT bid followed by a cue-bid of the opponent's suit after your partner has made the "forced" 3C call is Stayman and **SHOWS** a stopper in the opponent's suit.

Example: Partner RHO YOU
1NT (2H) ???

Your Hand: Qxxx AJ xxx Axxx

With this hand, bid 2NT (Lebensohl) which forces partner to bid 3C. After the 3C bid, a three heart bid by you is Stayman and **SHOWS** a heart stopper.

- (8) **TWO NOTRUMP** followed by 3NT over your partner's forced 3C bid **SHOWS** a stopper in the opponent's suit and asks partner to pass and play the hand in 3NT.

Example: Partner RHO YOU
1NT (2H) ???

Your Hand: AJx A9 Qxxx J10xx

With this hand you would bid 2NT (Lebensohl) which forces your partner to bid 3C. After the 3C response, you would follow with 3NT to **SHOW** a heart stopper and values to be in game.

Look at the Convention Card where you see Lebensohl listed. If you mark that you play Lebensohl, in the blank beside it, most people mark "FAST" denies. If you bid 3NT directly over an opponent's overcall, you are telling your partner that you have game values but you are denying a stopper in the opponent's suit.

But, by bidding Lebensohl (2NT) followed by 3NT, you are telling your partner that you have game values and that you hold a stopper in the opponent's suit.

In summary: Over a natural two-level overcall:

1. A double is for penalties.
2. A 2-level suit bid is non-forcing.
3. A 3-level suit bid is forcing to game.
4. A 2NT bid is artificial—forcing opener to bid 3C. Responder can pass if he has a weak hand with long clubs, or he can rebid as follows: if he rebids a suit below the rank of the suit of the overcall, it is a signoff; if he rebids a suit above the rank of the suit of the overcall, it is game invitational.

In addition, with game-going values, responder can show a stopper, or lack of a stopper, in the opponent's suit as follows:

1. A direct cue bid is Stayman, asking opener to bid a 4-card major and **DENYING** a stopper in the opponent's suit. It is forcing to game unless the partnership fails to find a major suit fit and also lacks a stopper for 3NT. In that rare case, the responder may have to pass opener's bid of 4 of his better minor. That bid denies both a major suit and a stopper.
2. A direct jump to 3NT over an opponent's overcall shows the values for game; but, **denies** a stopper in the opponent's suit.
3. 2NT followed by a cue bid of the opponent's suit over partner's forced 3C bid is Stayman and **PROMISES** a stopper in the opponent's suit. Opener must either bid a 4-card major or 3NT.
4. 2NT followed by 3NT over partner's 3C bid **PROMISES** a stopper in the opponent's suit and the values to play in 3NT.

The above makes it easy to avoid a notrump contract when neither opener nor responder has a stopper in the opponent's suit. Yet, it in no way hinders the search for a major suit fit. In addition, it clearly defines which responses are non forcing, invitational or forcing. But, you do lose or give up the natural meaning of the 2NT bid (transfer to diamonds) or game invitational.

Recommended Resources:

Championship Bridge Series, No. 27, LEBENSOHL by Eric Rodwell

THE LEBENSOHL CONVENTION COMPLETE IN CONTRACT BRIDGE,
by Ron Anderson

Practice Exercises

Your partner opens 1NT and RHO bids (2S). Decide what you would bid with the following hands. Why?

- (a) xx Kxxxxx Jxx 10x
- (b) xx KJ98x Axx Qxx
- (c) Ax K109x QJxx xxx
- (d) xx Axx Qxxx KQxx

Your partner opens 1NT and RHO bids 2H. Decide what you would bid with the following hands. Why?

- (a) KJ10xxx x Qxx xxx
- (b) K10xxx x Qxx xxxx
- (c) Qxx K10 AJ10xx xxx
- (d) KJxx xx Axx Qxxxx

Answers to the above are on the next page.

Next Week: The Lebensohl Convention: Part II

Practice Exercises Answers

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|----|----|------------|-------------|-------------|-----|--------------------------------------|
| 1. | a. | 1NT
3C* | (2S)
(P) | 2NT*
3H | (P) | 3H is signoff showing weak hand |
| | b. | 1NT | (2S) | 3H | | Game Force Bid |
| | c. | 1NT
3C* | (2S)
(P) | 2NT*
3S | (P) | Stayman, promising spade stopper, GF |
| | d. | 1NT | (2S) | 3NT | | GV, no spade stopper |
| 2. | a. | 1NT
3C* | (2H)
(P) | 2NT*
3S | (P) | GI |
| | b. | 1NT | (2H) | 2S | | To Play |
| | c. | 1NT
3C* | (2H)
(P) | 2NT*
3NT | (P) | GV, with heart stopper |
| | d. | 1NT | (2H) | 3H | (P) | Stayman, no heart stopper |

*Bids must be alerted.