

The Lebensohl Convention—Part II (July 5, 2021)

Last week, I presented an overview of the Lebensohl Convention which provides a way for the responder to compete when an opponent has made a two-level overcall after his partner has opened 1NT. The convention allows you to compete for part-score contracts; to double the overcall for penalty; to find an eight card major suit fit; to differentiate between game invitational hands and game forcing hands; to be in 3NT with a stopper in the opponent's suit; and, most importantly, to NOT be in 3NT when neither hand has a stopper in the opponent's suit.

Let's begin today by doing a brief review of the basics of Lebensohl after an opponent has made a two-level overcall of 2D, 2H, or 2S.

1. Double = Penalty

When trying to decide whether to double, or not, always be aware of the vulnerability. If the vulnerability is equal or is nonvulnerable vs. vulnerable, the outcome could be very lucrative for your side. But, if you are vulnerable and they are nonvulnerable, then you have to be careful. You have to set them a minimum of four tricks to score 800 vs. the 600 you would have scored for being in 3NT making.

2. A new suit at the 2 level = To Play

Here, it is unfortunate that the strong NT hand will be on the board for all to see.

3. A new suit at the 3 level = Game Force, with no stopper in the overcalled suit.

4. Two notrump (2NT)* = Lebensohl. Partner is forced to bid 3C*. After the 3C bid:
 - Pass = weak club suit
 - New Suit below rank of the overcalled suit = weak hand
 - New Suit above rank of the overcalled suit = GI (8/9 HCP)
 - Cue-bid = Stayman, promising a stopper in the overcalled suit
 - 3NT = GV, promising a stopper in the overcalled suit

*Bids must be alerted.

You lose the natural 2NT bid as a game invitational (GI) hand or as the fourth suit relay to diamonds.

5. Direct cue-bid = Stayman with no stopper in the overcalled suit
6. Direct bid of 3NT = Game values with no stopper in the overcalled suit

The Two Club (2C) Overcall of 1NT

An opponent has bid two clubs (2C) over your partner's opening bid of 1NT. Before you take any action, it is very important for you to find out if the bid is natural, showing a club suit; or, if it is an artificial bid. If it is an artificial bid, then the bid absolutely must be alerted. Always ask what the bid means if you are at all in doubt as to its meaning. If there was a failure to alert the bid, call the director. You need to protect your rights.

- I. Artificial 2C Overcall: When the two-club overcall does NOT show clubs or clubs and a higher suit. 1NT (2C)* ???

Double = Stayman

*Bid must be alerted if it is artificial.

2D = Transfer to hearts

2H = Transfer to spades

2S = Relay to clubs

2N = Relay to diamonds

II. Natural 2C Overcall: When the two-club overcall shows a club suit or clubs and a higher suit.

NOTE: Lebensohl is on just as in the 2D, 2H, or 2S overcalls.

1NT (2C) ???

Double = Penalty

2 of a new suit = 5+ cards in the suit (0-7 HCP)

2NT* forces 3C*: Then a new suit = 5+ cards in the suit and GI (8/9 HCP)

3NT = Game Values with a club stopper

Bids must be alerted!

Direct bid of 3C: Stayman (may or may not have a club stopper)

Any three-level new suit = 5+ in the suit (10+ HCP), GF+; no club stopper

Three NT direct = Game Values but no stopper in clubs

By using Lebensohl, you have the opportunity to double a natural 2C overcall for penalty. Some very lucrative scores result from having this option available.

NOTE: Be sure to alert your double of 2C as a penalty double! Opponents get very angry otherwise.

Regarding two-suited overcalls such as Landy, Cappelletti, Brozel, etc., it is recommended to let the opponents bid out their hand to show where they want to play the hand. Then, you can double for penalty or use what is called “delayed Lebensohl.”

For Example:

Partner	Opponent	You	Opponent
1NT	(2C* showing some one-suited hand)	Pass	(2D)* (*must be alerted)
Pass	(P)	You can:	

- Double = Penalty
- Bid 2H, NF
- Bid 2S, NF
- 2NT* which forces 3C by partner
- 3C* Forced:
 - Pass = clubs, weak
 - 3D = Stayman, with D stop, GF+
 - 3H = hearts, GI
 - 3S = spades, GI
 - 3NT = Game Values, with D stop
- 3C = clubs, GF+
- 3D = Stayman without D stop
- 3H = hearts, GF+
- 3S = spades, GF+
- 3NT = Game Values, no D stop

Opener's Rebids After a Two-Level Overcall

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

Opener	Opponent	Responder	Opponent	* Must be alerted
1NT	(2H)	2NT*	(Pass)	

Initially, you are forced to bid 3C* (Lebensohl Convention). This is all you can do until your partner makes a subsequent bid. If he passes 3C*, he is showing a weak hand with six plus clubs. The hand will play in 3C unless the opponents make another bid.

Your Hand: AQ9 K105 KQJ87 32

- a) If your partner bids 3D over your forced 3C* response, he is showing a weak hand with six plus diamonds. You should pass. If the opponent now bids 3H, I think you could possibly bid 4D with your hand. Don't even think about bidding 5D. Your weak club holding precludes bidding 3NT.
- b) If your partner bids 3H over your forced 3C* response, he is showing a game forcing hand with four spades and a stopper in hearts. Holding only three spades, place the contract in 3NT. Should you have had four spades, your bid would have been 4S, despite knowing that both of you hold stopper(s) in the heart suit. The doubleton club warrants placing the contract in 4S as opposed to 3NT.
- c) If your partner bids 3S over your forced 3C* response, he is showing GI values and a 5+ card spade suit. With a minimum NT opening, you will have to decide whether to bid 4S or to pass. You do have prime cards, a doubleton in clubs, and excellent spade support. I probably would bid four spades holding this hand, especially in a team game format.
- d) If your partner bids 3NT over your 3C* response, he is showing game values and promises a stopper in hearts. He denies holding four spades. You should pass. The hand will play in 3NT.

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

Opener	Opponent	YOU	Opponent
1NT	(2D)	???	

Opener's Hand: AQx J10xx Axx KQxx

- a) If the responder bids either 2H or 2S, what is your rebid?

You should pass. Either bid shows a weak hand with five plus cards in the bid major. You absolutely must pass his bid. Despite the fact that you have good holdings in either major that he bid, you should still pass his bid. Should the opponents now bid 3D, I think you could safely raise partner's heart or spade bid to the three level.

- b) If the responder bids 3D directly, what is your rebid?

Partner is showing a game forcing hand, holding one or both four-card majors. He denies a stopper in the diamond suit. You should bid 3H, showing four or five hearts. If partner bids 3S at this point, he is showing that he has four spades and denying that he held 4 hearts.

NOTE: You could have four spades as well as four hearts. Since you do not hold four spades, you should bid 3NT.

Opener's Hand (repeated): AQx J10xx Axx KQxx

c) If the responder bids 2NT*, what is your rebid?

Three clubs (has to be alerted). You are absolutely forced, by the Lebensohl Convention, to respond with forced three club bid over partner's artificial bid of 2NT.

d) If the responder bids 3D over your 3C* bid, he is promising one or both four card majors; and, he is showing a stopper in diamonds. You should bid 3H, showing a four-five card heart suit. If partner now rebids 3NT, he is showing that he had four spades and denying that he had held four hearts. If you hold four spades, you should probably put the contract in four spades. However, because you hold a balanced hand (i.e., no doubleton), you could not be faulted for passing 3NT with the above hand.

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

Opener	Opponent	Responder	Opponent
1NT	(2H)	3H	(P)

a) Your Hand: A109 Jx AQ64 KJ98

Your partner's direct cue-bid is game-forcing Stayman and denies a stopper in hearts. You do not have four spades; nor, do you hold the all-important stopper in hearts. Because neither of you have a heart stopper, four clubs seems to be a reasonable bid. Your second choice is to bid 4S, intending to play in the 4-3 Moysian Fit.

Three NT is absolutely OUT. Should your partner have extra values in the minor suit which you have bid, he will carry on to game over your bid. If not, the hand will play best in four of a minor suit. Occasionally, when a game forcing bid has been made by your partner, you have to pass short of game.

b) Your Hand: Ax xxx AKJ10 KQ109

Your partner's direct cue-bid is game forcing Stayman and denies a stopper in hearts. You should bid 4H, asking partner to bid his better minor. Your hand is good enough to drive to the five level in the better minor suit trump fit.

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

Opener	Opponent	Responder	Opponent
1NT	(2S)	3NT	(P)

Your Hand: xxx KJxx KQx AQx

Your partner's direct three notrump bid is game forcing and it denies a stopper in spades or four hearts. Since you also do not hold a stopper in spades, the best bid you can make is 4C. The above situation presents a dilemma as to what is the best bid to make. You are hoping that partner has cards in the club suit. If he holds only three clubs, then you still may be in a better contract than playing in 3NT with no spade stopper in either hand.

Before leaving the topic of the Lebensohl Convention, I want to share two more uses of the artificial 2NT bid.

Recall when we studied the opening of a weak two bid by an opponent (2D, 2H or 2S) and your partner made a takeout double, a bid of 2NT* by you is Lebensohl, asking your partner to bid 3C*. Both bids must be alerted. Refer to the notes from the April 5, 2021, lesson on Preemptive Bidding—Part II.

The example below is a basic guide which you may find useful. Credit goes to John Markey for the bidding sequences.

(2D) X (P) ??

Pass = penalty

2H or 2S = weak (4+ major, 0-8 HCP)

2NT* (forces 3C*)

*both bids must be alerted

 P = weak clubs (4+clubs, 0-9 HCP)

 3D = Stayman, D stopper, GF+

 3H or 3S = 4+ major, 9-11 HCP, GI

 3NT = values for game in NT and promises a stopper in diamonds

3C = 4+ clubs, 10+ HCP

3D = Stayman, without a stopper in D, GF+

3H or 3S = 4+ major, GF+

3NT = values for 3NT, without D stopper.

**NOTE: Similar bids are available for a weak 2H or 2S opening bid that is doubled by your partner.

A third use of the Lebensohl Convention is useful when your partner has made a reverse bid, showing a powerful hand. A 2NT bid by responder to a reverse is artificial and conventional, forcing opener to bid 3C* which enables responder to sign off at the 3-level with a weak hand. The opener may elect to disregard responder's command to bid 3C with a maximum reverse, having been warned that the responder holds a minimum initial response. Any bid other than the 2NT* artificial bid is constructive and game-forcing allowing a natural development of bidding a game or slam.

Example:	Opener	Responder
	1C	1S
	2H	???

a) If responder holds: K10xxx AJ10x xxx x

then he should rebid 3H, showing four-card heart support and values. The bidding proceeds naturally until game contract is reached.

b) If responder holds: KQxxx J10x xx Jxx

then he should rebid 2S, showing a 5-card spade suit. This bid is F1.

c) If responder holds: Qxxxx Qx xxx Jxx

then he should respond 2NT* forcing opener to rebid 3C*, which he intends to PASS. Remember you cannot take a direct club preference which would show a game-forcing hand with club support.

Next Week: Playing NT Hands—Part I