

Bidding over Opponent's No Trump

When we first start playing duplicate, we think of an opponent's 1 NT opener as one thing: a chance for us to practice our passing. With that one bid, the opponent is announcing a strong, flat hand. This makes it seem very unlikely that your side is going to be able to outbid your opponents. So, why give them any additional information by bidding? You might even give the opponents a chance to double you for a HUGE penalty.

While this is all true, you start realizing some things as you start advancing. First and foremost, strength doesn't always carry the day. We all remember hands where we double a contract because our side has the majority of points, but the opponents somehow manage to pull it out. When that happens, it usually because the opponents have some unexpected distribution. Second, sometimes we can get a good score even if we don't make our contract. In fact, this is the whole motivation behind preemptive openers. Third, if the opponents have free rein in the bidding, they're likely to find the right contract. This is especially true with No Trump openers since most partnerships have a LOT of conventions available to help find the right spot: Stayman, Puppet Stayman, Transfers, Gerber, etc. If you can find a way to muck up their communication, you'll make it harder for them to find the right contract. Finally, as you advance, you will start seeing more partnerships using weaker and weaker ranges. While a 15 - 17 range might scare you, an 11 - 14 shouldn't: that's just a normal opening hand!

That has led players to develop a number of different ways to interfere with opponent's No Trump opener. They are all based on a number of items:

1. Should we keep a penalty double or use it for something else?
2. We want to be able to show both long single suits (6+) and two suited hands (5 - 4+)
3. We want to show majors over minors both because they score more, but also because they're more preemptive
4. We don't want the bidding to get too high since that will invite the opponents to double us for penalty rather than compete

In the rest of this lesson, we'll focus on three different commonly used bidding conventions: 1. DONT, 2. Cappelletti and 3. Meckwell. There are other ones out there (e.g. Astro, Landy, Brozel), but these 3 are both common and useful. However, if you and your partner are interested in adding this ability, you may want to look at all the options.

DONT - Disturb Opponent's No Trump

DON'T is the easiest of these 3 conventions. There are 4 basic bids:

Double - Shows an unknown 6+ card suit

2 ♠ - Shows a 6+ card ♠ suit

2NT - Shows 5-4 or 4-5 in the minors

2 ♣ / 2 ♦ / 2 ♥ - Shows length in the named suit and a higher one; at least 5 - 4 or 4 - 5

And, partner's responses are also pretty straight forward:

- Over double, partner is expected to bid 2 ♣ to allow DON'T bidder to show her suit. Any other bid (e.g. 2 ♦ or 2 ♥) is showing a 6+ suit of his own. It is NON-forcing.
- Over 2NT, responder picks his better minor
- Over 2 ♠, partner is expected to pass or continue the preempt with a weak hand and ♠ support
- Over the other bids, partner can pass with support. Without support, partner bids the next highest suit to find out DON'T bidder's other suit. Any other bid shows a 6+ card suit
- As you get more comfortable, you can add a 2NT forcing response

Advantages

- This is the easiest of the conventions to remember
- You can show any single suit or 5-4 holding
- Bidding almost always ends at the 2 level, so less likely to lead to a telephone number

Disadvantages

- There is no penalty double. This makes it less appropriate to use against weak NT openers
- The DON'T bidder can't make a forcing bid with most hands
- There are multiple ways to bid several hands. For example, 2 ♠ and Double - 2 ♣ - 2 ♠ both show 6+ ♠. So, you should discuss with your partner which is weaker. Generally, fast arrival (e.g. 2 ♠ above) is weaker because your goal is obstruction.
- Doesn't cause a lot of interference
- Partner doesn't know which suit is longer. Can lead to some 4 - 2 fits!
- Doesn't differentiate between majors and minors

While the vulnerability will affect the strength needed, DON'T tends to allow the weakest hands to get into the action because it keeps the auction so low. So, each of these hands could bid when playing DON'T:

♠ K Q 9 7
♥ Q 7 6 3 2
♦ 10 9
♣ 7 6

Bid 2♥: two suits with 1 bid

♠ K Q 9 7 3 2
♥ 7
♦ 10 9 8 7
♣ 7 6

Bid 2♠: weak hand, 6+ ♠, maximum interference!

♠ A K Q
♥ A Q 7
♦ A K 8
♣ K 7 6 2

Pass! But, don't hold your breath for this auction...

Cappelletti

This one is a little more complicated, but still pretty straight forward once you've played it for a while. With this one, there are 5 basic bids:

Double - Penalty, typically greater strength than the 1 NT opener. Although, can just be trick taking in the direct seat (e.g. a runnable 8 card suit). Partner is expected to Pass

2♣ - Single suited hand. Partner will typically bid 2♦. Any other bid, including Pass, shows a 6+ card suit and is non-forcing

2♦ - 5-4 or 4-5 in the majors. Partner will typically bid his better major. With equal length, bid ♥.

2♥/2♠ - Shows 5 in that major and 5 in a minor. Partner will usually either Pass with support or bid 2NT to let bidder show minor. Any other bid, including 3 of a minor, shows 6+ of that suit.

2NT - Shows 5-5 in the minors. Partner bids his better minor, with the default being 3♣.

Advantages

- Keeps the penalty double. Makes it especially useful against weak NT (top at 14 or less)
- Focuses on finding majors
- Tends to be more interfering than DONT

Disadvantages

- Lack of fit may force partnership to the 3 level.
- Gives up some 5 - 4 combinations
- More likely to lead to a disaster when you first start using it due to unnatural bids (e.g. neither 2♣ nor 2♦ shows that suit)
- Need to be VERY careful in the pass out seat, especially with Double

Since the biggest benefit of this convention is maintaining the penalty double, most partnerships don't try this convention out until they start seeing weak NT openers. With standard 15 - 17 1 NT openers, the restrictions on hand strength and distribution mean you can use it less frequently in those cases. So, when facing a 1 NT that shows 12 - 14 points, you could bid:

♠ K Q 9 7

♥ Q J 3 2

♦ A 10 9

♣ Q 6

Double in the direct seat, but Pass in the passout seat

♠ A Q 9 7 5

♥ K J 6 3 2

♦ 9

♣ 10 6

Bid 2♦ in either seat

♠ 9 8 7 5 2

♥ K Q J 10 6 3 2

♦ Void

♣ 10

Bid 2♣ in either seat planning to show your ♥. You're ♥ aren't strong enough to double, especially since you have no outside entry. The difference in strength of the majors makes 2♦ a dicey proposition.

The final one we'll look at is Meckwell. I'm just going to describe it here, but not get into too much detail. Developed by Eric Rodwell and Jeff Meckstroth, two of the best players in the world, it is the most popular expert convention since it covers all the desired characteristics above. However, it is also VERY complicated. So, I'm just showing here to let you know how far you can push this concept, not so that you can play it.

Over a Weak NT

Double - Penalty oriented, 14+ points

2♣ - A two-suiter in either ♣\♠ or ♥\♠

2♦ - A ♦ two-suiter

2♥\2♠ - Natural

2NT - A strong hand with both majors or 6+♣

3♣ - A ♣\♥ two-suiter

Over a Strong NT or by a Passed Hand

Double - One of 5 different hand types: 1. 6+♣, 2. 6+♦, 3. Both majors, 4. A good 2♠ or 5. Other good hand

2♣ - ♣ and a major

2♦ - ♦ and a major

2♥\2♠ - Natural

2NT - Both minors or a strong hand with both majors

This is just one reason why these gentlemen have been so successful together!

Quick Quiz

Playing DON'T, what is your bid with each of these hands?

1.

♠ 7 2

♥ K 10 3

♦ Q 2

♣ K J 9 7 5 2

Answer: This a good hand to **Double** with. You've got a 6+ card suit, a decent number of points. Plus, you're going to Pass partner's 2♣ bid, so the bidding won't get very high. You also wouldn't mind a ♣ lead if partner gets to lead.

2.

♠ 7 2

♥ K 10 3

♦ J 10 9 7 5 2

♣ Q 2

Answer: This about as bad a hand as you might want to **Double** with. Yes, you've got a 6+ card suit, but do you really want a ♦ lead if partner gets to lead? Plus, telling the opponents about you're unexpected distribution can help them play the hand better, so **Pass** is a close second. In particular, you might do well to **Pass** in the direct seat since your left hand opponent hasn't bid yet. In the pass out seat, you are free to **Double** since you're fighting for a part score given the opponent's intervening Pass.

3.

♠ Q 10 6 2

♥ K J 10 7 3

♦ J 10

♣ Q 2

Answer: This a good hand to bid 2♥ with showing both majors. You have the right shape in the majors (5-4) and strength. Plus, this bid blocks a LOT of the opponent's bidding conventions.

4.

♠ Q 10 6 2

♥ 2

♦ J 10 9

♣ K J 10 7 3

Answer: This a good hand to bid 2♣ with showing ♣ and a higher suit. If partner doesn't like your ♣'s, you'll correct her 2♦ bid to 2♠. You have the right shape and enough strength since you'll b stopping at the 2 level. You're singleton is also quite valuable.

5.

♠ Void

♥ 3

♦ J 10 9 7 5 2

♣ K J 8 7 6 2

Answer: This a good hand to bid 2NT with. Somebody has a TON of major cards, so you want to maximize the interference. That takes 2♣ out of the picture. Yes, you only have 3 points, but the massive length in the minors compensates for that. Plus, partner is going to pick her better minor, so you're very likely to have a 9+ card fit. That will make it VERY difficult for the opponent's to double you, even at the 3 level.

6.

♠ A Q 10 7

♥ A K J

♦ Q 6

♣ 10 7 5 2

Answer: This the hand you have to give up with DON'T. So, you must **Pass** in tempo.

Playing Cappelletti, what is your bid with each of these hands? Opponents are playing a weak NT (12-14)

1.

♠ 7 2

♥ K 10 3

♦ Q 2

♣ K J 9 7 5 2

Answer: This hand is strong enough to bid 2 ♣, single suit. Any weaker, and **Pass** would be the bid since Partner is going to respond 2 ♦, which will force you to the 3 level.

2.

♠ 7 2

♥ K 10 3

♦ J 10 9 7 5 2

♣ Q 2

Answer: This hand is just barely strong enough to bid 2 ♣, single suit. This is a different consideration than #1 since you can Pass partner's 2 ♦, which will keep you at the 2 level. However, all the same considerations as the ones discussed in #2 above as why you might want to **Pass**.

3.

♠ Q 10 6 2

♥ K J 10 7 3

♦ J 10

♣ Q 2

Answer: This hand is perfect to bid 2 ♦, both majors. It's not quite as preemptive as the 2 ♥ DON'T bid, but it's pretty close.

4.

♠ Q 10 6 2

♥ 2

♦ J 10 9

♣ K J 10 7 3

Answer: Pass. Yes, you have the right length for a 2 ♠ bid. But, if partner doesn't have support, you're hand isn't strong enough to force to the 3 level.

5.

♠ Void

♥ 3

♦ J 10 9 7 5 2

♣ K J 8 7 6 2

Answer: 2NT, just like DON'T.

6.

♠ A Q 10 7

♥ A K J

♦ Q 6

♣ 10 7 5 2

Answer: Double, for penalty. This is the hand you want when the opponent's open their silly weak 1 NT!