

Two Over One

D.O.N.T.

Disturb the Opponents Notrump

When the opponents open the auction with a call of 1NT, they generally have a prepared system of bids available to help them find good contracts. Even novices with less than 5 masterpoints can wield Stayman and Jacoby Transfers to describe major suit positions and point count. More experienced players may master complex systems of responses to 1NT that allow them to describe major-minor holdings, shapely major-major holdings, various minor suit holdings, a variety of runouts, and an array of slam tries. But most of these systems, simple or fancy, can usually be totally untracked by the very simple step of interjecting an overcall between opener and responder.

Even if the opening side does not intend to trot out a system bid, you simply cannot afford to let the opponents play 1NT at will. If they are right in thinking that 1NT is a good place for them, then how can it be a good place for you? Of course, they are not always right to be in 1NT; in that case you are right to let them play. But for those times when 1NT is a good place for the opponents, then we would like to bump them into a less desirable contract, or perhaps even wrest the offense away from them and play in a partscore contract of our own.

To ease partner's burden of balancing in the 4th seat we would like a way for the first defender to overcall whenever he holds a hand suitable for balancing in advance. Whenever the first defender can overcall in the direct seat, his overcall will yield the additional advantage of breaking up the opponents' prepared system of responses. One of the methods used to this end is the popular Hamilton convention, or Capelletti as it is sometimes known. But many players worry about this convention since it will often force the defense to bid to the 3-level on scant values,

whereupon they may end up undoing the advantage they were seeking to create.

The DONT convention (Disturb the Opponents No Trump), which avoids sojourns to the 3 level, has been been touted by Larry Cohen in his work on the Law of Total Tricks. Cohen argues that the two level can be protected by the Law, while the 3 level may not be. He therefore advocates DONT as a convention preferable to Hamilton, and to others that do not offer the defenders the same chance to stay at the 2-level. DONT has probably replaced Hamilton as the most popular defense against the 1NT opening.

The DONT Schema

Double.....Any One Suiter

Partner will bid 2 clubs.
The DONT bidder may pass if his suit is clubs, or he will correct to the suit he actually holds.

2 Clubs.....Clubs and any higher suit

2 Diamonds....Diamonds and any higher suit

2 Hearts.....Hearts and any higher suit

2 Spades.....Spades

Weaker than a double followed by 2 spades.

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Answering the DONT Bid

If partner using DONT has bid a suit, and if you have 3-card support for the suit bid, then just pass. Accept this fit. Don't go hunting around for some better fit, and don't try to get from a minor to a major unless you are positive that you can. So let's say you hold this hand:

Q975 J854 A3 J95

If partner using DONT bids 2 clubs and the opponent passes, you should pass also. Yes, if partner's higher suit is a major, you have a better fit and can try for a higher score. But what if partner is 5-5 in the minors? Moving from 2 clubs could be a disaster. If, when you are holding the same hand, partner's DONT bid had been 2 diamonds, then you bid 2 hearts. Partner will either pass you or bid 2 spades, depending on what his major suit is.

If you held

and partner bids 2 diamonds as DONT, then you should bid 2 hearts and let partner name his major, because you are certain that he has a major. If partner's original DONT bid were 2 hearts, showing both majors, then just pass with equal length. Don't bother moving to spades because you have the queen instead of the jack. Just let it be. Partner's hearts may be better than his spades for all you know.

Just accept the first fit you find, whether in a minor or a major, unless you are certain that a major suit fit exists, or unless you are certain a better fit exists.

But what if partner bids a suit in which you lack 3-card support? Now you must try to

move to a fit that does exist without skipping over any potential fit. To do this:

When lacking a fit with partner's first of two suits, bid your cheapest 3-card suit.

So let's look at an example. You hold the following hand:

A87 J63 86 Q10865

The opponent has opened 1NT and your partner has overcalled 2 diamonds. You lack a fit with diamonds, but you have support for either major. So bid 2 hearts. Partner will pass or bid 2 spades.

By the way, all of the initial DONT bids, whether a double or a suit overcall, must be alerted. Likewise, if you do not pass and accept the first suit offered, partner must alert your bid. If asked, he will explain that you may have bid a 3-card suit.

So much, then, for accepting a fit when partner shows a two-suiter, and so much for bidding your cheapest 3-card suit when you lack a fit for the first suit and must hunt for the other. But what if partner has doubled 1NT to show a single suited hand? The DONT Schema states that you must bid 2 clubs so that partner may either pass you (if his long suit is clubs), or else he will next bid his suit. But if the opponent acts ahead of you, you are no longer obliged to bid at all. You were only bidding 2 clubs to keep the auction open for your partner. Now that the opponent has bid, he has discharged this responsibility for you. Partner will get a chance to bid again if he should decide to do so. He may decide NOT to act in this circumstance since he has already succeeded in disturbing the opponent's notrump.

Let's say, however, that your partner has doubled to show a single-suited hand and the

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opponent has bid 2 clubs. First of all, be aware that this is not necessarily clubs and not necessarily Stayman. Partnerships will treat this 2 club bid differently over your partner's double. If you are not going to bid, just pass; but remember that you may want to ask later what the bid meant.

But you may want to bid. Now I have just told you that you don't HAVE to bid when the opponent keeps the auction open for you. But you may have something to say. All you can have to say, however, is that you have your own long suit of 6 cards or more. If you do, then you may bid it.

opener	partner	responder	you
1NT	dbl	2♣	2♠

You have 6 or more spades that you reckon are probably just as good as partner's 6-card suit, or even better, and you want to play there. Any suit you would have bid instead of 2 spades would have shown some other one-suited hand and identified your suit outright.

When the DONT Bid is Doubled

When you partner makes a DONT bid it may be doubled. Generally speaking, this double will be a penalty double, but not necessarily. The opposing partnership may have some meaning other than penalty by special agreement. But their meaning of the double doesn't matter to you. You still must treat it as if it were a penalty double since the other partner may want to convert a conventional double to a penalty double.

So, if partner's overcall has been doubled, then pass if you have a fit, redouble if you want him to bid his 2nd suit, or bid your own suit if you have a 6-carder. This will allow partner to make the best decision. If you have passed and

the double comes back around to him, he can pass confidently, knowing that you hold trump support. Otherwise, he is receiving some other specific information from you that he can evaluate and act upon.

Observation on the DONT Double

When the action over 1NT is double, partner is showing a single-suited hand containing a 6-card suit, or perhaps a very good 5-card suit. Since the double has this special conventional meaning, you cannot double 1NT for penalties. You have lost that option. DONT bidders do not feel that this is a problem. They suggest that penalty doubles of 1NT are quite unusual and that they place a substantial burden on the defenders to defend correctly to be assured that the contract is actually defeated. Moreover, experienced opponents have cooperative methods they can employ to escape to a fit when doubled uncomfortably in 1NT. All things considered, then, not much seems to be lost by forgoing the penalty double of 1NT.

This would all be reasonable enough if the opponents are playing 1NT within the standard ranges of 15 to 17 or of 16 to 18. But quite a few pairs play weak notrumps, where the range of the 1NT opening bid is 13 to 15, or perhaps 12 to 14, and perhaps even 10 to 12. Against these weaker notrump openings, the loss of a penalty double creates quite a problem. The occasions of wanting to double will arise more often. And since you have less strength to defeat, the defense may not be as precarious. Besides that, you and partner will find the need to show each other good strength when a weak 1NT opener has preempted the entire 1-level.

So here is an important partnership

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agreement when you are playing DONT:

Play DONT against opponents who utilize the standard notrump ranges. Play Hamilton (to retain the penalty double) when playing against weak notrump ranges.

You are allowed to play both systems. Look at your convention card. It offers you a chance to signify that you play one system against strong notrump openings and another system against weak notrump openings.

DONT compared to Hamilton

Notice another difference between DONT and Hamilton. Playing Hamilton you present the major suit as the preferred trump suit, and you use any minor suit as the “fallback” position if the major suit will not work out. But DONT presents the minor suit first and offers it as the trump suit, which means you may miss a major suit fit. Cohen argues that you don’t care if you miss a major suit fit. The important thing was to disturb the notrump. Having done so, you have taken an advantage. Perhaps you will miss out on a top score, but at least you should still get a favorable result.

Let’s add to this. Just because the DONT bidder may have a major suit doesn’t mean that the partners have a major suit fit. Remember, you feel attracted to DONT exactly because it allows you stay on the 2 level. The price you pay for this comfort is an occasional case of missing a major suit fit. This advantage of playing at the 2 level is considerable since the 3-level may be trouble when you have to go there.

But there is one more advantage you gain from the lower level approach of DONT. It will allow you to interfere more often than will

Hamilton. Remember the basic concept behind overcalling the opponent’s 1NT when it announces a superior hand: you are putting up your shape as protection against the notrump bidder’s strength. Ideally, to overcall the 1NT bid you will hold a two-suiter with 5-5 shape. When playing Hamilton, where you know you may be compelled to flee to the 3 level, it is more important to have this ideal shape. When you aren’t going to come off of the 2-level, you can more freely bid with 5-4 shape at least, and in some circumstances perhaps even with 4-4.

Shape and Strength of the DONT Bidder

The ideal shape for the DONT bidder is 5-5. This would afford the maximum protection and more readily assure that an 8-card fit may be found. But if you always wait for this shape, then you will be overcalling with considerable less frequency and failing to enjoy the advantages of disturbing the opponents notrump. Since you are starting out cheaply and accepting the fit first found, employing a method that keeps you at the 2-level, go for more frequent disruption and make your DONT call when 5-4, especially when your honors are in your suits.

But should you consider lowering your standard all the way down to 4-4? Now you can interfere even more often, but you would no longer have exceptional shape to offer you protection from a storm of opposing strength. I assure you that skilled opponents will have the methods and the will to punish you for unwise disruption. Gauge your opponents and especially gauge their methods of handling disruption. Look at their convention card. If they are playing

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Lebensohl to combat your intervention, then they will have methods of landing on their feet when you poke your nose in. Since your disruption may cause but a nuisance, the additional risk of interfering with 4-4 hardly seems warranted. This is especially true since the double of your DONT bid by a player using Lebensohl is for penalties.

However, if the opponent's convention card indicates they are playing "Stolen Bid," then you should DONT with the greatest frequency possible. Stolen Bid does not offer its users any sense of direction at all unless they can double your bid. And when they do double, it isn't for penalty, so they will be bidding you out of trouble. This is an ideal combination of circumstances for the DONT bidder—disruption when you aren't doubled and safety when you are. Against the Stolen Bid gang, use DONT with 4-4 shape, especially if you are not vulnerable.

So much for shape. What about strength? Is there a lower strength limit or an upper strength limit? In my opinion there is. You may be either too weak or too strong. But this is not the position taken by Cohen in To Bid or Not To Bid. In Chapter 4 he states, "even if you have zero(!) high-card points, the LAW will protect you if you can find an eight-card fit on the two level." Neither does Cohen set an upper point count limit, so the inference follows that there is none. I will tell you this, if I am playing against Larry Cohen and he opens 1NT, I am not going to welcome my partner bidding with zero points. Well, it might be okay if Cohen and

his partner are playing "Stolen Bid," but what do you think the chances are of that?

When a skilled partnership opens 1NT and they have the values and fit to play and make game, they are not going to be deterred by an intervening DONT call. They will swat it off like a fly. Perhaps they will fail to find a close slam that the rest of the field will likely not bid, but DONT does not gain much at all when prepared opponents have the lion's share of cards. The biggest gain from DONT comes when the defense can wrest away a partscore contract and make it, or else go down 1, particularly when they are undoubled and not vulnerable. Getting to a playable partscore when the points are divided is the chief benefit of DONT.

The chief threat to the DONT bidder is to be doubled off and set when the other side cannot bid and make a game. Down 1 doubled and not vulnerable will probably still be good for the DONT pair, but down 2 will be a poor result, and down 1 doubled vulnerable will also be bad. Wouldn't it be something to bid with zero points when partner has a juicy 17 or 18 and will likely stop the opponents cold on defense. But on offense he can't reach your hand and will constantly be leading away from all he has. Poor guy. Later, away from the table, he may express disapproval of your bidding with nothing. Protection under the Law doesn't mean much when you've been mugged.

Have no worse than an 8-loser hand to interfere with DONT. If vulnerable, have better shape or bid only when your honors are in your suits.

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I also suggest that you restrain yourself from DONT when you hold 13 or more points. Consider the circumstances of your opponents. They may hold the balance of power and have the cards to bid game. Or, they may have but half the deck, arguing that your side should be in the auction. Or, they may just short of enough power for game, say 23 or 24 points. How does this effect you?

Let's say that your partner has zero. Your bid with 13 points was useless because the opponents will find and bid game, unless they lack a stopper and don't HAVE a game, in which case they will double you for a juicy penalty.

So now lets say you don't act and the next player passes. Your partner will now be inclined to balance, using DONT agreements, since now you are not likely to be doubled and you stand to wrest away the partscore. You are in the circumstance of the greatest potential gain, encouraging partner to act.

Let's say, finally, that you pass with 13 and the left hand opponent makes an invitational bid, which opener declines. You just dodged a bullet. Had you spoken up, this is exactly the circumstance where you are going to find yourself doubled and in trouble. Opponents playing Lebensohl double DONT bids when they have just invitational values; and openers with insufficient points to bid game just pass and set you.

With 13 points you are too strong to make a DONT call. If the opponents can neither bid game nor invite game over your pass, then you have a partner in the balancing seat. If they can bid game or even invite one, then you never wanted to get into the auction.

When To Bid Game

Don't even worry about bidding game. When opener has 16 HCP, only 24 remain, too few to support game even when opener's partner is totally broke. Well, of course, that's not entirely true. There are values for shape available. If you and partner have just the right hands in the right circumstance you are going to sometimes take 10 tricks in your major suit. It is even possible for the partner of the DONT bidder to bid 2NT with 15 points and for the DONT bidder to relay information about his hand in an attempt to reach games in this type of circumstance. If you want detail about this, I suggest you use the internet to look into it. But consider this: everytime you try for this game and decide you can't make it, guess where you are? You're at the 3-level, the very place you never wanted to go. If you are really tempted to bid game, just rely on losing trick count. Since the DONT bidder promised an 8-loser hand, you can try the game with a 4-4 or 5-4 fit and a 6-loser hand. But unless you are using losing trick count, I don't think the fancy game tries are worth it. Here is Cohen's remark on the subject: "Getting to game the one time in ten that it makes will gain one swing and lose nine."

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DONT: A Brief Summary

Use DONT to interfere over an opposing NT opener of 15 – 17 or 16 – 18 HCPs.

Requirements of the DONT bidder in the direct seat:

- Less than 13 HCP
- No worse than an 8-loser hand
- Either a long suit (6+ cards)
or 5-4 shape

The DONT bids:

- Double.....any single-suited hand (partner will bid 2 clubs if opponent passes)
- 2 clubs.....clubs and any higher suit
- 2 diamonds....diamonds and any higher suit
- 2 hearts.....hearts and spades
- 2 spades.....weaker than a double followed by 2 spades

Requirements of the DONT bidder in the balancing seat:

- Balance if at all reasonable.
- Vulnerability is an issue. Have a clear balance if vulnerable.
- Double is a long suit, 2 clubs is clubs and a higher etc.,
but points are not an issue and shape may be less than optimal.

Responder just passes the first fit found (3-card support) unless he is certain a better fit or a better suit will be present.

When lacking a fit with partner's first suit, responder bids his cheapest 3-card suit.

If partner has doubled and the opponent HAS bid, then pass is expected. If responder does bid a suit, it is 6-cards or more and offered as the trump suit.

If the DONT bid is doubled, responder's pass promises at least 3 cards and is expected. Redouble by responder asks for partner's 2nd suit.

A bid by responder is a 6-card suit (perhaps a good 5) offered as the trump suit.

Don't worry about missing game. Settle for a partscore almost always.