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Toronto N.A.B.C. I/N Lecture

A Short List of Conventions you Need



Why do such an exercise? The main reason is years of watching players at all levels screw up systems and conventions. Bridge is a game of mistakes. The winners are the ones who make the fewest mistakes! We all make enough errors in judgment, declarer play lapses and defensive blunders, why add another unnecessary category?

My basic advice is to only play conventions that your partnership needs and that both of you understand as completely as possible, so even this list might be too long. Even Meckstroth & Rodwell have eliminated special bids from their repertoire over the last several years due to infrequency of occurrence. I love a Mini-Roman variation that I invented where opener shows a 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0 with a short Major and 10-16 HCP. It works well but it is so infrequent as to suggest playing a 2D opening as something else.

Please note that I never suggest not having discussions and agreements. All of our bridge partnerships have to talk about the meanings and strengths of our natural sequences. We need to know the values shown by many bids. What minimum lengths do bids promise in the bid suits? Most pairs spend too little time here and too much time on conventions.

I'm assuming we play takeout doubles, a strong 2 Club opener and weak two-bids as part of everyone's bidding repertoire. Blackwood is omnipresent. Additionally, almost all players play Stayman and Jacoby Transfers.

Having said that, here is my "short" list:

- 1) Negative Doubles
- 2) Responsive Doubles
- 3) A game forcing raise in the Majors
- 4) A forcing raise in the minors
- 5) Drury
- 6) Fourth Suit Forcing
- 7) Some way to show both Majors over their 1NT
- 8) A few ways to deal with the opponents' competition.



1) Negative Doubles

Negative doubles only occur when our side opens, the opponents overcall and the responder doubles. The essence of this double is you lack either the length or strength or both for a suit bid. The only decision is how high do we play these.

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| e.g. 1 minor – (1Heart) – 1 Spade
1 minor – (1Heart) – Double | - Best played showing 5+ Spades
- Shows exactly 4 spades |
| 1 minor – (2 Spades) – 3 Hearts
1 minor – (2 Spades) – Double | - Forcing with 5+ Hearts
- Either four hearts and enough HCP to compete at the 3-level (10+) or 5+ Hearts and 8-11 HCP |

The higher the double, the less specific the shape promised. In Bridge, as in Life, it is an imperfect world. I suggest playing negative doubles over overcalls up to 4D.

2) Responsive Doubles

Responsive doubles only occur when their side opens, our side overcalls or doubles and their responder raises opener. Usually you show the unbid suits when partner overcalls or specific suits if partner has doubled. The essence of this double is you want to bid, but do not know what to bid. We all know if we guess to bid one of our suits, partner's fit will be in some other suit (see Murphy's Law ☺).

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|---|---|
| e.g. (1 Club) – 1Heart – (2 Clubs) – 2 Spades | - Natural and forcing or not forcing depending on your preference. If played NF, usually only playable in Spades. |
| (1 Club) – 1Heart – (2 Clubs) – Double | - Perfect hand is Spades and Diamonds; tolerance for Hearts (2 cards) and some values. |
| (1 Club) – Double– (2 Clubs) – Double | - Takeout, usually with both Majors |
| (1 Heart) – Double– (2 Hearts) – Double | - Takeout, usually with both minors |
| (1 Club) – Double– (1 Spade) – Double | - Most play this as penalty, although some play it as takeout |

3) A game forcing raise in the Majors

It is always important that information is shared between partners. If my partner opens 1 Spade and I hold: S AKT5 H Q987 D AJ2 C T5; I know we belong in spades and at least at the game level. Responding 2 Diamonds on a three card suit, or 2 Hearts on a four card suit are both unattractive. The easiest method here is also the most common nowadays. A 2NT response shows 4 trumps, at least an opening hand and usually no side shortness. It also lets partner know what I knew when she opened 1 Spade.

4) A forcing raise in the minors

Again, it is important that information is shared between partners. If my partner opens 1 Diamond and I hold: S T7 H AQ8 D AJT82 C K93; I already know we belong in some game, probably 3NT or 5 Diamonds or possibly slam. Inverted minors are one simple forcing raise of the choices out there. Playing that convention, 2D by you says you have no four card Major, good diamonds and ten or more HCP. Some people play it as Game forcing for simplicity and they play 3D would be a limit raise with 10-11 HCP. It also lets partner know some of what I knew when he opened 1 Diamond.

5) Drury

Years ago World Champion Mike Passell told me “You can’t play bridge without playing Drury”. If it’s good enough for him, it’s good enough for me and you.

The simple version is a 2C response to a Major by a passed hand is artificial and asks how good a hand the 3rd or 4th suit opener has.

6) Fourth Suit Forcing (FSF)

For several years, standard bidding and 2/1 Game Force have played a 2nd round jump by responder as invitational. This means that often we have to fake a bid to force the auction. There are 24 fourth suit forcing situations where the last bid is possibly artificial and forcing. Nine of them involve more simple bidding. The other 15 involve either reverses or 2 level responses and may have special meanings. In the first nine cases the last bid always shows a strong hand:

1C-1D-1H-1S (perhaps a special case)

1C-1D-1S-2H

1C-1H-1S-2D

1C-1H-2D-2S

1D-1H-1S-2C

1D-1H-2C-2S

1D-1S-2C-2H

1H-1S-2C-2D

1H-1S-2D-3C

1C-1S-2D-2H

1C-1S-2H-3D

1D-1S-2H-3C

1D-2C-2H-2S

1D-2C-2S-3H

1H-2C-2D-2S

1H-2C-2S-3D

1H-2D-2S-3C

1H-2D-3C-3S

1S-2C-2D-2H

1S-2C-2H-3D

1S-2D-2H-3C

1S-2D-3C-3H

1S-2H-3C-3D

1S-2H-3D-4C

(not a very efficient auction)

Openers third bid should be the most natural bid they can make. The big priorities are showing delayed support for responders first bid or showing a stopper in the fourth suit. One of the key things to playing fourth suit forcing is that responder tells with her third bid why she used FSF. You will have to decide if FSF is just a one round force, or more simply forcing to game.

7) Some way to show both Majors over their 1NT

In my opinion this is necessary and the other details are not that important. You would get along fine if you played Landy where 2C shows the Majors and everything else is natural, although I have no objection to most other more complicated methods, as long as both of you understand and remember them.

8) A few ways to deal with the opponents' competition.

This has become important because nowadays the opponents bid all the time. You can actually use their bidding to your advantage. It gives you information about the placing of high cards and the shape of the hand. Also you have some new bids you never had if they passed: Double or Redouble or possibly cue-bidding their suit(s). Without getting into details, you might want to look into Unusual vs. Unusual, Anti-Michaels, Lebensohl and cue-bidding when they overcall.

I believe with this perhaps not-so-short list of conventions, good judgment and competent play and defense, you could play against anyone. The only convention I might add is "Splinters", which are very important for good slam bidding, and therefore more important at teams than pairs.

Barry C. Harper
Regina, Saskatchewan
Canada



bcharper@hotmail.com



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