

CONVENTIONS used by some players at Meon Bridge Club

Playing Standard ACOL at Meon Bridge club, you are sure to come across opponents using **Conventions** of which you should be aware so that, when they arise, you and your partner can decide whether to bid or pass, and how to play your cards.

When asked to explain an alerted (Conventional) bid, bidder's partner must give a full explanation, so that the enquirer is given the relevant information to enable him/her to decide whether or not to bid. That said, remember that to make an enquiry during the auction (at your turn to bid) your hand should be of sufficient quality to be considering whether to enter the bidding. Otherwise, delay your enquiry until the bidding auction has finished.

Benjaminised Acol

- 1) **Playing BENJI, an opening bid of 2♥ or 2♠** shows 6 cards in the Heart or Spade suit and either 5-9 or 6-10 HCP. Partner's response of 2NT should have 15+ HCP, showing interest in a 'game' contract, and asks partner to describe his hand further. **OGUST rebids** are as follows: 3♣ shows low HCP & poor suit (i.e. fewer than 2 of the 3 top Honours in his suit), 3♦ = low HCP & good suit (2 of top 3 Honours in suit), 3♥ = better HCP & poor suit, 3♠ = better HCP & good suit, 3NT = Top 3 Honours in suit. (**Note:** Not everyone uses OGUST, so you may need to ask what the re-bids show – perhaps a feature, such as an 'outside' Ace or a Singleton.)
- 2) **In Benji, a 2♣ opening is strong**, but usually weaker than the Game Forcing 2♦ opening (though some players play Reverse Benji, where 2♣ is stronger than 2♦). The 2♣ opening, (a) when balanced, may show 19-20 HCP (but some play it as much stronger); and (b) when unbalanced, should have the strength of at least 8 Playing Tricks, containing 1 or possibly 2 long strong suits (i.e. the hand will make 8+ tricks without any tricks in partner's hand, allowing for a defined (Orange Book) distribution of the missing cards in the long suit: 0 cards in partner's hand and the second best distribution between opponents. (**Note:** Such a hand **additionally** needs at least the normal HCP strength for an opening 1-level bid, in order to be opened as a Strong Two.)
- 3) **The Game Forcing 2♦ opening** shows 23+ HCP when balanced, and otherwise at least 10 Playing Tricks without help from partner's hand.

Lucas Twos

Playing **Lucas Twos**, an opening bid of 2♥ or 2♠ normally has 5-9 or 6-10 HCP, depending on partnership agreement, with **at least 5 cards in the Major suit bid and 4+ cards in a Minor suit**. Partner's raise of the Major to the 3-level is pre-emptive. Otherwise, a response of 2NT asks opener to bid the undisclosed Minor suit. Instead, if responder has no fit in the

Major suit, he/she may bid another 6-card suit – to play! **Note:** Partnership agreements may vary from this, so you may need to ask.

Multi-2 Diamonds

Playing **Multi-2 Diamonds**, a 2♦ opening will show either 1 weak and 2 strong options or 2 weak and 1 strong option. Commonly, it shows a Weak 2 in Hearts or Spades (usually a 6-card suit in Hearts or Spades and a defined range of 5-9 or 6-10 HCP), a Strong 2 opening in an undisclosed Minor or a Strong balanced hand, maybe 19-20 or 21-22 HCP. (**Note:** Some partnerships may play other specified options instead.)

Defending against a Multi 2 Diamond opening, some experts recommend immediate overcalls with suitable hands. A suggested defence can be found in Wikipedia.

The Strong 1♣ Precision Opening

Using this Convention, a **1♣ opening bid shows 16+ HCP**, whereas a 1♦ opening shows 11-15 HCP. Responding to **1♣**, partner's 1♦ response shows 0-7 HCP. The Convention has a complicated system of rebids and responses. A simple 2-suited defence is to double to show the Major suits, or bid 1NT to show the Minor suits.

Other 1♣ openings

Some players playing a 5-card Major system may open 1♣ as a 'better Minor'. They may hold only 3 cards in the Club suit and partner does not need to alert this. Other players, also playing a 5-card Major system, open **1♣** even though the hand may have no cards in the Club suit, and this must be alerted by partner.

4th suit forcing

Many players **use a bid of the 4th suit** (i.e. when they have already bid the other 3 suits in an auction) as a **forcing bid**, showing no particular holding in the suit but with a strong enough hand to force partner to make a further bid. Sometimes the '4th suit bidder' is looking for a NT contract without a safe holding in the 4th suit, sometimes he just wishes partner to describe his hand further, perhaps to discover whether they have a 5-3 fit in a suit already bid, for instance. (Note: After the bidding sequence by partners of **1♣ 1♦ 1♥ 1♠**, the **Spade bid is not normally treated as 4th suit forcing**, whereas in any other bidding sequence - for example **1♣ 1♦ 1♥ 2♠** or **1♥ 1♠ 2♣ 2♦**) by a pair who play this Convention, a **bid of the 4th suit is 4th suit forcing.**

The Jacoby response to 1♥/1♠

Using **Jacoby**, a **2NT** response to partner's opening **1♥/1♠** (when there has been no interference by the opponents) shows a good suit fit and game force, i.e. at least a good 12+HCP and no worse than 7 losers using the Losing Trick count. This enables an early investigation of slam possibilities, if warranted. If Opener's rebid is a jump to game in the relevant Major, that may imply (according to partnership agreement) that he has a 'light' opening hand.

McKendrick response to 1NT

There are different versions of McKendrick, but the one often used is a **2♠** response to a 1NT opening from partner which shows **either** an ordinary 11 HCP hand **or** a long 6-card Minor suit (weak), asking opener to bid 2NT with 12-13 HCP or **3♣** with 14 HCP. Then Responder, with 11 HCP, will pass partner's 2NT rebid or convert **3♣** to 3NT. If instead, Responder has a weak hand with a long Minor suit, he will convert as necessary to **3♣/3♦**. (**Note:** With an 11 HCP hand, responder does best to examine his/her hand to assess its playing strength and to consider Stayman when the hand contains a 4-card Major etc., rather than be rigid.)

5-card Puppet Stayman

In response to a strong 2NT opening bid, responder bids 3♣ to ask whether partner has a 5-card or a 4-card Major, or neither. Holding **a) a 5-card Major**, Opener now bids **3♥/3♠** whereas **b) holding one or both 4-card Majors**, Opener bids **3♦**, but **c) with not even a 4-card Major**, Opener bids 3NT. Using this information:

Responder may have a 5-3 fit in case a) above and can therefore bid game in Opener's 5-card Major (or consider Slam, if warranted),

With a 4-card Major and a **3♦** response from Opener (see case **b)** above), Responder will now bid the 4-card Major he hasn't got (hence the name 'Puppet' Stayman), so that his partner can choose whether to play in 3NT or in the unbid Major, if they do have an 8-card fit). However, holding both 4-card Majors (and now knowing that Opener has at least one), Responder's second bid will be **4♦**, which asks Opening partner to choose the 4-card Major, i.e. bid game in **♥/♠**.

When Responder has a hand containing 5 Spade cards and 4 Heart Spades, how can he tell Partner (who has opened 2NT)? An immediate response of **3♠** is the suggested agreement.

Inverted Minor suit responses

When a natural 1♣/1♦ is the opening bid, some partnerships agree that Responder's jump raise to the 3-level is weak and pre-emptive, whereas a raise to the 2-level would be stronger, showing 10+ HCP.

The most common defences to an opening 1NT are:

- 1) **LANDY**, where an overcall of 2♣ shows at least 4 cards in each of the Major suits and the strength of an opening hand (with most High Card points in the Majors), or a hand which might have fewer High Card Points (HCP) when the Majors are 5-card (or longer) suits.
- 2) **ASPTRO**, where an overcall of 2♣ shows Hearts and another suit (at least 5+ & 4+ in length), and 2♦ shows Spades and another suit (5+ & 4+). The bidder should have 8-15 HCP, i.e. either the HCP of an opening hand, or extra length in the two suits. Partner responds according to the fit in the 'anchor' suit and the strength of his/her hand. (**ASTRO** and **ASPRO** are similar but show slightly different holdings.)
- 3) **SHARPLES** is less frequently played, where an overcall of 2♣ shows a hand at least as strong as a good 1NT opener, and usually contains at least 4 cards in the Spade suit.

Escape from 1NTX

- 1) **Exit Transfers:** To escape, with a very weak hand, from partner's opening 1NT which has been **doubled**, some players (with a 5-card suit) play **Exit Transfers**. This means that they would a) redouble (holding a 5-card Club suit) to be alerted by partner who when bids 2♣, or b) bid 2♣ for transfer to 2♦, etc.
- 2) Using the **Halmic Convention**, Responder **a) with a 5-card suit redoubles** and partner bids 2♣ to be passed or converted to responder's 5 card suit; **b) bids the lower of two 4-card suits (when weak)** so partner may pass or bid up-the-line if he has only 2 cards in that suit until at least a 4-3 fit is found, **c) passes (alerted) with a 4-3-3-3 hand**. Partner (the 1NT opener) re-doubles, and responder may leave this in with a strong enough hand (say 8+ HCP) or when weak bids 2C (or his single 4-card suit – depending on partnership agreement), so that Partner may then bid his longest suit for the best fit.

Jump Overcalls

Jump Overcalls are played at varying, defined strengths, which do not need to be alerted, so an opponent may need to enquire the agreed range for a partnership's jump overcall. In

standard Acol, a jump overcall shows a 6-card suit and the high-card strength for a good opening bid. Some partnerships make a jump overcall pre-emptively with fewer points, and others make their jump overcalls with HCP strength according to vulnerability.

Two suited Overcalls

1) The Unusual 2NT overcall

Following an opponent's opening 1♥ or 1♠ bid at the 1-level, **an overcall of 2NT is 'unusual'**, showing at least 5+5+ in the 2 Minor suits (normally with 8-15 HCP). Some players extend this Convention so that over, perhaps, a 1♣ or 1♦ opening, a 2NT overcall could show the 2 lowest unbid suits.

2) Michael's Cue bids

When an opponent has opened 1♣ or 1♦, a cue bid of 2♣ or 2♦ respectively shows at least 5+5+ in the Major suits (normally with 8-15 HCP).

3) CRO Ghestem overcalls

These overcalls are 2-suited (at least 5+5+) and are according to **Colour, Rank or Odd** suits (hence CRO). When an opponent opens 1C, a 2C overcall would show 2 suits of the same **colour** (it follows that the 2 suits shown would be Hearts and Diamonds), whereas a 2NT overcall would show 2 suits of the same **rank** (the Majors), and a 3C overcall would be showing 2 **odd** suits (i.e. Diamonds and Spades). Notice there should be no mistake as the CRO bids are in order, lowest first.

Some other Cue bids

Responding to partner's opening suit bid when there has been a suit overcall by an opponent, for example, 1♠ (2♦) 3♦, responder's bid of 3♦ here should be alerted, as he/she will have a good hand and is either asking partner to consider bidding NT with a good stop in the Diamond suit, or is showing a good raise in partner's suit to at least the 3 level. Whichever the case, the further development will show.