

Defending Against the Precision Club

By Neil H Timm

The bidding structure of Standard American and the 2/1 Game Force Systems are very similar; however, it is very different from Precision Club Systems. Because many club pairs do not play against partnerships that use some version of the Precision Club approach to bidding, they often have trouble defending and bidding against them.

In this Bridge Bit, I will briefly review the philosophies of the two approaches, “standard” and “strong club” systems, and discuss how one may defend against a Precision Strong Club System.

Fundamental Differences

Hand Evaluation

For “standard” systems hand evaluation depends on several factors:

HCP

Over valued honors (Q’s and J’s) and under valued honors (A’s and 10’s)

Suit Length

Dubious Honor Combinations

Suit Quality

Flatness and Shape

For “strong club” systems hand evaluation depends on two factors:

HCP

Flatness and Shape

1NT Bidding

For “standard” systems the common ranges are 15-17 or 15-18.

For “strong club” systems the common ranges are 10-12 (Mini) or 12-14 (Weak).

Some use mini ranges and others use weak ranges. FYI, any range that includes the number 15 is considered strong by the ACBL.

Opening Bids – One of a major

For “standard” systems the common range is 12 -21 points

For “strong club” systems the common range is 11-15 HCP.

Thus, one uses a wide range and the other uses a precise limited range.

Strong Bids

For “standard” systems the common range is 20-21 (2NT) or 22+ points (2♣)

For “strong club” systems it is unbounded 16+ HCP (1♣*), some use 17+ if balanced.

Review of Precision Bids

The “standard” bids in strong club Precision Systems are very different from Standard American or the 2/1 Game Force System. Review of some common bids:

The 1♣* bid (alert) shows a strong (16+ HCP hand), is artificial (can show any shape) and is forcing (for one round).

The 1♦ bid (announced as may be short, often 2) shows any number of hands with 11-15 HCP. It is a catchall bid.

The 2♣* bid (alert) is a hand with 11-15 HCP usually with at least 6/5 clubs and may or may not include a side 4-card major. However, some only require five clubs.

The 2♦* bid (alert) is typically a 3-suited hand with 11-15 HCP and shortness in diamonds (0/1).

The bid of 1NT may be 10-12 or 12-14 or 12-15 HCP is usually a partnership agreement. And, some have different ranges when VUL or NV.

The bid of 2NT usually shows the minors with 5-5 distributions and 11-15 HCP; but there are variations because some use it to show 20-21 HCP and balanced.

Typical Hands

What are the typical hand types for a precision 1♣* opening bid? Better than 85% of the hands opened 1♣* (discounting for very unusual distributional hands with fewer than 16 HCP) have 16-19 HCP. And, 48% of the hands with 16 or more HCP are balanced (4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, or 5-3-3-2). So, when your opponents open 1♣*, better than 40% of the time, they will have a 16-19 no trump hand, and when they don't they will be balanced or semi-balanced (adding in the 5-4-2-2, and 6-3-2-2 hands) about 65% of the time.

Defending Against 1♣* Openers

So, when your opponents open 1♣*, more often than not, they will not have shortness, and most of the time, they will have between 16 and 19 HCP. This tells us that it is highly likely that your side does not have a game, and you should devise your defense to the 1♣* opening bid based upon that fact. Most pairs playing against strong notrumps are not looking to find a GAME when their opponents open 1NT (15-17 HCP); so neither should you when your opponents open with the strong club.

So, it is probably best to use your defense to do two things: interfere with a constructive auction, and compete for part scores based on fit.

When do you interfere?

When the opponents open 1♣*, Mel Colchamiro's Rules of 8 and 2, based on average expected tricks are again used.

Rule of 8 says you need 6 HCP and after adding the number of cards in your two longest suits and subtracting the number of losing trick count (LTC). Then compete/interfere if the number is 2 or more, in the Direct Seat.

Rule of 2, used in the **balancing**, says if you have at least two shortness points, independent of HCP – then compete/interfere at the 2-level.

However in Precision YOU MUST BE CAREFUL and ask openers partner the meaning of his response bid when in the balancing SEAT.

For Example in The **Strong Transfer Precision Club System**, partner's responses to the opening 1♣* (alert) bid are as follows – all responses are alerted.

- 1♦ = artificial and 0-7 HCP
- 1♥ = 8+ HCP and transfer to spades
- 1♠ = artificial and 8-13 HCP
- 1NT = 12+ HCP transfer to clubs
- 2♣ = 12+ HCP and transfer to diamonds
- 2♦ = 8+ and transfer to hearts
- 2♥ = 8-13 with Heart singleton
- 2♠ = 8-13 with Spaded singleton
- 2NT = 14+ HCP
- 3♣ = 8-13 with club singleton
- 3♦ = 8-13 with diamond singleton
- 3♥ = spade singleton (1-4-4-4) with 4+ controls, usually 14+ HCP
- 3♠ = a solid 7+ card suit (AKQxxxx), 9 + HCP with or without side controls
- 3NT = club singleton (4-4-4-1) with 4+ controls, usually 14+HCP
- 4♣ = diamond singleton (4-4-1-4) with 4+ controls, usually 14+HCP
- 4♦ = heart singleton (4-1-4-4) with 4+ controls, usually 14+HCP

There are MANY MORE VARIATIONS OF PRECISION – Instead of Transfer Precision which right sides the contract, some play the “Wei-Sender” system where many of the responses to 1♣* are natural. Others play “Modified Precision” where the responses give only point counts and most bids are artificial.

What bidding convention do you use in Direct Seat?

Having applied the rule with judgment, what convention should you employ? The one you remember! Seriously, the same one you use against strong 15-17 NT. For example:

DON'T (Marty Bergen)

- Double – shows any single suit (6 or more cards); partner bids 2♣*, after which overcaller corrects to his actual suit
- 2♣*, 2♦*, 2♥* – shows the bid suit and any higher-ranking suit (usually 5-5); advancer bids 2NT to find higher ranking suit
- 2♠ – shows spades (6 or more cards)

There is disagreement as to the use of the 2♠ bid. Some treat it as weaker than the sequence of a double followed by 2♠; others play it as showing a solid spade suit, and there are other agreements possible.

Finally, many have added to the original convention that 2NT* is for the minors.

Cappelletti (Mike Cappelletti) also called Hamilton (Fred Hamilton)

- Double – PENALTY
- 2♣* shows a one-suited hand (usually 6 or more cards). Partner is expected to:
 - bid 2♦* with a weak hand, which the overcaller can correct to his long suit, or
 - bid 2 of a Major if he has a good 5 or 6 card suit, or
 - bid 2NT* with a strong hand, (overcaller bids the suit)
- 2♦* shows both majors (usually 5-5 – some play it 5-4)
- 2♥* shows hearts and a minor (usually 5-5 – some play it 5-4)
- 2♠* shows spades and a minor (usually 5-5 – some play it 5-4)
- 2NT* shows both minor at least 5-5

Observe that these conventions are geared toward two suited hands; however because one-suited hands are more common they have been modified. The best system, in my opinion is Suction, developed by Harold Feldheim from Hamden, Connecticut.

Defense over their Opponents Precision Bids (SUCTION)

2♣ = 6+♦ or 5-5 in ♥ and ♠

2♦ = 6+♥ or 5-5 in ♠ and ♣

2♥ = 6+♠ or 5-5 in ♣ and ♦

2♠ = 6+ ♣ or 5-5 in ♦ and ♥
2NT = 5-5 in ♣ and ♥ (rounded suits)
X = 5-5 in ♦ and ♠ (pointed suits)

1NT = 4-4 in the majors
1♦/1♥/1♠ = 5-card suit

Another system played over a strong club is the modified TRASH (TRansfer And SHape) convention. It is similar to Suction but has the advantage that the bids are at the one Level.

Modified (TRASH) over the Precision Club

X* = 6+♦ or (5-5) ♥ - ♠ (next 2 suits)
1♦* = 6+♥ or (5-5) ♠ - ♣ (next 2 suits)
1♥* = 6+♠ or (5-5) ♣ - ♦ (next 2 suits)
1♠* = Two-Suited unknown (rounded/pointed)
1NT* = 6+♣ or (5-5) ♦ - ♥ (next 2 suits)
*=alert

A popular “simple” convention designed for the strong club system is Mathe; **however, it has little effect to “interfer” with the bidding system of precision pairs.**

Mathe

- 1NT – shows both minors (5+/5+)
- Double – both majors (4-4 or 5-5)
- 2♣, 2♦, 2♥, 2♠ - natural 5- card suits

Or, one may use the Modified Mathe convention – a little better!

Modified Mathe

1NT*=Majors (5-5) and 2♣*=(5-5) in the minors.

At least the bids force the opponents to the 2-level!

However, like interference over strong notrump bids, there are many proposed conventions for interference over the strong club conventions (e.g. Precision). For a discussion I refer you to the web site:

www.chrisryall.net/bridge/debates/strong-club.htm

Finally, the Modified Blooman method may be used.

Modified Blooman (Direct Seat)

Bid	Meaning
Double**	Relay to 2♣ then apply Capp
2♣*	Transfer to 6-card diamond suit
2♦*	Transfer to 6-card hearts suit
2♥*	Transfer to 6-card spade
2♠*	Transfer to 6-card clubs suit
2NT*	Shows the minors (usually 5-5)

** Where now you are 5-5: 2♦ = Majors, 2♠ = Spades and a Minor, and 2♥ - Hearts and a minor because if you are one suited you would use the transfer bid. All bids are alerted.

If you win the contract, the strong Precision Club bidder is on lead; in the balancing seat bid your 6-card suit, double with both majors, and use 2NT* to again show the minors.

Competing over Mini/Weak NT (Any Seat)

Competitive bidding over the strong 1♣ strong notrump is geared toward finding a part score or to sacrifice; games are unlikely. Hence, you often interfere with a weak hand. Over the Mini/Weak NT a game is a possibility so doubles and bidding must be constructive and disciplined. What systems should you use? Many employ Landy.

Landy

2♣*	Both Majors 4-4, 5-4, 4-5, or 5-5 (2♦ asks for longest)
2♦/2♥2♠	Natural
Double*	Penalty (14/15 HCP)

While the convention is simple and easy to remember, let's look at Modified Landy. We assign point values to the bids, which helps partner.

Modified Landy

2♣*	One or both majors 4-4, 5-5, 4-5 7-10 HCP (2♦ asks)
2♦*	Both Majors (5-5) and 11-15 HCP
2♥/2♠	Natural 11-15 HCP
Double*	Penalty 14/15 HCP

Other popular conventions one may employ are Mohan, Multi Landy and Modified Cappelletti, among others. Whatever your convention a double must be for Penalty not take-out. **Do not use Meckwell or DONT.**

Defending against the 1♦ opener

1♦ shows at least 2 cards. In this situation, diamonds are usually natural or the notrump range not covered by the 1NT opener. Here, you should defend against the bid as natural.

Defending Against the 2♣* opener

2♣ openers are problematic for both sides. While it does have some preemptive value, it also preempts the opener's side. Defend as follows.

X = cards, takeout 12+ HCP

2♦, 2♥, 2♠ natural and 10+ HCP

2NT = 14-18 HCP balanced, clubs stopped

3♣ = Michaels

Note: some use 3♣* when 10-12 as a pre-empt with 6+ clubs.

Defending Against the 2♦* Opener

2♦* bids is like a "mini-roman", but both sides know what the short suit is. Overcalls in direct seat should be sound. The reason is that doubles by responder may be negative free bid (NFB), and can cause you to go for a number. So, 2♦-2♥-X (NFB) - all passes can be very dangerous.

2NT should show a strong 1NT (15-17) and a double should be either 12 -15.

Defending Against the 2NT Opener

Bid your 6-card major suit at the 3-level and double to show 5-5/ 6-5 in the majors with 12+ HCP.