

What is your agreement? A Bridge Tip The “Undercall” Club Convention - Extended

By Neil H. Timm

How many times have the opponents opened a club and you have overcalled a major and then they make a negative double to show the other major? Or, you make an overcall and win the contract and the weak hand is on lead? Is there a convention that you can use that can prevent the often-used negative double or ensure that the strong hand leads? The answer is YES; but before discussing the convention lets look at an example.

In the second seat, after the bid of 1♣, you pick up with favorable vulnerability the following hand:

♠AQJ873 ♥432 ♦J87 ♣A what do you bid?

With an opening hand and six spades, most would overcall a spade to show a good suit and lead directing! However, if you win the contract, the weak hand is on lead. In many situations it is better to get the strong hand on lead. Thus you want your partner to play the contract. To accomplish this goal you may use the “Undercall” Club convention, which is based upon transfers.

The convention applies ONLY over the opening bid of 1♣. In the second (overcall) seat your overcall bids are: Opener 1♣:

1♦* = transfer to hearts (5+ hearts 10-15 and 1st or 2nd round control)

1♥* = transfer to spades (5+ spades 10-15 and 1st or 2nd round control)

1♠* = transfer to diamonds (should have 10-15 and 1st or 2nd round control)

1NT* = shortness in clubs and 10-15 HCP (Take-Out – some play it as 15-18)

X= 16+ HCP with stopper in clubs (some play it as Take-Out)

2♣* = both majors and 10-15 HCP weak

2♦* = transfer to hearts (5/6+ hearts and strong 16+ HCP)

2♥* = transfer to spades (5/6+ spades and strong 16+ HCP (Optional 2♥=

Flannery/Flexible Flannery 11-15).

2♠* = 5-5 in the majors and strong (16+ HCP)

2NT* = 5+hearts and 5+diamonds; however, if you play Flannery it is a transfer to Spades (16+HCP)

3M* = transfers to game in major

3NT= to play with stopper

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What do you gain by using the transfer bids?

- 1) You get partner to declare the hand in your long suit, putting the strong hand-opening bidder on lead.
- 2) With diamonds you preempt their one-level overcall by bidding 1♠.
- 3) You escape a penalty double if partner happens to hold length in the suit you bid with shortness in the suit you have shown.
- 4) You get to make two bids (usually) for the price of one, since most of the time partner will bid your suit or something else and you get to make another bid (standard transfer advantage).
- 5) By transferring into your major suit, it may take away their negative double.

Now let's look at the complete deal and employ our new "Undercall" club convention.
Dealer East N-S vulnerable.

		♠	AQJ87		
		♥	43		
		♦	J87		
		♣	A		
♠	2	N W E S		♠	64
♥	AQ75			♥	J108
♦	KQ10			♦	654
♣	K10873			♣	Q8642
		♠	K1095		
		♥	K96		
		♦	A932		
		♣	J5		

Not playing the Undercall Club Convention, North would overcall a spade and N-S would reach a part score or game in spades and make eight or nine tricks with east leading the jack of hearts. Playing the Undercall Club Convention, the bidding would proceed as follows.

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♥*	Pass	1♠
Pass	2NT**	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

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**Short Suit Game Try (SSGT) – alert

Or, one may bid:

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♥*	Pass	2♠**

Pass 4♣*=splinter Pass 4♠
All Pass

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**Super accept

With south playing the contract, west leads the king of diamonds. South wins the ace, cashes the ace of clubs, leads a trump to hand and ruffs a club, draws a second trump and leads a diamond toward dummy; ending in hand. A heart is discarded on the 13th diamond. If west started with two diamonds, he is end played. If west started with four diamonds, he gets out with a diamond and declarer wins the jack, leads a third trump to hand and plays a diamond, throwing a heart. Now west is end played. Four spades bid and made --- but only from the south side.

It is true that even if south plays the hand, a club or spades lead with defeat 4♠, but only if west defends perfectly. After winning the first round of diamonds, he must shift to a heart, leading away from AQxx. It is not that easy!

What do you lose by playing the Undercall club Convention?

You lose the ability to hear partner bid 1♥ or 1♠ as he could after a 1♦ overcall. Also, if you bid 1♠ with diamonds, committing your side to the two level, you will need a better diamond suit than for a 1♦ overcall.

As in Precision, can you refuse the transfer? Yes, if they pass, bid 1NT without a fit (a void or only one card in the transfer suit, with two/three cards – accept the transfer). Or, you can bid your own 5+-card suit. And, if they interfere you can pass without support, or perhaps bid your own suit. Finally, you can bid 2♣ to ask the over caller (partner) to bid his second suit.

Let's look at few more examples: The opponents' open 1♣ and you hold the following hands:

(1) ♠ 975 ♥ A75 ♦ AK1096 ♣ 75

(2) ♠ K75 ♥ A75 ♦ AK1096 ♣ 75

(3) ♠ A75 ♥ A75 ♦ AK1096 ♣ 75

For hand (1) you would bid 1♠ as a transfer to diamonds (lead directing); however, with hand (2) you would bid 1NT as takeout (tells partner you have an opening hand and can support all suits), and with hand (3) you would double. You would reverse your bids in hands (2) and (3) if you play 1NT as a strong hand, and double for takeout!

Finally, with the following hand: ♠ AKQJ7 ♥ 7 ♦ 987652 ♣ A, you would bid 1♥ and (if necessary) perhaps bid diamonds later (e.g. if partner bid 2♣).

This is the basic Undercall Club “Transfer” Convention; it is best played only over a ONE CLUB OPENING BID (Provided the club bid is not the strong Precision Club). However, you may also play transfers over other 1-level opening as follows.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THEY OPEN 1♦? Can we extend the transfer bids? Yes!
One can again use transfer bids:

Opener	You
1♦	1♥* = transfer to spades (5+ spades and 1 st or 2 nd round control) 1♠* = transfer to clubs (should have 10-15 HCP 1 st or 2 nd round control) 1NT* = shortness in diamonds and 10-15 HCP (Takeout) X = 16+ HCP with shortness in diamonds 2♦* = both majors and 10-15 and weak 2♥* = transfer to spades (5/6+ spades and strong 16+HCP)/Flexible Flannery (11-15 HCP) 2♠* = 5-5 in the majors and strong (16+ HCP) 2NT* = 5+hearts and 5+diamonds /playing Flexible Flannery Transfer to Spades (16+ HCP) 3M = Transfer to major game with 16+HCP

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WHAT HAPPENS IF THEY OPEN 1♥?

Opener	You
1♥	1♠* = transfer to clubs (should have 10 – 15 HCP with an ace or king) 1NT* = shortness in hearts and 10-15 HCP (Takeout) X = 16+ HCP with stopper in hearts 2♥* = transfer to spades 5/6+ spades and strong (16+HCP) 2NT* = 5-5 in the minors. 3♥* = Transfers to game in spades with 16+ HCP

AND FINALLY if they open 1♠

Opener	You
1♠	1NT* = shortness in hearts and 10-15 HCP (Takeout) X = 16+ HCP with shortness in diamonds 2♠ = hearts and a minor 2NT* = 5+clubs and 5+diamonds 3♦* = transfer to game in hearts with 16+ HCP 3NT = to play

The convention proposed here is an extension of the Undercall club convention discussed by the Granovetter's in their book: “Bridge Conventions in Depth” (2003) by Matthew & Pamela Granovetter. Master Point Press.