

AICM Files 1 – Alerts for Transfer Breaking Agreements

Welcome to my online article on **Breaking Transfers** with associated alert descriptions for use with online bridge. I use the term AICM (Artificial Intelligence Counter Measures) for computer aided bidding agreements and associated text (files) used for **Alert Explanations**.

Breaking Transfers is a topic which though not necessarily something you would agree to on a first date, it might be something that budding bridge partnerships would do well to discuss. This article concentrates on actions associated with **Red Suit Transfers (RST) following a 1 No Trump opener**.

When I was first introduced to the concept it was suggested transfers were only broken when maximum. This would be holding four of the major (hearts after 2 diamonds, spades after 2 hearts) and top of the range (14 if playing 12-14, 17 if playing 15-17 no trump). The mechanics were simple – bid three not two of the agreed suit. Then consideration was given to other factors. By extension of the Law of Total Tricks, the competitive tactic of bidding to the limit of the fit became common practice. So breaking transfers became less avant-garde and with a known nine card fit various routes to three of the major or higher was available. Some people adopted the use of 2NT if top of the range and 3 of the major otherwise. Others chose only to break the transfer if maximum but use 2NT to show two of the top three honours in the trump suit. Personally I became more intrigued in why showing a small doubleton was adopted by some. Why might that work?

Times change and these days opening 1 NT with a five card major is quite common. So I have included that in my scenarios.

For tactical reasons (that is how well you might score) your choice of bids at the table might vary. Pairs tactics can be very different to teams tactics. The scenarios can reflect this and suggest different treatments.

Before giving examples of AICM descriptions let us consider why a partnership might choose to show a small doubleton as part of the Breaking Transfer process.

Consider this hand when following partner's 1NT (12-14) opener and your 2 hearts (transfer to spades), now gets a 3 (three) diamond break of transfer showing a relatively worthless doubleton (Jx or less) :-

♠ K8642 ♥ KJ ♦ 9753 ♣ A2

I tend to undervalue 5-4-2-2 hands where the length and strength is divided but opposite a paltry 12 count with four spades and poor diamonds, prospects are bright. Opener only needs an ace and options in clubs for game to be lay down or at least a good shot.

♠ AQ75 ♥ A432 ♦ 86 ♣ K76

With the above hands opposite each other, game rolls home except in the most bizarre of circumstances and even the following eleven count 1NT opener has chances (on a heart lead or switch you may not even need the club finesse)

♠ A975 ♥ A432 ♦ 86 ♣ QJ6

As a consequence of the above, for a teams (IMPs scoring) environment I would have no hesitation in incorporating a change of suit showing a small doubleton.

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Tactical Considerations Pairs vs Teams

If you and partner intend to play primarily in pairs events would you use the above agreement (break of transfer to show a small doubleton)? I am tempted to say yes and leave it to judgement as to whether you continue to game. In practice not all hands where game is possible offer the same chances as the those illustrated.

Regarding pairs tactics a lot can depend on temperament or objectives. In a qualifier in a multi-stage pairs competition I would argue that you play the percentages, fortune favour favours the wary and all that. Others argue that two tops and a bottom is 2/3rd of the match points [the tops and (frontal lo)bottomy approach as I call one of my Wild West friend's style].

Breaking the transfer with an 11, 12 or 13 count when partner may not have any points is very much a modern pairs tactic. Non-vulnerable possibly ok but risking it at teams when vulnerable could be letting the side down. With strong(er) One No Trump openers there is less risk in bidding to the limit of your fit (three level with a nine card fit four with ten) and doing so with combined High Card Points (HCP) in the range 17-23 has been standard practice for a long time.

Note that Strong No Trumpers are much better placed than others to use transfer breaks as the risks of a huge negative score when things go wrong are much reduced.

So for pairs players using any range of no trumps and for strong no trumpers in any form of the game I would suggest the following might work well (the rest can please the'selves)

Following a red suit transfer 2M (M is transfer suit, hearts after 2D, spades after 2H)) initially shows or implies 2,3 card support but might be used as a waiting bid

Change of suit shows 4 card support (for the transfer suit) and a small doubleton in the bid suit

3M shows 4 card support and less than maximum points

2NT shows 4 card support and maximum points

4M shows 5 card support (scary perhaps especially when vulnerable and partners value unknown but in a pairs environment there is a case for it being the percentage bid).

After a few words about text file formatting I will suggest an AICM file incorporating the above agreement together with options you might choose when tailoring your own agreements:-

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Technical Note on text ‘styles’: For presentation purposes I am using a PDF file but the bid descriptions are easily transferable to editable files that can be then word processed or edited. Each section has a Heading Comment Block (***Bold and Italics***) and other comments are *in italics*. When producing lists of bid explanations be careful that anything you want to cut and paste to an online chat line box should be simple text, no bold, underlines or special characters. [There is a caveat about Special Character usage as, if you know what you are doing, you can get some very interesting effects].

If you use a basic editor such as the Windows Accessories ‘Notepad’ to edit files with a ‘.txt’ suffix then only simple text is normally allowed. However you then have the problem of how to identify Headings and other comment information from the core ‘bid explanation’ text. IT old timers tended to use strings of asterisks “*****” as (line) separators and text boxes for comments.

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*****  
*****  
**      TEX BOX      **  
**                               **  
*****  
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**BREAKING TRANSFERS - ALERT EXPLANATIONS FOR SUGGESTED BIDS
IN AN UNCONTESTED AUCTION (PARTNER OPENS ONE NO TRUMP)**

The partnership can opt for any range of One No Trump opener. Point counts for continuations will then vary to suit the system although I have tried to be range independent. I tend to use 1NT openers in the range 11,12 -14 or 15-17 which may be reflected in the phraseology. Other ranges are equally legitimate.

Responder bids 2D transfer to Hearts

Opener Replies

2H	completing transfer, 2+ card support [See Note (a)]
2S	doubleton in suit bid (Jx or less), Four Card support in H
2NT	Four Card support in H, Maximum points (nn)
3C	doubleton in suit bid (Jx or less) Four Card support in H
3D	doubleton in suit bid (Jx or less) Four Card support in H
3H	Four Card support in H, less than maximum (nn -nn)
4H	Five Card support for Hearts [See Note (b)]

Note (a) Where a bid is described as 2+ it may be used as a waiting bid where the true nature of the hand is only pertinent once the transferring hand has shown positive values

Note (b) This bid might be only used when non-vulnerable. If using it vulnerable is not part of the partnership agreements perhaps as an alternative 2H might be used initially and Note (a) would apply.

Responder bids 2H transfer to Spades

Opener Replies

2S	completing transfer, 2+ card support
2NT	Four Card support in S, Maximum points (nn)
3C	doubleton in suit bid (Jx or less) Four Card support in S
3D	doubleton in suit bid (Jx or less) Four Card support in S
3H	doubleton in suit bid (Jx or less) Four Card support in S
3S	Four Card support in S, less than maximum (nn -nn)
4S	Five Card support for Spades [See Note (b)]

Style Comment

The above block structured repetition facilitates a rapid eye scan to precise information in the tabulation. Anomalies might then be more easily be detected. Unlike a system card which is of a fixed size, AICM files can be far more expansive.

EXPANDING AICM FILES TO INCLUDE COMPETITIVE SCENARIOS

Quite often hard copy system agreements only list essentials and important issues such as interference by the opposition is only covered in general terms. For many conventions the subject is not covered at all. So let us look at counter measures. What do we do when opponents disturb our agreements? How do we counter the counter measures?

What might we do when opponents use similar systems against us ? The best way to understand your own system is to know how to beat it !!!

Initially let us consider competitive bidding and ‘general principles’ or ‘general system agreements’:

Every partnership should have them. They can be expressed simply, provide general rules to cater for unexpected events and as such offer a measure of consistency across various aspects of system and convention definitions.

My personal take on partnership bidding understandings is that “If we can get rules straight and find somewhere to go, my next bid can be taken as a definite maybe”. But that is just me and my jokey way of defining a competitive bid. Read on and see how apt the phrase might be when with suit agreement a bid ‘on the way up’ is available.

Let us assume the following is a part of our general agreements or is the agreed style of operating

* Double of a conventional bid is lead directing or shows a holding in that suit

* Failing to complete a transfer shows a dislike of partners known suit or general weakness, that is few points

* Completing the transfer over interference is 'competitive'. *(At pairs there is a strong case for agreeing all natural bids in a competitive auction are just that, conventions such as Lebensohl then being avoided as a redundant complication).* Forcing bids should be alerted and explained to the opponents.

* The no trump bidder will make the system responses indicated but will not bid further. *In a limited number of circumstances (where subsequent action suggests the original response to the transfer request was now shown to be a waiting bid) this rule is broken to show very specific features.*

THE OPPOSITION INTERFERE OVER OUR TRANSFER REQUEST

Generally the way I approach competitive scenario descriptions is to take the lowest convenient bid (including double or redouble) that is available to the opposition and list the meanings of our subsequent actions. I tend initially to be quite pedantic about this process and go through each possible bid even though this might involve considerable repetition. Computers do not care if a small ! text file is 200 or 20,000 characters long. When writing a system card we do care and need brevity. For AICM files it is just a limited number of blocks of similar information which is easy to produce (cut and paste and a few minor adjustments) and if produced systematically easy enough to compare for similarities or discrepancies. You may find for example that opponents bids of higher or lower ranking suits, particularly if they pre-empt , need some itemisation before common treatments can be attempted. This tends to make first cuts of AICM files very long winded but a second shorter form of AICM file might emerge containing statements much more like the system agreements we put on a system card.

Initially let us look at some examples competitive scenarios. These are deliberately incomplete as my intent is to illustrate the process.

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Responder bids 2D Transfer to Hearts, the opponents double to show diamonds

Opener Replies

Pass	Minimum or only 2 or 2+ card support for partner
Redouble	Specifically 3 card support
2H	completing transfer, 4 card support minimum points
2S	Spade suit Four Card support in H
2NT	<i>Idle bid – The options for use are / might be A five card minor, 2 or 3, or exactly 3 card support Four card support maximum points no side suit feature Five card support</i>
3C	Club suit, Four Card support in H
3D	<i>Cue bid - Idle bid – options Four card support maximum points no side suit feature Five card support</i>
3H	<i>Idle bid – options as for 3D above</i>

Responder bids 2H Transfer to Spades, the opponents double for takeout showing Hearts

Opener Replies

Pass	Minimum or only 2 or 2+ card support for partner
Redouble	Specifically 3 card support
2S	completing transfer, 4 card support minimum points
2NT	<i>Idle bid – The options for use are / might be A five card minor, 2 or 3, or exactly 3 card support Four card support maximum points no side suit feature Five card support</i>
3C	Club suit, Four Card support in Spades
3D	Diamond suit, Four Card support in Spades
3H	<i>Cue bid - Idle bid – options Four card support maximum points no side suit feature Four, 4+, or Five card support</i>
3S	<i>Idle bid – options as for 3H above</i>

Responder bids 2D Transfer to Hearts, the opponents bid a suit

* The opponents bid 2 Spades (natural)

Opener Replies

Pass	Minimum or only 2 or 2+ card support for partner
Double	Support double, 3 card support
2NT	<i>Idle bid – The options for use are / might be A five card minor, 2 or 3, or exactly 3 card support Four card support maximum points no side suit feature Five card support</i>
3C	Club suit, Four Card support in H
3D	Diamond suit, Four Card support in H
3H	Four or 5 card support in H

End of extracts from Example Script

Analysing AICM Agreements

Initially a re-iteration of method of production

An obvious comment is that the document is getting to be lengthy. I have only itemised a few scenarios and there are plenty more which I have omitted. The full details of competitive arrangements are like that and that is why system cards only tend to detail the basic arrangement and general approach. The document is an example of a first cut and can be expanded and subsequently reduced in size as part of the ongoing process of establishing then maintaining the partnership agreement. Note that when preparing the scripts many scenarios are similar and the document can be rapidly compiled using cut and paste of from earlier work and then making minor adjustments.

Because of the block structure the information is surprising easy to read and digest. The constant repetition makes it easy to compare scenarios and check for faults and areas of contention. General rules can be discerned where similarities repeat.

It is good practice to get comments from partner (or the group) at an early stage as then other's ideas are more easily incorporated. We all have different mind sets and you might fundamentally disagree with the bids (I have) proposed. Some aspects you might like but have different ideas for their incorporation.

Expanding a concept

An example of this part of the process could be a discussion of why are there bids to show side suits and their associated level of fit. Initially this may have been added as a possible use for otherwise idle bids. The concept at this stage is that once committed to a level of support for partners suit say three of a major, there are intervening bids which are available and might have a function. *So have a play*. This could rapidly be converted into a method of discovering a secondary fit. Double suit fits have a trick taking potential and their discovery presents opportunities for thin games. Conversely the absence of a fit might assist bidding judgement as the possible defensive properties of the combined hands is indicated. Knowledge is power. There may be occasions where you know more about the opposition's trick taking potential than they do themselves.

An example of combined hands worth more than the sum of their high card parts is

♠ 97 ♥ A432 ♦ J86 ♣ AK76

opposite

♠ 6 ♥ KJ985 ♦ K104 ♣ Q1082

Note the one no trump opener will show the clubs if opponents interrupt two spades over the transfer and for the partnership to push onto game is a good bet. The partnership is in good shape to take the axe to four spades should the opposition insist (*but beware as penalty doubles can go badly wrong particularly when your combined trump holding is poor*).

Checking more complex sequences

AICM analysis is iterative and therefore refining the agreement tends to involve a number of phases. In competitive auctions there is a need to counter opposition bid and we may have choices as to the best way to proceed. That in turn may need a second level of agreement. Take for example a sequence that identifies a 5-3 major fit and a five card minor. The bidding might go

1NT-pass-2D (transfer to Hearts)-double-2NT (1NT opener has a five card minor and three hearts)-pass -?

(note in the sequence illustrated opposition bids are lower case). Note that the opponents have doubled!

If the Responder (to the initial 1NT) bids three clubs then presumably this would ask opener to define their minor. Not quite pass or correct however. Opener might now bid the transfer (agreed) suit to show three hearts and five clubs, with the diamond continuation being natural showing five diamonds 'on the way up'. This would need to be agreed. But what might responder bidding three diamonds mean [1NT -2D (transfer to hearts opps double) - 2NT (opener has a five card minor) – 3D (responder bid on the way up)? Possibly invitational based on a club preference.

A few example hands to make the above clearer

♠ J7 ♥ A43 ♦ J86 ♣ AK763

opposite

♠ 6 ♥ KJ985 ♦ K104 ♣ Q1082

Our bidding might then be

1NT-pass-2D (transfer to Hearts)-double-2NT (five card minor, three hearts)- pass - ?

then 3H is the weakest bid available to responder (the hand with 5, in this instance, hearts)

But

3D would show values and is invitational based on a liking for clubs. The no trump opener punches to four hearts

but with

♠ 6 ♥ KJ985 ♦ KQ105 ♣ 84

The enquiry might be now three clubs which if converted to three hearts would be left there. If converted to three diamonds opener's partner takes control.

Opener might have

♠ A7 ♥ A43 ♦ J8642 ♣ A63

and a likely spade lead could see us garnering twelve tricks on a good day

My apologies to any casual reader who finds the above hard going.

Restating General Agreements

Analysis of competitive bidding options is complex but at some point you need to draw a line and consider whether you need to add more statements to the ‘general agreement’. It is always helpful to compose a brief synopsis especially when trying to understand complex technical detail. As a result of the above deliberations it might be best to add a line to the general agreement explanations ” In competitive auctions following a transfer request changes of suit are natural but show a fit” You might have something more to state about doubles and redoubles since I have touched on their possible use, for example support doubles. Any additions to the general agreement would need to be compatible with Take-out, Penalty Double agreements.

Apologies

For where I have stated plus points of the method and not gone into details. For example “The best way to understand your own system is to know how to beat it“. I would suggest that where you have encountered a measure of grief in dealing with an opponents bid, you incorporate that bid in your counter measures where your opponents have transfer breaking sequences.

Also I have not (in this article) produced any expanded scenarios for where completing the transfer is re-requested.

Finally

So what do you think about AICM and expanded partnership agreements? If you are of the opinion you can do without too many complex agreements possibly not a lot. So what do you think about using block structured statements to define conventions and their meaning (and explanations)? I quite like it and maybe the Covid 19 pandemic has helped add a little more to the bridge scene by forcing enhanced dependence on computer technology. Perhaps revisiting our systems will give us something else to do during the long winter nights.

And what about breaking transfers ? I am always happy to relay interesting thoughts and thank you for your time in reading my views on how other’s good ideas might even be enhanced.