



Lebensohl Part 1

An earlier article in this series covered responding to 1NT. Of course, the opponents will seek to come in whenever they reasonably can and, in recent years, much effort has gone into developing ways of countering intervention over your 1NT opening.

You need methods to:

- | Penalise
- | Compete
- | Play in the best game ie find a 4-4 major

Lebensohl is not perfect, but it does provide answers to most of the above bullet points.

First, you need to decide on your initial move when the opponents come in at the two level over your 1NT (it doesn't really matter what range your no-trump is but this article will assume 12-14).

Double

If partner opens 1NT and the opponents bid 2♠ (natural) then what will you do with the following hands?

Hand A	Hand B
♠ KJ97	♠ 54
♥ 54	♥ KJ97
♦ AJ94	♦ AJ94
♣ J73	♣ J73

With a ten count game is unlikely, so should you go for a part score or perhaps seek to penalise? An easy

answer to Hand A would be to play a penalty double, but that would leave you struggling with Hand B. If you play double as take-out then this is what you do on Hand B and partner could:

- a. Pass to penalise
- b. Try to find a fit at the three level

Given you are likely to go to the three level, you should not be too far short of the values for 2NT to start with and opener can either bid his lowest suit which partner can correct or use 2NT to show two places to play. It will typically be more use than using it naturally. If you hold the West hand:

♠ J86	♠ 54
♥ KJ94	♥ A765
♦ K9	♦ QJ75
♣ AJ76	♣ Q84

The auction might go:

West	North	East	South
You		Partner	
1NT	2♠	DbI	Pass
2NT ¹	Pass	3♦	Pass
3♥	All pass		

¹I don't wish to defend and have two possible places to play

They might make 2♠ or go one off and you might make 3♥. Of course, they might go on to 3♠ which is all but certain to go off. So once in a while it might be right to defend, but more

often than not you will achieve a better result at the three level by making your contract, going one off when they are making theirs or persuading them to continue to 3♠ and going down.

You might now ask what happens with Hand A as you will be keen on the possibility of a penalty. Partner should strain to re-open when:

- a. He is short in their major
- b. He has a reasonable hand

On occasions, when he passes and you could have got a penalty, then perhaps they will be vulnerable and you will still get +200 and, on other occasions, you may not have any particular so +50 or +100 will be a reasonable score.

2NT Bid

Now consider what the following sequence might mean:

West	North	East	South
1NT	2♠	2NT	

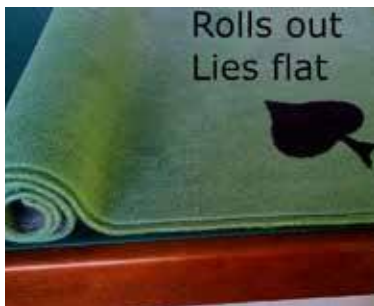
2NT could, of course, be natural but perhaps there are better uses for it?

It would be useful to be able to show the following hand types:

- a. A hand which only wants to compete with a decent suit
- b. A hand that is worth game with a suit but is not certain where to play
- c. A hand worth game with or without a four card major and with or without a stop in the opponents' suit. ▶

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Lebensohl uses 2NT as an artificial bid requiring partner to bid 3♣ so they can then describe their hand.

You can't cover Hands A, B and C with a 2NT bid, so let us cover other bids.

New Suit at the Three-Level

If you bid a new suit then it is natural and forcing. After the bidding has started:

West	North	East	South
1NT	2♠	?	

A typical hand might be:

	♠	♥	♦	♣
North	7 5	K J 9 5 3	A Q 7	K 9 5

You have enough for game and five cards in the other major. If partner has a ♠ then you want to play 4♥. If partner doesn't, then you probably want to play 3NT if he has a stop or chance 4♥ on a 5-2 ♠ if he has not. Bidding 3♥ natural and forcing will get you to the right contract most of the time. If you have a heart suit but are not worth game then we will see shortly what you might do.

Cue Bid

If you change your hand a bit to:

	♠	♥	♦	♣
North	A 5	K Q 9 3	A Q 7	10 9 4 2

Again you have the values for game but no suit to bid (as you show five or more cards by bidding a suit at the three level). You do, however, have a stop in their suit. You could just bash 3NT, but it is possible that 4♥ will be better if you have a ♠, so here you can cue bid their suit. ♠ shows both a stop and four in the other major. If you had a stop without four of the other

major you would just bid 3NT. So what happens when you don't have a stop? Read on, but first a mini summary.

If they intervene with 2♥ or 2♠ then:

- | A new suit at the three level is natural and forcing.
- | A cue bid shows four of the other major and a stop.
- | A bid of 3NT shows a stop but not four of the other major.

If your opponents come in over 1NT with 2♣ or 2♦ showing something like hearts and another, or spades and another, you can proceed as if they had bid the major and a bid of their major means the same thing, so, for example:

	♠	♥	♦	♣
North	K J 4	Q 9 8 5	A K 7 4	K 8

West	North	East	South
1NT	2♦ ¹	3♠ ²	

¹Spades and another

²A spade stop and four hearts ie bid as if they had bid 2♠

Back to 2NT

Now we come to hands where either you just want to compete or you have the values for game but no stop in their major.

Suppose you hold:

	♠	♥	♦	♣
North	9 7 2	Q J 10 7 5 4	K J 3	4

West	North	East	South
1NT	2♠	?	

You want to compete in hearts, but if you bid 3♥ partner will think you have the values for game so, instead, you bid 2NT. ♠ is an artificial bid requiring partner to bid 3♣ and then you pass or bid 3♦ or, in this case, bid 3♥ in order to show your suit. You are not inviting partner to bid on.

Occasionally, you can distinguish between three differing values of hand. Suppose again partner opens 1NT and the opponents bid 2♣ showing both majors. Now you can bid:

- | 2♦ natural and weak
- | 2NT followed by 3♦ to show an invitational hand
- | 3♦ to show a natural and forcing hand

2♦ applies any time you can bid your suit naturally at the two level.

You may have a hand where you have the values for game but with no stop in the opponent's major.

Suppose you hold:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♠ 9 7 5 ♥ K Q 8 4 ♦ K 7 ♣ A J 8 6
--	--

West	North	East	South
1NT	2♣	?	

You bid 2NT and over your partner's response of 3♣ you bid 3♠ to show the values for game, exactly four hearts and no spade stop.

Partner can now choose to bid 3NT if he has a stop, bid 4♥ with a 4-4 **2♦** if or even chance it on a 4-3 **2♦** if he

thinks this best, or he can bid a four card minor. You can stop in 4♣ or 4♦ if you only just have the values for game. Game forcing here really means forcing as far as 3NT.

If you have neither a stop nor four of the other major, you can bid 2NT and over partner's 3♣ response you can bid 3NT. Partner can remove to four of a minor if he does not have a stop. **2♦** can be passed or raised to game.

Warning

A word of warning if you take on this set of agreements. 'Do we play Lebensohl?' is a dangerous question for two reasons:

- a. Not everyone plays it as described above.
- b. Some people play it in more positions than a **2♦** 1NT and an overcall. To give an example: does it apply if you overcall rather than open 1NT?

We will see next time where else it could apply and what else 2NT might mean. **2♦** 2NT bid in competition is an example of one which is rarely natural these days. In my opinion, this agreement comes into the category of being played when you play with someone you play with regularly rather than a casual one of **2♦** partnership. ■

Summary

- | Decide what you do when your opponents intervene over 1NT. Is double for penalties or does it show the values for 2NT or more without their suit?
- | You can use 2NT artificially to describe some hands. Direct bids are forcing. This is the route you go to show a hand with a stop in the opponent's suit.
- | You go via 2NT to show a weaker hand or a game forcing one without a stop in the opponent's suit.
- | If you agree to play Lebensohl, it is wise to check you are playing it in the same way as your partner.
- | I have a rule which says you shouldn't be allowed to play a convention you can't spell and this often disqualifies the use of Lebensohl although not as often as Cappelletti defence to 1NT!



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