



# Lebensohl

## Part 2

The Lebensohl article in the previous issue covered what happens after your side opens 1NT and the other side intervenes at the two level.

Once this idea became established in the 1970s, minds turned to how the principle could be extended. One consequence of this is that it reduced the number of times 2NT was natural in any competitive auction. It used to irritate a teammate of mine to the point that he insisted that the phrase 'unless 2NT is specifically discussed it is always natural' was written into the team system notes. That, at least, avoids misunderstanding but there are situations where Lebensohl can help make auctions more precise.

### After your side doubles a weak two

Consider the following pair of hands. On each of them the auction has started:

West	North	East	South
?	2♣ <sup>1</sup>	Dbl	Pass
Weak			

You hold either of these hands:

West	West
♠ 7 5	♠ 7 5
♥ K J 9 6 4	♥ K Q 9 6 4
♦ 8 4 3 2	♦ A 4 3 2
♣ Q 3	♣ J 3

On the first hand, you simply wish to get out alive at the lowest level and (probably) play in hearts. Partner will have some hearts for his take-out

double. On the second hand, you wish to suggest game if he has a reasonable hand. How do you do this? If you don't play Lebensohl, you pretty much have to bid game on the second hand.

In principle, if you take out partner's double to a suit at the three level, you could have a one count or a ten count and partner has to guess. Lebensohl removes part of the guess. With the first hand, you bid 2NT and when partner bids 3♣ you bid 3♥ to say, 'All I wanted was to play here.' If you hold the second hand you bid 3♥ directly to say, 'I have hearts and would like to suggest game.'

### What to do with a very good hand

There is one very important difference between these sequences and one where 1NT was opened and the next hand bid.

When the sequence starts:

West	North	East	South
1NT	2♠	2NT	Pass
?			

West's opening bid is within quite a narrow range (say 12-14) and he will always bid 3♣ now allowing East to show his hand, but in sequences such as the one above where it has started:

West	North	East	South
2NT	2♠	Dbl	Pass
	Pass	?	

Now East can have anything from a shapely 12 count to a block busting 22 count so he cannot afford to rebid 3♣ on all hands.

Suppose the sequence has started as above. The doubler might have:

	♠ 9 6
	♥ K J 8 6
	♦ A Q 7 5
	♣ K 9 5

With a minimum take-out double, he would bid 3♣ and be happy to play in a part score if partner had a weak hand.

If, on the other hand, he had:

	♠ A 4
	♥ K J 8 6
	♦ A Q 7 5
	♣ K Q 9

He would be worried about missing a game. He might overcall 2NT over the opening 2♠ bid with this hand, but with only one stop and being playable in the other three suits, he might prefer to double. After a double and a 2NT response, his rebid should be 3♦ showing a diamond suit and a strong hand (usually 18+). East could, of course, be even stronger. Suppose he had:

	♠ Q 7
	♥ A J 9 5
	♦ A K Q 6 2
	♣ A Q

He would double the 2♠ opening and after a 2NT response would be too strong to bid 3♦ so would cue bid the opponents' suit. The auction would go:

West	North	East	South
2NT	2♠	Dbl	Pass
?	Pass	3♠	Pass

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Now you are expected to bid 3NT, with some help in spades and a few points, and your lowest four card suit if you have nothing, so with:

♠ A 9 6  
♥ 7 4  
♦ J 4 3  
♣ J 7 6 5 4



You would bid 3NT over 3♠.  
If on the other hand you held:

♠ 10 9 6  
♥ 7 4  
♦ J 4 3  
♣ J 7 6 5 4



You would bid 4♣ and cross your fingers.

Is all this perfect? Certainly not. You can have hands which don't work very well for these methods. The point is that if you and your partner are prepared to do the work to learn the methods, then more hands will work for you than with standard methods.

When playing Lebensohl after a 1NT opening, you could also cater for hands where partner had four cards in the other major with or without a stop and the values for game. You can do the same after a weak two.

Suppose you have the following hand after the auction has started:

West	North	East	South
	2♠	Dbl	Pass
?			

♠ K 9 6  
♥ A Q 9 6  
♦ K 9 4 2  
♣ Q 4



You have a game forcing hand and the likely games are 3NT or 4♥ so you want to keep both in the picture. You can bid 3♠ with this hand. It shows both a four-card heart suit and also a stop in spades so partner can choose. He could, of course, have an awkward hand such as:

♠ 7 5  
♥ K 7 5  
♦ A Q 7 5 3  
♣ A J 6



Here you will bid 3NT. You don't have four hearts but you know partner has a spade stop, so you hope that will be enough. 5♦ might be better but you can't find out and that is, of course, why opponents pre-empt against you.

If you have game values but neither a four-card major nor a stop you can bid as follows:

West	North	East	South
	2♠	Dbl	Pass
2NT	Pass	3♣	Pass
3NT			

This shows a hand with game values, no stop and without four hearts. A typical hand might be:

♠ 8 5 2  
♥ A 9  
♦ K J 7 6  
♣ A Q 6 5



You may not get to a making game but you will give yourself the best chance of doing so.

## Other Lebensohl Positions

Two other common positions which occur and you ought to have some agreement about, even if it is only, 'We do not play it here,' are:

- after your side have overcalled 1NT
- after the opponents have opened a multi

West	North	East	South
	1♥	1NT	2♥
?			

Imagine an auction above. The rules here are very much the same as if partner had opened 1NT. If you bid at the three level, then that is natural and shows some values. If your 1NT overcall is 15-18, then a free bid at the

three level should show about 6-8.

You might have:

♠ K 6 4  
♥ 4 2  
♦ K J 7 5 2  
♣ 10 9 5

You can bid 3♦. If your hand had five or six diamonds and fewer points, you could bid 2NT first to show a weaker hand. All the same rules about showing stops and four cards in the other major continue to apply. A hand for bidding 3♦ via 2NT might be:

♠ 6 4 2  
♥ 4 2  
♦ K Q 7 5 2  
♣ 10 9 5

If you were much weaker than this you would just pass.

If your opponents open a multi then you bid as if they have opened a weak two. Suppose you hold:

♠ 7 5  
♥ J 9 5  
♦ K J 6 5 4 3  
♣ 8 3

The auction might go:

West	North	East	South
	2♦ <sup>1</sup>	Db1 <sup>2</sup>	2♥ <sup>3</sup>
2NT	Pass	3♣	Pass
3♦	All Pass		<sup>1</sup> Multi

<sup>2</sup>About 13-16 fairly balanced <sup>3</sup>Pass or bid 2♠

You are able to show your decent diamond suit when playing Lebensohl because you also know you are not promising the earth when you do so. You have shown a few values, because with absolutely nothing you just pass. You have also caused your opponents to be uncertain as to which major the opener has.

When players make pass or correct bids such as the 2♥ bid above, then you should treat it as artificial so that if you hold:

♠ 7 5  
♥ A Q 7 5 3  
♦ Q J 6  
♣ 10 9 5

The auction might go:

West	North	East	South
	2♦	Db1 <sup>2</sup>	2♥ <sup>3</sup>
3♥ <sup>4</sup>	Pass	4♥	All Pass

<sup>1</sup>Multi

<sup>2</sup>About 13-16 fairly balanced

<sup>3</sup>Pass or bid 2♠

<sup>4</sup>Natural and about 8-11

A bid of either major is natural. Very occasionally, you might hit their six-card major, but so infrequently it is better to bid naturally.

Incidentally, as an aside to the main purpose of this article, knowing when you can bid your major after a multi sequence reduces the confusion it can cause by a good 30%. If you do have a game forcing hand and nowhere clear to go you can double 2♥ on the auction above. This just shows values and not necessarily hearts.

## Summary

- If you choose to play 2NT as Lebensohl in situations other than after a 1NT opening, be careful to define what they are.
- Playing Lebensohl after the opponents open a weak two and partner doubles is quite common, but you need to allow for the doubler to have a very good hand. If he has, he is not compelled to bid 3♣, but may bid a suit of his own (good hand) or cue bid the opponents' suit (very good hand).
- When defending against a multi, whether you play Lebensohl or not, then know which bids of a major are natural.

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