

TONTO and DOUBLE TONTO

TONTO is a NT overcall system that in addition to the typical disruption of the opponents' auction, has two main tactical benefits:

1. For two suited hands, it immediately and specifically identifies both of overcaller's suits.
2. For both two suited hands and single suited hands, it transfers the contract to advancer should their side ultimately declare.

In the first case, specifically identifying both of overcaller's suits has the benefit of eliminating extra rounds of bidding to locate a "playable" strain, often keeping the final contract at a lower level than other systems, But more importantly, knowing exactly which two suits overcaller holds guarantees playing in the BEST fit, versus many systems which often have to settle for a "tolerable" fit, should the overcalling side win the contract.

In the second case, when the contract is transferred, overcaller's hand, whose distribution has now been disclosed to the opponents, becomes dummy, but advancer's hand remains hidden. Additionally, when TONTO is used in the direct seat, the NT opener will have to lead from his strength.

The key drawback of TONTO is that single suited hands must be bid at the 3 level, eliminating any opportunity to interfere and preempt with a moderate suit at the 2 level. However, modern bidding techniques have thwarted the effectiveness of 2 level single suited bids. So the tradeoff compared to the benefits that TONTO provides would not seem unreasonable.

A myriad of NT overcall systems abound. Each provides some combination of benefits and drawbacks similar to and opposite of TONTO. The relative value of these differences is very difficult to quantify, and subject to debate. Each partnership has to make their own determination as to the features they believe most effective.

Below are the mechanics of TONTO.

TONTO (Transfer Overcalls of NT Openings) mechanics.

Over their strong NT opening:

All 2 level suit bids show 2 specific suits, the *next suit up (transfer) plus S's*.

Bids of 2N and higher are also transfers, but to a single long suit, and are simply preemptive.

2C shows D + S

2D shows H + S

2H shows S + C (since S is already the next suit up, this shows the next two suits up)

2S shows C + D (the next suit up, C, plus the next suit after that, D)

2N shows C (still a transfer, but just C's, simply a C preempt)

3C shows D (D preempt)

3D shows H (H preempt)

3H shows S (S preempt)

Note there are two, 2-suit combinations not covered by these bids: H + C and H + D. We use double to show either of these, instead of using the double as the rare and generally ineffective penalty double. So, DOUBLE shows H + C or H+D.

With even 3 H's, advancer can bid 2H, resulting half the time in at least a "safe" 3-4 fit at the 2 level, and the other half of the time an excellent 3-5 fit.

The two suits must be 54+, and preferably with a singleton. As low as 6 hcp is acceptable, if the 6 points are concentrated in the two suits. A little more caution should be exercised vulnerable, but don't be shy about getting in their way.

Of course, if the opponents get back into the auction, advancer does not have to bid. But knowing the specific 2 suits that overcaller has, he may be able to safely advance the interference, or even sacrifice over an opponent's game bid.

DOUBLE TONTO

The primary disadvantage of TONTO is having to bid to the 3 level with single suited hands. Since modern bidding tools provide ways to deal with most overcalls at the 2 level, giving up the possibility of playing a suit at the 2 level might be considered a minor disadvantage compared to the advantages that TONTO provides. But there's a good argument that being able to bid spades at the 2 level is an exception. It forces the opponents to the 3 level to find a fit, and leads to ambiguities in many systemic responses. So to take advantage of 2S as a natural overcall, DOUBLE TONTO was created.

In DOUBLE TONTO, 2S is no longer used to show C + D, but instead is natural, to play. Now you can afford to effectively interfere with a decent 5 card S suit!

But what to do with the C + D two suiter? You roll it into the double. So double now shows H + C, H + D, or both minors. Another way to think about this is that double now shows ANY TWO SUIT COMBINATION THAT DOESN'T INCLUDE S's. Or, as we announce on the alert: "Any two suits, not S's".

So all the bids for DOUBLE TONTO are the same as TONTO, except:

2S shows S

DOUBLE shows any 2 suits not including S's

After a double, advancer should still bid H's with even 3 H's, as that will be an acceptable place to play 2/3 of the time. If overcaller instead has C + D, he will bid 2N over the 2H call, and advancer will then pick the best minor suit.