

TRANSFERS – PART 2

5 DEC 2017

After We Overcall 1NT

<i>South West</i>		<i>North East</i>	
	1m	1NT	Pass
??			

The opponents have opened 1 small m (aka one of a minor), and Partner has overcalled 1NT showing, let's say, 15-18. What next?

Most pairs play "systems on" here, so typically that would be Stayman and Transfers. And, as a practical matter, bids in the opponent's suit (other than Stayman) can be to play, as in this Minor Suit Transfer auction:

<i>South West</i>		<i>North East</i>	
	1♣	1NT	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♣	All Pass

That's a simple treatment which works well, but if the opponents open a *major* then things could get messy.

<i>South West</i>		<i>North East</i>	
	1♥	1NT	Pass
??			

If you are playing "systems on", what does 2♦ mean in the above auction? Surely it's not an attempt to show Hearts as your LHO claims to have five of them. Our simple suggestion is to play it as artificial and game-forcing. After 2♦, natural bidding breaks out.

So, not so complicated after all. "Systems on" means what it says in all cases *except* when we transfer into their five-card major.

Other Transfer Situations

(a) **Balancing 1NT:**

South West North East

1♣ Pass Pass

1NT Pass ??

To keep life simple, we can use the same methods as when Partner makes a direct 1NT overcall.

(b) **Enemy Overcall:**

South West North East

1NT Pass 2♥ 3♦

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Here, if we are to support Partner's Spades, it must be at the three-level. With only two Spades we would pass (or maybe whack 3♦) and with four Spades we would have no qualms about bidding 3♠. The tricky case is when we have 3-card support for Spades. In that case we must use our judgement as to whether the hand is offensive or defensive in nature. If our hand is unsuitable for doubling or bidding 3♠, and we pass, the auction is not over yet ... Partner can always make a competitive Double, requesting us to do something intelligent.

(c) **Enemy Double:**

South West North East

1NT Pass 2♥ Dbl

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Standard procedure is to pass with only two Spades ... with three Spades Opener accepts the transfer ... and with four Spades he may want to make his normal super-accept. How about Redouble? This should show a good defensive hand, probably only two Spades, hopefully a Heart trick or two ... the hope is that Partner can co-operate in doubling 3♥. It is *not* an attempt to play in 2♥xx!

(d) **Texas Transfers:**

Texas is the fast way to reach game, as in 1NT 4♦, 4♥ and 1NT 4♥, 4♠. A typical Texas hand might be something like AQJxxx, x, xxx, xxx. In other words a hand with a decent 6-card major which wants to take a shot at game, and has no aspirations for slam. Those players with a scientific bent insist on making a distinction between 1NT 4♦, 4♥ and 1NT 2♦, 2♥ 4♥. If you listen, they will tell you that the fast auction is a close-out, and the slow auction is actually a mild slam try. Fascinating stuff, we're sure.

Minor Suit Transfers

Playing major suit transfers means that, opposite a 1NT opening, a response of 2♠ is available for some other purpose.

One common method is to use 2♠ to show a weak hand in one of the minors. After the 2♠ bid, Opener bids 3♣ and now Responder either passes or signs off in 3♦. This method is simple (that's good) and not very effective (not so good).

Minor Suit Transfers (MST) are superior, but there's a learning curve involved:

- **Step 1:** Make a small change to your Stayman agreement. Now, Responder can use Stayman for all its traditional purposes, PLUS for balanced invitational hands with no 4-card major. This means that the auction 1NT 2NT has been rendered redundant by the auction 1NT 2♣, 2any 2NT.
- **Step 2:** Opposite 1NT, Responder now has freed up two bids ... 1NT 2♠ is freed up because of the major suit transfers ... and 1NT 2NT has been freed up by the repurposing of 1NT 2♣, 2any 2NT.
- **Step 3:** Put these free bids to good use!

Here are your new responses to 1NT, incorporating MST's:

- 2♣ is still **Stayman** (but, remember, it no longer guarantees a 4-card major).
- 2♦ and 2♥ are still **Jacoby Transfers**
- 2♠ is an **MST** to Clubs
- 2NT is an **MST** to Diamonds

So far, so good? Now, as you can see, there is a gap between 2♠ and 3♣, and similarly between 2NT and 3♦. How to use this gap? There are two schools of thought, with not much to choose between them. As usual, we suggest the natural and intuitive method which is:

1NT 2♠, 2NT says "I don't like Clubs", and **1NT 2♠, 3♣** says "I like 'em"
1NT 2NT, 3♣ is "Don't like Diamonds", and **1NT 2NT, 3♦** is "I like 'em"

In other words, "bid 'em if you like 'em" in both cases, and make the intermediate bid if you don't. How good does Opener's minor suit need to be for her to say "I like 'em"? Opinions vary, we'd say that Axx or Kxx or Qxx or Jxxx or even xxxx are all likeable. Some might lower the requirements a tad to include Ax and Kx.

MST's can be used for all sorts of minor one-suiters and two-suiters. We cannot do the subject full justice in these few pages, but here are a few snippets:

♠ 7
♥ 6 5 3
♦ A 9 8 6 5 4
♣ 9 4 3

A miserable hand! When Partner opens 1NT our plan is to play in 3♦. So, we respond 2NT, and will either pass Opener's 3♦ reply, or convert her 3♣ reply to 3♦.

♠ 7
♥ 6 5 3
♦ A Q 8 6 5 4
♣ J 10 3

This hand has possibilities for 3NT if Opener says that she likes Diamonds. So Responder bids 2NT, and will venture 3NT if Opener replies 3♦. But if Opener does not like Diamonds then 3♦ will be the contract.

♠ Q 7
♥ K 5 3
♦ A 9 8 6 5 4
♣ Q 3

There's no reason to mess around with MST's on this board. 3NT is where this one belongs and Responder should just bid it directly.

♠ 7
♥ K 3 2
♦ A Q 10 6 5 4
♣ A J 10

Slam is a possibility, and the auction might start 1NT 2NT, 3♦ 3♠. By agreement, 3♠ shows a singleton, and if this persuades Opener that her hand is slam-suitable then she can make a forward-going move.

♠ 7
♥ 4 3
♦ J 10 4 3 2
♣ J 10 6 4 3

Responder wants to play this miserable minor two-suiter in three of a minor. So he bids 2NT. Now, if Opener bids 3♦ she likes 'em, and 3♦ should be playable. If Opener bids 3♣, she doesn't like Diamonds, and hopefully likes Clubs better.