

How to Compete over the Forcing 1NT Bid

By Neil H. Timm

After a major opening the opponents bid 1NT and announce the bid as forcing. For example, the bidding goes 1♥/1♠ - Pass - 1NT - ? Should you compete and with what convention?

To compete you need at least 6 HCP and your two longest suits minus your losers must be 2 or more or you need two shortness points playing for example 2/1 or Precision.

While some pairs may play all bids as natural, sometimes you need a way to show hands that are widely varying in strength (without misleading partner) or a two suiter. A clever way is to switch some bids around which allows one to compete in the fourth position. Using the Useful Space Principle, one may employ the VASILEVSKY Convention.

In the above forcing NT sequence, you bid as:

Dbl*	transfer to clubs
2♣*	transfer to diamonds
2♦*	transfer to the unbid major
2 of the bid major	good, distributional takeout “double”
2 of unbid major	weaker takeout double, guaranteeing four of the major bid
2NT*	distributional takout for the minors
3♣/3♦	natural, but shows 6-4, the four being the unbid major.

Let's see how it works. The bidding goes 1♥ - Pass - 1NT - ? and you hold:

a) ♠Q10654 ♥A5 ♦9 ♣KJ1076

Double*, showing clubs. If opener passes and partner bids 2♣, you next bid 2♠, showing a two-suited 5-5 hand. If you were 6-4 in clubs and spades, you would bid 3♣.

However, suppose you are 4-4 in clubs and spades. You have the hand:

b) ♠AJ54 ♥7 ♦AK93 ♣A874

You now bid 2♠*, showing a strong takout double. With either of the following hands:

c) ♠AJ54 ♥72 ♦Q87 ♣KJ74

d) ♠9542 ♥7 ♦KJ854 ♣Q107

You would bid 2♥*, a weak takout double.

However, when you are a passed hand, Vasilevsky no longer applies. Since intervener's hand is limited, he doesn't need two bids.

The only disadvantage of the convention is that one may not penalize a 1NT bid; however, this does not occur that often. The advantage is that, using transfers, the calls are logical, hence easy to remember and show exactly the distribution and strength needed to compete.

The Useful Space Principle

The VASILEVSKY Convention is based upon the Useful Space Principle (USP) developed by Jeff Rubens. The principle has formed the basis for the creation and development of many modern day conventions; for example, Roman Keycard Blackwood with Kickback. The definition is:

When allocating bidding space under partnership agreements, assign it where most useful without deference to natural or traditional bridge meanings of calls.

Let's apply the principle in some simple situations.

Suppose the bidding goes: 1♣ - DBL - 1♥ - ?

What do you bid if you are weak and have four spades, bid 2♥. With 10+ points and five spades, bid 2♠.

Let's consider another example. Recall Leaping Michaels is reasonable way to show a two-suited hand over weak two/three level bids. Using the USP, suppose the bidding goes:

2♠ - Pass - 3♠ - ?

How do you now compete? Consider the following bids.

4♣* shows clubs and hearts

4♦* shows diamonds and hearts

4♠* shows game in a long minor and asks partner to bid 5♣ which may be corrected, if necessary, to 5♦

4♥ is natural

4NT* shows both minors

The above are just two examples of exchanging the normal meaning of bids; you can invent many more if you are so inclined. One Last example!

When your partner overcalls, he is usually not inviting you to introduce a suit of your own; but, sometimes you have a suit worth showing. Should the new suit shown by partner be forcing? Experts disagree, but a majority plays it as merely investigational or

NF Constructive, which is the treatment, adopted in the 'Bridge World Standard'. However you play it, you need a good suit to change partners overcall or to suggest you play in 3NT. How do you show your good suit, even with a bad hand, without misleading partner? Again, as suggested by Jeff Rubens of Bridge World, you again use the USP and play transfers!

Here is how it may work. The bidding goes 1♣ -1♠- pass - ?? You may bid as follows.

- 1NT natural with club stopper
- 2♣* transfer to diamonds
- 2♦* transfer to hearts (weak with only 4)
- 2♥ 5 hearts and strong
- 2♠ natural
- 2NT* reverse good-bad notrump (relay to clubs and bid your strong suit)

You hold: ♠5 ♥985 ♦KQJ865 ♣ J43. Bid 2♣, transferring partner to diamonds.

However, holding ♠5 ♥Q87 ♦AKQJ86 ♣ QJ4; bid 2NT*, and after the club relay, bid 3♦. If partner holds ♠AJ7642 ♥K104 ♦732 ♣ 8, he will pass.

With the hand: ♠5 ♥AQJ943 ♦J87 ♣954, bid 2♦* as a transfer to hearts.

With the hand: ♠5 ♥AKQJ75 ♦A87 ♣973, bid 2♥. What do you think? Develop you own bidding sequence.

For example:

Competing over the 1X- Pass-1NT - ? with 8+ HCP or 2 shortness points

- 2♣* = 6+♦ or 5-5 in ♥ and ♠
- 2♦* = 6+♥ or 5-5 in ♠ and ♣
- 2♥* = 6+♠ or 5-5 in ♣ and ♦
- 2♠* = 6+ ♣ or 5-5 in ♦ and ♥
- 2NT* = 5-5 in ♣ and ♥ (rounded suits)
- X* = 5-5 in ♦ and ♠ (pointed suits)
- *=alert

or

- 2♣* = transfer to Diamonds 6+ card suit**
- 2♦* = transfer to Hearts 6+ card suit**
- 2♥* = transfer to Spades 6+ card suit**
- 2♠* = transfer to clubs with a good hand 6+ clubs**
- 2NT* = 5-5 in the Minors**
- Double = Responder bids 2♣ -- May Pass with a weak hand and 6+ clubs or bid Capp (5-5)**

What sequence do you use if the bidding goes: 1♠ - 2♥ - pass - ??? Again, use the USP to develop your own sequence!

For more suggests, consult the book “Competitive Bidding in the 21st Century” by Marshall Miles (2000) published by Master Point Press.