



Conventional Wisdom

Filling out the convention card — part 3

The 24-part *Conventional Wisdom* series is available online at www.acbl.org/play/conventionwisdom.html

3♣, 3♦, 3♥, 3♠ Ask a dozen pairs what meanings they assign to these bids and you're likely to get a dozen different answers. There are many popular treatments, so it's important that you discuss with your partner what these bids mean in your partnership. Many pairs play 3♣ and 3♦ as natural, but be certain you understand what strength these bids promise. Some pairs like to play these as weak; they're a sign-off. Others prefer to treat them as invitational to 3NT promising a decent six-card suit. And others prefer to use them as strong and slam-going. If you play any of these treatments, no Alert is required. If, however, you'd prefer to use any of these bids to show, say, a two-suited hand (many pairs use 3♥ and 3♠ to show both majors) or maybe a three-suited hand (with shortness in the suit bid), that's okay too, as long as you write a brief explanation on the convention card and Alert the treatment. Note that these lines are in **RED**, requiring an Alert.

4♦, 4♥ Transfer

Many partnerships use 4♦ and 4♥ as transfers to 4♥ and 4♠, respectively. This popular treatment is known as a Texas transfer. After partner opens 1NT, you may show a long major suit (with appropriate values) at the four level by bidding the suit one rank below the one you actually hold. Partner will accept the transfer by bidding your "real" suit.

ANNOUNCEMENT If you play this method, you must Announce "Transfer" to the opponents when partner responds 4♦ or 4♥ to your 1NT opening. The **BLUE** box indicates a bid that must be described to the opponents by an Announcement.

NOTRUMP OPENING BIDS	
1NT to _____	3♣ _____
_____ to _____	3♦ _____
5-card Major common <input type="checkbox"/>	3♥ _____
System on over _____	3♠ _____
2♣ Stayman <input type="checkbox"/> Puppet _____	_____
2♦ Transfer to ♥ <input type="checkbox"/>	4♦, 4♥ Transfer <input type="checkbox"/>
_____ Forcing Stayman <input type="checkbox"/>	Smolen <input type="checkbox"/>
2♥ Transfer to ♠ <input type="checkbox"/>	Lebensohl <input type="checkbox"/> (____ denies)
2♠ _____	Neg. Double <input type="checkbox"/> : _____
2NT _____	Other: _____

Negative Double Say partner opens 1NT, right-hand opponent bids 2♥ and you double. Many pairs play this as a good old-fashioned penalty double, but some like to play it as a negative double, promising values and length in the other suits, especially the major(s). If you prefer the latter approach, check the box.

Smolen Experienced pairs use Smolen to help them describe a hand with a 5-4 or 4-5 pattern in the majors after partner's 1NT opening. Smolen also helps keep the strong hand as declarer if a fit is found. Say the auction begins

Partner	You
1NT	2♣
2♦	?

After your 2♣ Stayman inquiry, partner has denied holding a four-card major. If you hold game-forcing values with five spades and four hearts, you know your side doesn't have an eight-card heart fit, but you might still have a 5-3 spade fit. How to show this kind of hand? Playing Smolen, you may now jump to the three level in your shorter major (hearts) to tell partner about your pattern. Partner can then decide between 3NT and 4♠. If you have four spades and five hearts, you would jump to 3♠ instead. Smolen requires an Alert after the three-level jump.



Lebensohl When the opponents intervene over your side's 1NT opening, it can be difficult to describe your hands accurately. For example, what does 3♣ mean in this auction?

You	Opponent	Partner	Opponent
1NT	2♥	3♣	

2♥ is natural. Is 3♣ forcing? Or is it to play? Both ways are reasonable, but you must have an agreement. To help differentiate between forcing and non-forcing actions by responder, many pairs use lebensohl. It works like this: Direct three-level actions (as in the given auction) are forcing, but with weak hands, responder bids 2NT (Alertable) first. This conventional bid commands opener to bid 3♣ so that responder can pass (with clubs) or bid another suit (such as diamonds) to show a weak hand with a long suit. Another nice part of lebensohl is that it allows you to tell partner whether you have a stopper in the enemy suit. Many lebensohl enthusiasts use this type of sequence to deny a stopper:

You	Opponent	Partner	Opponent
1NT	2♥	3NT	

Partner's 3NT call says, "I have enough strength to be in game, but I don't have a stopper." To show a stopper, partner bids 2NT first, forcing you to bid 3♣, and then bids 3NT:

You	Opponent	Partner	Opponent
1NT	2♥	2NT	Pass
3♣	Pass	3NT	

Since the "faster" auction denies a stopper, many pairs write the word "Fast" in the blank next to "denies" on the card. This treatment requires an Alert.

