



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(187) DONT and Meckwell

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Level: 2, 4

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General

When the opponents open the bidding with a strong 1NT the hand usually belongs to them, as we are less likely to have a majority of the HCP. If we stay out of the auction, most partnerships will bid to a good final contract after a 1NT opening, so we strive to interfere in the auction when we can. Since the opponents usually have more HCP us when they start the bidding with 1NT then the types of hands that we want to compete in the bidding with are usually 1-suited or 2-suited distributional hands. With these hands we turn our focus to getting in the opponents' way and further competing in the bidding when our side discovers a large fit. Many modern bidding systems (the kind that use artificial structures) over the opponent's 1NT opening bid are designed with this competitive bidding approach of destructive bidding with distributional hands in mind. Let's see how it works.

DONT vs. Strong 1NT - "Disturb the Opponents' Notrump"

One of the first systems designed to be primarily destructive is a system called DONT. DONT is optimized for 2-suited hands - allowing us to show all 2-suited hands at the 2-level (some other systems end up pushing us to the 3-level to show our 2-suited hands). We define all the bids at the 2-level as artificial, each bid showing "the suit bid and a higher ranking suit". Thus, with a 2-suited hand we simply bid the cheaper of our two suits.

1NT ?

- 2♣* Clubs and a higher-ranking suit (2-suited hand)
- 2♦* Diamonds and Major suit (2-suited hand)
- 2♥* Hearts and Spades (2-suited hand)
- 2♠* Spades (1-suited hand)

If partner does not like our first suit bid then they can bid the next cheapest suit to ask us to show our second suit.

Example

1NT 2♣* P 2♦*
P 2♠

Notes:

- 2♣* Clubs and a higher-ranking suit
- 2♦* Denies Club support and asks for partner's other suit
- 2♠ Clubs and Spades

Since all the bids at the 2-level show two suits (except 2♠) then 1-suited hands seem to be left out of the bidding. With a weak hand and one long suit, we could jump to the 3-level. But we would like to have a way to show a 1-suited hand (one with a 6+card suit) at the 2-level, so we define double* to show a 1-suited hand. After we double*, partner can bid 2♣* (waiting) and then we show our suit at the 2-level.

Example

1NT X* P 2♣*
P —

- Pass 6+card ♣ suit
- 2♦ 6+card ♦ suit
- 2♥ 6+card ♥ suit
- 2♠ 6+card ♠ suit

Notice that this system allows us to simply and efficiently show both 1-suited hands (usually 6+card suits) and 2-suited hands (at least 5/4 distribution) at the 2-level, but the cost for doing so is that we give up the penalty double. This is in line with the idea that the frequency of a penalty double is such that it does not make sense to allocate a valuable bid to something that is so unlikely to be used. We want to use all our bids to Disturb the Opponent's NoTrump – DONT.

What is a 2-Suited Hand?

A 2-suited hand does not always need to be 5-5 or longer shape. Many things may affect your decision to bid with a 2-suited hand:

- Suit quality (location of honors),
- Overall values (number of HCP),
- Shape of the hand -- 5/4, 5/5, 6/5 or more... (4/4 is possible in the right situation).
- Vulnerability,
- Seat (direct seat vs. balanced seat),
- Style – your person level of aggression in bidding over the opponent's 1NT opening.

Examples

The modern style is to bid with the following hands (or something similar) when non-vulnerable:

♠ Axxxx	♠ QJTxx	♠ KQTx	♠ KQJ9
♥ Axxxx	♥ QJTxx	♥ AQTxx	♥ KQJ8
♦ xx	♦ xx	♦ x	♦ xxx
♣ x	♣ x	♣ xxx	♣ xx

1-Suited Hands with the ♠ Suit

You may have noticed that there are two ways to show a 1-suited hand with ♠ – either overcall a direct 2♠*, or double* first to show a 1-suited hand and then bid 2♠. The difference in the two bidding sequences is the strength shown. An immediate 2♠* bid is more destructive (preemptive) and double* followed by 2♠ shows a stronger hand. This is an example of the Fast Arrival concept at work – direct (immediate bids) are weaker than “going slow.”

Balancing with DONT

DONT is an effective system in both the direct or the balancing seat.

1NT __? or 1NT P P __?

- X* some 1-suited hand
- 2♣* ♣ + higher suit
- 2♦* ♦ + higher suit (Major)
- 2♥* ♥ + ♠
- 2♠* ♠, 1-suited (weaker than double and bid ♠)
- 2NT minors

Meckwell

Leave it to one of the best partnerships in the world to find a way to improve on something that is already effective. The first improvement was a small change to DONT (called modified DONT), which was to make 2♣* show ♣ and a Major (instead of possibly both minors). This allows Advancer to compete in the bidding more aggressively when they have length in both Major suits, knowing Interferer has length in at least one of these suits.

Another modern improvement to many bidding systems for interfering over the opponent's 1NT opening bid is to make bidding either Major suit (\heartsuit or \spadesuit) directly, natural. (This is true in Modified Cappelletti, Meckwell, etc...) With this change in Meckwell, bidding $2\heartsuit$ no longer shows $\heartsuit + \spadesuit$, but it shows a 1-suited hand with \heartsuit . We show both Major suits in the way that we used to show only hearts, by doubling and then bidding $2\heartsuit$. This is an improvement because when we have both Major suits we are often not in as much of a hurry to enter the auction. But when we have a 1-suited hand with \heartsuit , it may be important to show this immediately (in case the auction is at $2\spadesuit$ when it gets back around to us).

Here are the meanings of the bids in Meckwell:

- X^* 1-suited minor (\clubsuit or \diamondsuit), or **both Majors**, or strong with \spadesuit
- $2\clubsuit^*$ **$\clubsuit + \text{Major}$**
- $2\diamondsuit^*$ $\diamondsuit + \text{Major}$
- $2\heartsuit$ **1-suited in \heartsuit (natural)**
- $2\spadesuit^*$ 1-suited in \spadesuit (natural)
- 2NT minors

The items in **bold** are changes from DONT to Meckwell.

The most significant change is in the way we show a 1-suited hand with \heartsuit vs. showing a hand with both Major suits.

Conclusion

DONT (as well as Meckwell) is a system for competing over a 1NT opening bid that gives up the penalty double in order to allow us to allocate as many bids as possible to showing shapely hands that want to bid over the opponent's 1NT bid. The hand types that are mostly likely to want to bid over a 1NT opening bid are 1-suited hands and 2-suited hands. Since the 2-suited hands are the most common hands that you will interfere with and have more information to communicate (both suits), then direct bids are used to show these hands as cheaply as possible, showing both suits at the 2-level. This leaves double for us to use to show the 1-suited hands. Give this powerful destructive bidding tool a try and work to make life as difficult as possible on the opponents when they open the bidding 1NT - "DONT let them have a free ride."