

Gimmicks
(or Little Things to Add to Your Game)

I'm sort of a sucker for looking for ways to improve my bridge bidding. I need tools!! So I like to try various different things that I hear or read about....then I add some of them to my convention card while discarding others. The gimmicks that follow are certainly not original with me. They are ones that I have been introduced to along the way, and, of course, I like them or you wouldn't be hearing about them.

Keycard Asking over Three-Level Preemptive Bids

Occasionally partner preempts before you've had a chance to bid. (Your partners loves to preempt!) You find yourself with a REALLY good hand with controls in the other suits. You'd like to investigate slam but the problem is.....just how bad or how good is partner's long suit. This is a method to find out.

In order to ask for aces after a preemptive bid at the three level, 4♣ becomes RKC (Roman Keycard Blackwood.) The responses are:

- 1st step – 0 keycards
- 2nd step - zero keycards but do have the Queen
- 3rd step - 1 keycard, no Queen
- 4th step - 1 keycard with the Queen
- 5th step - 2 keycards

If the preemptive bid was in clubs, 4♦ becomes the RKC bid with the same step responses. If you need to know more, you're on your own.

Example: Partner opens 3♣ in first position and catches you with the following:

♠AKxxx ♥ AKx ♦ KQJ ♣ Kx.

You bid 4♦ to ask about keycards and get one of the following responses:

- 4♥ shows 0 keycards so sign off quickly in 5♣.
- 4♠ shows 0 keycards but with the Queen. Again sign off quickly in 5♣.
- 4NT shows 1 keycard but no Queen. Either sign off or gamble on 6♣.
- 5♣ shows 1 keycard with the Queen. Bid 6♣.
- 5♦ shows 2 keycards. A problem hand. Best chance seems to be 6♣.

Trying for 3NT after a Weak Double Raise (Minors Only)

It's not uncommon to play that jump raises in the minors are preemptive and thus fairly weak. The problem is just how weak is weak? If you happen to play inverted minor raises and a simple raise is fairly strong, the double raise can have a wide range....something like 5-9+. In addition, the vulnerability should have some bearing on responder's jump raise.

In order not to miss game over these bids the following is a method to investigate for game.....either 3NT or five of the minor.

So now, as the opening bidder with a very good hand, having heard partner jump to three of the same minor (preemptive), you can make a try for 3NT or five of the minor as follows:

Next higher suit by opener asks if 3NT will have a play. The responses:

- (a) Next higher suit by responder says Yes
- (b) Second higher bid by responder says No but 5 of minor likely
- (c) Third higher bid by responder says No, but 5 of minor possibly
- (d) Rebid of minor at four level says No to all of these things

Example: 1C - 3C (Opponents out)
3D - says if I bid 3NT will it have a play?
3H - yes
3S - no but 5C likely
3NT - no but 5C maybe
4C - no way (maybe w3 can make 4C!)

Balancing in the Dead Seat After Opponents Auctions That End in 1NT

Whenever an opponents' auction comes to a screeching halt after a 1NT rebid by opener, you often may be thinking about balancing. The following is a convenient and usually effective way of belatedly getting into the auction. It's a form of DONT and it works like this:

- (1) 2♣ shows 4 clubs and another four card suit
- (2) 2♦ shows 4 diamonds and another four card suit
- (3) 2♥ shows four cards in each major.
- (4) Double is intended as penalty and asks for the lead of the suit bid by dummy.

Example No. 1: Opponents bidding is 1♣ Pass 1♥ Pass
1NT Pass Pass ?

Your holding is Qxxx xx KJx KJxx so you can start with 2♣ intending to bid 2♠ over partner's 2♥ bid but to pass if partner bids 2♦.

It does not matter that the suits you bid with this DONT method have already been bid by the opponents...it's still quite effective. It even seems to work best with suits exactly four cards long as partner will unlikely play you for a five-card suit that you could have bid earlier. It's amazing how often you can find a playable fit at the two level.

Example No 2: Opponents bidding is 1♣ Pass 1♥ Pass
1NT Pass Pass Double

You hold something like Ax KQJ10xx Kxx xx. You truly do want the heart suit led!

Applying Some Convention After An Opponent's 1NT Overcall

Do you have any partnership agreements as to what bids mean when partner has opened the bidding, your RHO overcalls 1NT and you bid? It's a good idea to have a method in your arsenal that enables you to compete effectively. I have found that it works best to play some convention....possibly the same one you would have played had your RHO opened 1NT. It works just the same.....you don't need many values (but shape is nice) because partner has opened the bidding. Here I am using the CAPPELLETTI convention but it works equally well with other conventions.

A. After one of a minor followed by a 1NT overcall: (Example 1♣ 1NT ?)

Double - Penalty

2♣ - any one-suited hand

2♦ - both majors

2♥ - hearts and a minor

2♠ - spades and a minor

B. Similarly, after 1♥ 1NT

Double - Penalty

2♣ - any one-suited hand

2♦ - heart raise with longer spades than hearts

2♥ - heart raise with a minor on the side

2♠ - spades and a minor

Or if the auction was 1♠ 1NT

Double - Penalty

2♣ - any one-suited hand

2♦ - spade raise with longer hearts than spades

2♥ - hearts and a minor

2♠ - spade raise with a minor on the side

C. It also works quite well when pulling partner's double of a weak NT or strong NT: (Ex. 1NT X P ?)

2♣ - any one-suited hand

2♦ - both majors

2♥ - hearts and a minor

2♠ - spades and a minor

Equal Level Conversion Doubles

Sometimes you hold a decent hand and are planning on opening the bidding when your RHO beats you to it by opening 1 of a major. Now, unfortunately, your hand, while it has the values for a takeout double, doesn't have the right shape. If you are 5-5 or 6-5 you can use a Michaels cuebid but if you have a 6-4 or 5-4 hand similar to ♠AQxx ♥xx ♦AQJxxx ♣x after 1♥ by an opponent you have more of a problem. Of course you can overcall 2♦ but then you and your partner may lose the spade suit. What's the solution?

The answer is an Equal Level Conversion Double. With the above hand after your RHO opens 1♥ you first make a takeout double. If partner responds with spades everything is great. But what if partner responds with clubs (as my partners always seem to do)? Playing ELC doubles you can "convert" to diamonds and you're at the same point you would have been had you just overcalled 2♦ in the first place. It shows no more values than a 2♦ overcall would have.....you have just converted partner's response to a more playable contract. Hence the term "equal level conversion".

Another example where a takeout double would appear to be less appealing but actually works just as well would be something like ♠Kxxx ♥AKx ♦K109xxx ♣ -

Now it's quite obvious that the partnership needs to have an understanding about these ELC doubles. To reiterate....doubling the opponent's opening bid of a major suit and then bidding diamonds after your partner responds with clubs DOES NOT show any extra values. It's just a correction. Since this is clearly a partnership agreement an alert seems to be required when partner corrects to diamonds after his/her original T/O double.

It's probably best to keep these ELC doubles as fairly limited bids. If you should hold a really good hand with diamonds and spades and your RHO opens 1♥ it may be best to simply overcall 2♦ with the intent of bidding your spade suit later. If you hold the other major and five or more clubs this ELC agreement does NOT apply. For example with AKxx xx x AJxxxx one would need to simply overcall clubs.

Suggested Responses to Michaels Cuebids

Most of you are likely familiar with the convention known as a Michael's Cuebid. It originated with and was developed by Michael Michaels many years ago and allows you to show a two-suited hand after an opponent has opened the bidding. The idea is to use a cuebid of the opponent's suit to show two other suits thus describing your hand with one bid. Well, sort of anyway. Obviously the hand doesn't qualify for a takeout double and often the point count range is on the weak side. Or, at least it used to be that the range of the Michael's Cuebid was limited to about 7-10 HCP's. However, over the years it has become acceptable to have almost any range for this bid.

The convention works like this. Over an opponent's minor suit opening a direct cuebid shows both major suits....usually at least 5-5. Over a major suit opening the direct cuebid shows the other major and one unknown minor, again usually at least 5-5. At favorable vulnerability some partnerships have relaxed the suit length requirement so that the Michaels cuebid can be used with 5-4 or 6-4 hands with the longer suit being a minor. But at unfavorable vulnerability, most stick to the minimum distribution of 5-5 with reasonable strength.

It is this ambiguity that makes necessary a better way of responding to partner's introduction of a Michael's cuebid. Additionally, if you prefer to play that your Michaels Cuebid can have a wide range, it is necessary to have a method available to partner to find out how weak or strong you are. This is such a method:

(1) In response to Michaels over a Major (1M - 2M - P (or X)):

2♠ (if 1♥ was the opening bid) is to play and is not at all invitational

3♥ (if 1♠ was the opening bid) is to play and is not at all invitational

3♣ asks the Michaels bidder to pass if their minor is clubs or to correct to diamonds if it's diamonds

3♦, 4♦, 5♦ show diamonds and are not correctable

4♣, 5♣ show clubs and are not correctable

3NT - to play

2NT asks whether the Michaels bidder is min or max:

Structured Responses over 1♠-2♠-P 2NT P would be:

3♣ shows clubs (and hearts) and a minimum

3♦ shows diamonds (and hearts) and a minimum
3♥ shows clubs (and hearts) and a maximum
3♠ shows diamonds (and hearts) and a maximum.

Structured Responses over 1♥ 2♥ P 2NT P would be:

3♣ shows clubs (and spades) and a minimum
3♦ shows diamonds (and spades) and a minimum
3♥ shows clubs (and spades) and a maximum
3♠ shows diamonds (and spades) and a maximum

(2) In response to Michaels over a minor (1m 2m P (or X))

2♥ is to play and is not invitational
2♠ is to play and is not invitational
2NT asks for Major suit length and strength

Responses by the Michaels bidder are:

3♣ shows minimum hand with longer hearts
3♦ shows minimum hand with longer spades
3♥ shows minimum hand with 5-5
3♠ shows maximum hand with longer hearts
3NT shows maximum hand with longer spades
4♣ shows maximum with equal length and club shortness
4♦ shows maximum with equal length and diamond shortness

There's some memory work involved but don't knock it until you've tried it!

Simple McCabe Over Doubles of Weak 2 Bids
(McCabe Adjunct)

In very simple terms the McCabe Adjunct is a two-notrump response to a weak two-bid intended as a relay to three clubs and it's usually preliminary to signing off at three of a suit lower than your partner's suit. For example: 2H P 2NT P
3C P 3D is an offer to play 3D and is neither forcing nor invitational. Compare to 2H P 3D which most play is 100% forcing.

However, the best use of this convention or treatment occurs after RHO has doubled your partner's weak two-bid. Now responder may bid as follows:

Redouble = forces the weak two bidder to bid the cheapest suit and is the start of a single-suited runout.

2N = game try; systems on (Ogust, Feature, etc).

New suits = lead directional raises of the weak two bidder's suit.

The lead directors are particularly useful since the weak two bidder will frequently be on lead after a takeout double in direct seat.

An example of the type of hand where the lead directing bid is really nice is this: After 2H X you hold: xxx xx Qxxx AQJx. This directs partner to lead clubs on the opening lead.

Some people play a variation of this gadget in which redouble is natural, new suits at the 2 level are to play, and 2N forces 3c to sign off at the 3 level somewhere. If you choose to play that variation, you can redouble and bid a new suit to show a forcing one suiter. Either of these variations is infinitely superior to standard.

Puppet Stayman

Puppet Stayman is used after NT opening bids when the partnership has agreed that it is permissible to open balanced hands with five-card majors with NT. Although it can be used after 1NT opening bids, it is much more common after 2NT openers or after 2♣ followed by 2NT. Puppet Stayman has the benefit of making sure that the big hand is always the declarer.

Using this convention, responder should still transfer with a five card major of his or her own, but with only 3 or 4 card major suits, 3♣ should be used as Puppet Stayman. After a 3C response to 2NT the responses by the opening bidder and the continuing sequences are as follows:

(1) 3♦ = 1 or 2 four-card major suits

Responder: 3♥ = do not have hearts, but have four spades
3♠ = do not have spades, but have four hearts
3NT = no four-card major, was checking for five
4♣ = both majors, only interested in game
4♦ = both majors, some slam interest.

(2) 3♥ = five-card heart suit

Responder: 3NT = to play
4♣ = RKC for hearts
4♦, 3♠ = cuebids in support of hearts
4♥ = to play
4NT = quantitative raise

(3) 3♠ = five-card spade suit

Responder: 3NT = to play
4♣ = RKC for spades
4♦, 4♥ = cuebids in support of spades
4♠ = to play
4NT = quantitative raise

(4) 3NT = no four- or five-card major suit

Responder: 4♣ = Gerber
4♦ = Transfer to hearts (rarely)
4♥ = Transfer to spades (rarely)
4NT = Quantitative

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