

# Bridge Theory for Practitioners

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## 32. Mama don't let your boys and girls play these Conventions

In a typical column on bidding theory, the writer prescribes all sorts of fancy conventions for the readers. I am taking a 180 degree opposite viewpoint in this column. I will list two conventions that you should not play. Period. Of course, I will provide reasons why you should not play these and moreover, I will suggest methods that you should use instead.

### I. Do not play a convention called *Stolen Bid*

First let me quickly summarize what this convention is. If partner opens 1N and the opponent in the direct chair bids something at the 2-level, then a double by responder says I had that bid if my RHO was silent. For example,

1N	2C	X	= Stayman
1N	2D	X	= Transfer to Hs etc.

Now, here is a test for the readers. Ask any Bridge player of your choice whether she plays this specific convention. And then ask how many Blue Ribbon qualifications (a much, much better indicator of player strength than masterpoints --- not all masterpoints are created equal) does she have. You will see a strong inverse correlation. **Strong players do not play Stolen Bid convention.**

A more important question is why is that?

Because strong players like to penalize the opponents at the 2-level when partner opens a strong NT. It is that simple. If my partner realizes that our opponents play stolen bids and do not have a penalty double at their arsenal, she would start bidding with nothing. With absolutely nothing. The more she bids the less she would have. And when the dust settles you will realize you have got a real bad board. She has stolen it from you.

So do not play this convention. Keep the double for penalty with couple of exceptions. I will describe those in my next bidding column.

What to play then when opponents overcall over partner's strong NT? We would like to play a convention that mixes transfers and yet keep the double for penalty. Best of both worlds. In my next bidding column I will introduce you to a variation of the so-called Lebensohl convention

called the **Transfer Lebensohl**. This version is very, very easy to play. So easy that my next bidding column will be called “An intuitive Transfer Lebensohl convention for the Hoi Polloi”.

## II. Do not play point count step response when partner opens 2C

Following this convention when partner opens 2C and the RHO is silent, responder bids

2D = 0-3 high card points

2H = 4-6 high card points

etc.

Needless to say, this is a poor scheme. Again, you should take the test I described above and ask any strong player of your choice. The reason for not playing this convention is the following.

When partner opens 2C, she has a strong hand and she is interested in *immediately* knowing two things: a) How many controls (Aces and Kings) do you have and b) Whether you have a long, strong suit of your own. Those are pertinent information that would help her most in figuring out how high the hand should be played in. Point count steps method counts Queens and Jacks along with Aces and Kings and provides practically no useful information.

### What to play then instead when partner opens 2C?

I will go over this in detail in a future column but briefly here is the method I propose that provides info about **controls and long minor suits**. We define an Ace as 2 controls and a King as 1 control.

2D = No Ace, might have a King; but does not have a one-loser 6 card **minor** suit such as KQJxxx

2H = 2 controls; Either an Ace or two Kings; but does not have a one-loser 6 card **minor** suit such as KQJxxx or AQJxxx

2S = 3 or more controls. If exactly three controls then must be an Ace and a King and not 3 Kings. Does not have a one-loser 6 card **minor** suit such as KQJxxx or AQJxxx or a solid minor suit like AKQxxx

2N = Exactly 3 Kings; does not have a one-loser 6 card **minor** suit such as KQJxxx.

3C/3D = Either 1 loser or solid 6+ card minor suit; total control situation unknown.

All other bids are non-system. This allows partner to bid her major suit at the three level if the response is 3C or 3D. Responder's solid or semi-solid major suit is not as important. When opener bids 2N a transfer to major suit is quite convenient; otherwise responder can bid her long, strong major suit now.

I will continue with this topic in my next column on bidding. Specifically I will introduce you to a relay system called *Kokish Relay* if the bidding goes 2C-2D. I will also teach you what to do if the opponents interfere after a 2C opening.