

MARVIN VS STRONG NOTRUMP OPENINGS

Yet another defense against notrump openings? Is there no end? Well, no apologies, because this one does it all. It provides for the description of all one-suited, two-suited, or three-suited hands.

"Marvin vs Notrump" applies against all opening notrump bids, with slight differences for weak and strong notrumps. A strong notrump is defined as having a minimum of 14 HCP. See the next section for the defense against non-strong notrumps.

Common sense dictates the strength required for all actions, taking into consideration both vulnerability and the high card point (HCP) range of the 1NT bid. The defense applies in both direct and reopening seats. It also applies against 1NT rebids that show a strong notrump opening (e.g., 1NT rebid by a Precision 1♣ opener), provided that the defending side has not bid or doubled prior to the 1NT bid.

Business Doubles

A double by an unpassed hand is a penalty double. In the direct seat it may be based on either superior high card strength or partly on the basis of a good lead. With seven spades AKQ you can double with no other points! When balancing it is dangerous to double with scattered high-card strength, since opener is sitting over you. Therefore this double indicates that a long strong suit is held and partner is expected to lead that suit. He will usually guess right by leading his shortest small-card suit, giving preference to a major if in doubt.

Simple Suit Overcalls

A 2♠ bid is natural by a passed hand only. Other simple suit overcalls at the two level are artificial, showing one of three types of hand:

- A three-suited hand, short in the bid suit
- A two-suited hand, with the two suits just below the bid suit
- A one-suited hand with the suit below the bid suit

For this purpose, clubs and spades are "touching," and clubs rank "above" spades. The three-suited takeout is especially valuable in the balancing position, when you know 1) partner has some strength and 2) that he is probably going to lead your short suit. Be conservative with a short major in this position, however, because partner is likely to have length in that suit only.

-- An overcall of 2♣ shows both majors plus diamonds, or both majors only, or a one-suited hand with spades (a 6-4 hand is considered "one-suited"). The best three-suited distribution is 5=4=4=0, but 4=4=4=1 is also good. Might be 4=5=4=0, 5=4=3=1, or 4=5=3=1. Sometimes I do it with 5=3=4=1 or 4=3=5=1, what the hell, but 2♣ promises at least four spades if the hand is not strong enough to bid a red suit after a 2♠ response (e.g., a strong hand with 3=4=5=1 or 3=5=4=1 distribution). This provides a second way of showing a one-suited hand with spades, a 2♠ overcall being the other. The latter is the weaker way to show spades.

Partner ("advancer") chooses one of the three suits. He bids a four-card or longer major, preferring spades to hearts. He may (holding some high cards) bid a three-card major in preference to a four-card diamond suit. Lacking three cards in a major, he might have to bid a three-card diamond suit. Finally, with 2=2=2=7 he bids 3♣ or passes.

If advancer bids 2♦ in response to 2♣, overcaller bids 2♥ with both majors only. Advancer picks a major, preferring spades with equal length. Accordingly, it is better to pass a doubtful hand rather than overcall with 4-5 in the majors. If overcaller has spades only, then of course he bids spades over either 2♦ or 2♥:

South	West	North	East
1NT	2♣	Pass	2♦
Pass	Pass	4=4=4=1	
		2♥ - hearts and spades	
		2♠ - spades only	

With a good hand, advancer can bid 2NT to inquire. Answers:

- 3♣ - three-suited hand, 4=4=4=1
- 3♦ - three-suited hand, five diamonds
- 3♥ - both majors
- 3♠ - spades only

Advancer now passes or picks a contract. Since 2NT shows a good hand, overcaller should jump (4♦, 4♥ or 4♠) with a good hand himself. Since 3♣ is forcing, it is not necessary to jump with that sort of hand. Overcaller can defer the decision whether to bid game or not until he has heard what the 2NT bidder says next.

-- An overcall of 2♦ shows both majors plus clubs, or spades and clubs, or clubs only. The best three-suited distribution is 5=4=0=4, but 4=4=1=4 is also good. Might be 4=5=0=4.

Advancer generally bids a major, preferring spades to hearts with equal length. Avoid the 3♣ response when holding three cards in a major, unless the clubs are quite good. Bid 3♦ only as a last resort with 2=2=7=2 distribution. With a two-suiter or one-suiter, overcaller corrects as necessary if advancer bids a suit not held:

South	West	North	East
1NT	2♦	Pass	2♥
Pass	2♠ - spades and clubs		
	3♣ - clubs only		

Advancer's 2NT response inquires. Answers:

- 3♣ - clubs only
- 3♦ - three-suited hand, four hearts
- 3♥ - three-suited hand, five hearts
- 3♠ - spades and clubs

-- An overcall of 2♥ shows both minors plus spades, or minors only, or diamonds only. Advancer bids 2♠ with three or more, otherwise picks a minor, preferring diamonds with equal length. Overcaller corrects as necessary:

South	West	North	East
1NT	2♥	Pass	2NT
Pass	3♣	- both minors	
	3♦	- diamonds only	
	3♥	- three-suited hand, four spades	
	3♠	- three-suited hand, five spades	

The Two Notrump Overcall

A 2NT overcall is a transfer to clubs, but may be based on a diamond suit. If the latter, the forced 3♣ bid will be converted to 3♦. The bid denies a good hand, with which one of the above methods would be used to get to three of a minor. This is not Alertable because it's a cue bid. If overcaller bids a major next, that is forcing and shows a powerful hand, possibly two-suited.

Jump Overcalls

A bid of 3♣ shows clubs and hearts (rounded suits) and 3♦ shows diamonds and spades (pointed suits). With a very strong hand that fears the jump will be passed, overcaller can start with 2NT and bid the major on the next round.

A jump in a major suit is strong and shows an independent suit. It implies a fear that advancer might pass a conventional overcall. Advancer can raise with a few high cards, even when short in the suit.

Overcaller's Rebid

When overcaller has a strong enough hand to try for game opposite a possible bust, he has a number of possible game tries:

-- A simple raise of advancer's response, showing at least five cards in the suit.

-- A bid in a suit that advancer has skipped over, showing a five-card suit and only three-card support for advancer's suit:

South	West	North	East
1NT	2♣	Pass	2♥
Pass	3♦	- strong but not forcing, only three hearts (4=3=5=1)	

Holding five hearts and a few high cards, East should now bid 4♥, not 3♥.

When Third Seat Doubles

A common action for third seat is to double a suit overcall, showing length in that suit or, for some, merely showing "cards." Some doublers will suppose they are invoking Stayman (double of 2♣) or a transfer

(double of 2♦ or 2♥). If you ask what the double means, chances are good you'll get the wrong answer. Few partnerships will have a clear understanding about the double. It is therefore wise not to ask and to use the same tactics over any sort of double, a policy that has the virtue of simplicity. It goes like this:

-- A pass (which must be alerted) shows at least six-card length in the doubled suit and no sure fit with doubler's hand. The suit quality required for a pass depends on the likelihood of a fit with overcaller. You don't want to go down in a doubled contract when there is a better contract available. A passer is therefore probably very short in the doubler's known suit.

-- A suit bid by advancer is to play, showing at least a six-card suit (four, in overcaller's known suit), and the 2NT response has its normal meaning:

South	West	North	East
1NT	2♦	Dbl	Pass - to play
			2♥/2♠ - long suit
			3♣ - four or more clubs
			2NT - strong inquiry

Jumps over the double are preemptive, since a good hand can bid 2NT. All calls other than a bid of the "anchor" suit (clubs, in this auction) must be alerted (and explained as showing a long suit).

-- A redouble (alertable) promises no strength whatsoever, but merely asks the doubler to clarify his hand. With both a pass and a bid showing a playable suit, the only call left when lacking a "to play" suit is a redouble. Must be alerted, of course, and must never be forgotten if advancer values her life.

When Third Seat Bids Freely

If opener's partner makes a free bid instead of doubling, common sense will usually guide advancer. Inferences can sometimes be drawn about overcaller's hand, depending on what third seat bids. Advancer's double of a suit bid is usually negative, for takeout, and suit bids by advancer (unless third seat bids notrump naturally) are always to play. If third seat bids the anchor suit, then a double is for penalties. The 2NT inquiry still applies, but 3NT is natural. If 2NT is available, a negative double denies the strength necessary for a 2NT bid (which always shows a strong hand). Sometimes third seat's suit bid will be conventional (e.g., a transfer bid), but (as with a double of an overcall) it is better to treat both natural and conventional bids in the same way.

-- When the overcall is a suit bid, there are four possibilities for a suit bid by third seat.

1) A bid in the same suit as the overcall:

South	West	North	East
1NT	2♣	3♣	Dbl - negative
			3NT - natural
			3♦/3♥/3♠ - to play
			4♣ - cue bid, strong

In reply to the negative double West may want to jump with an extra good hand, since East promises some values. The "to play" suits must be quite good, and at least six cards long; overcaller is likely to pass, even with a singleton. Four cards are enough, of course, in overcaller's known suit (spades, in this case). With the negative double available, a cue bid must be based on a void and good trump support for either spades or spades and a red suit. If these calls seem unlikely after an opposing strong 1NT, remember that the opening bid could be a psych.

2) A bid in the next ranking suit:

South	West	North	East
1NT	2♣	2♦	Dbl - negative
			2NT - inquiry
			2♥/2♠/3♣ - to play
			3♦ - cue bid, strong

In this auction the club suit had better be very strong, since West is likely to be short. If East has a few diamonds, West probably has both majors or spades only. East can therefore bid a three-card spade suit without much danger. Other "to play" bids require a good six-card suit. West can pass the negative double if he has good diamonds. Otherwise he can bid two (or three) of his better major, since this negative double implies support for both majors.

3) A bid in the second-higher suit:

South	West	North	East
1NT	2♣	2♥	Dbl - negative
			2♠/3♣/3♦ - to play
			2NT - inquiry
			3♥ - cue bid, strong

If East has some hearts, West probably has spades only. In that case East can bid 2♠ with just a tripleton and a modicum of strength. Again, West can pass the negative double if he has a heart suit.

4) A bid in the next lower ranking suit (which overcaller must hold):

South	West	North	East
1NT	2♣	2♠	Dbl - penalty
			2NT - inquiry
			3♣/3♦/3♥ - to play

In this situation West must pass the double, since he has at least four spades.

If opener raises responder's suit, overcaller's double is for takeout if there are two or three "unbid" suits and partner has not yet acted.

South	West	North	East
1NT	2♣	2♦	Pass
3♦	Dbl - hearts and spades		

Had South raised a heart or spade bid, a double would be penalty.

-- When third seat bids notrump naturally, a double is for penalties and a suit bid is not "to play."

South	West	North	East
1NT	2♣	2NT/3NT	?

A double is for business. North could have a nice long string of clubs or diamonds, so East should be careful about doubling without minor suit stoppers. In this case a suit bid is not "to play," and West should correct if East bids a suit not held by him. East would bid 3♦ over 2NT, for instance, with ♠Q2 ♥A105 ♦J10973 ♣432, which West should correct to 3♥ or 3♠ if he doesn't have a three-suiter.

-- When third seat bids 2NT conventionally (e.g., Lebensohl, asking opener to bid 3♣), a double is negative and suit bids are "to play:"

South	West	North	East
1NT	2♦	2NT *	Dbl - negative
			3♣/3♦/3♥/3♠ - to play
		* Lebensohl	

When South bids 3♣ over East's double, as Lebensohl requires, a free bid by West shows good values. Whatever the nature of his hand, he should pass with a minimum 2♦ bid and let East compete further if she can (perhaps with a repeat of the negative double).

-- When third seat bids a suit over a 2NT overcall (showing clubs or diamonds)::

South	West	North	East
1NT	2NT	3 any	Dbl - penalty
			3NT - undefined

When Opener Bids

South	West	North	East
1NT	2♣	Pass	2♥
3♣	Pass	Pass	3♥

The heart "rebid" does not show five hearts. East could be 3-4 in the majors, so West must correct to 3♠ with a one-suited hand.

After a Voluntary Takeout

A "voluntary" takeout is one made over a pass:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♥	?

-- If the takeout is natural, then a double (either direct or balancing) is for takeout; a 2NT is unusual notrump for the minors, and jump overcalls are all strong:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♠	Dbl - takeout
			2NT - minors, or hearts-diamonds
			4♣/4♦ - invitational

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♠	Pass
Pass	Dbl - takeout		
			2NT - minors, or hearts-diamonds

-- If the takeout is a forcing artificial bid, such as Stayman or a Jacoby transfer, the situation is different. A double of Stayman 2♣ shows clubs and denies the ability to bid 3♣ if the hand is single-suited. It is primarily a lead-directing double, as is the double of a 2♦ response to Stayman. Action over a transfer response is discussed in section 12-5, Defense vs Transfer Bids.