

THE LEBENSOHL CONVENTION by Maritha Pottenger

When your partner opens 1NT and an opponent comes into the auction before you can bid, you & your partner need to be able to distinguish between times when you just want to compete (and your bid is a “drop dead” bid) and when you want to force the auction to game. The Lebensohl Convention allows you to do that.

General Principles are:

- 1) Bidding over the opponents at the **two level is purely competitive**. It is not forward-going. Partner is expected to pass. For example, 1NT-2H-2S.
- 2) If opponents bid at two level and **you bid 2NT, partner must bid 3C**. (Your bid is a relay.) You will then further clarify your hand. [If responder has long club suit and weak hand, can simply pass the forced bid of 3C.]
- 3) A **double of the opponent’s two-level bid is purely penalty** and partner is expected to pass.
- 4) If opponent bids at the two level and **you bid at the three level**, you have initiated a **game-forcing auction**. For example, 1NT-2H-3C.
- 5) An **immediate cue-bid of opponent’s suit is Stayman** and promises at least one 4-card major and **denies a stopper** in opponent’s suit. For example 1NT-2H-3H.
- 6) An **immediate jump to 3NT** (“fast arrival”) shows the points for game, but **denies a stopper** in opponent’s suit. If NT opener also lacks a stopper, you must start bidding 4-card suits up the line, “scrambling” to find a fit at the 4-level. (If NT Opener has a 5-card major, s/he bids that.)
- 7) **Two no trump** (relay to 3C) **followed by cue-bid is Stayman with a stopper** in opponent’s suit. For example, 1NT-2H-2NT-P-3C-P-3H- (Opener can bid 4S or 3NT.)
- 8) **Two no trump** (relay to 3C) **followed by 3NT** shows points for game and **guarantees a stopper** in opponent’s suit. For example, 1NT-2S-2NT-P-3C-P-3NT.
- 9) **Two no trump** (relay to 3C) **followed by a suit at the 3-level invites game if your suit is above the opponent’s suit**. For example, 1NT-2H-2NT-P-3C-P-3S. Responder has 5 or more spades and probably 8-9 HCP. Opener—depending on whether s/he is minimum or maximum and his/her spade holding and heart stopper or lack thereof can pass 3S; bid 4S; or bid 3NT. If your suit is below opponent’s suit (e.g., 1NT-2S-2NT-3C-P-3D), your bid is purely competitive and should be passed.

If the opponents come in at the 3 level:

- 1) A double is take-out (NOT penalty!). Should also be used when you have points for game but no stopper in opponent’s suit.
- 2) 3NT shows a stopper and is to play.
- 3) Bidding game (e.g., 4 of a major; 5 of a minor) is to play (sign-off). Except Texas still applies if a jump.
- 4) Cue-bid of a minor suit is either Stayman or a slam try.
- 5) A bid below game is forcing.

Further Variations that You Can Play When Opponents Show Two Suits:

- 1) When both suits are known, the cheaper cue-bid is game invitational. The higher cue-bid is game-forcing.
- 2) When one or both suits are unknown, cue-bid of the known suit is game-forcing. All other basic Lebensohl principles apply (e.g., bids at 2 level are competitive; bids at 3 level are forcing, etc.).
- 3) Delayed cue-bids (after using 2NT relay) show stopper.
- 4) Doubles are penalty-oriented. Redoubles show good hand.

Versus Artificial 2 Clubs, play all systems on (transfers, etc.) and double is Stayman.

Versus artificial double (one-suited), play all systems on.