

Reinventing the Weak NT Wheel.

Our 1NT sub-system is a culmination of many years of tinkering combined with a desire to discontinue using transfers.

Why stop using transfers?

This has been debated on BridgeWinners, but basically:

- Transfers are great when the opps are unable to compete, but can be a liability when the opps have the balance of points or very shapely hands which fit well. The transfers simply give them more options. This is obviously more likely playing a weak NT than a strong one.
- 1NT-(p)-2M where 2M is natural and non-forcing puts a lot more pressure on the 4th player than a transfer does.

What are the issues?

- We need to find an alternative way to bid 2-suited and invitational hands.
- The contract is 'wrong-sided'; this is less of an issue playing a weak NT as much is known (or can be quickly discovered) about opener's hand. It can sometimes be an advantage to hide the 'weaker' hand about which very little is known besides it having a five-card major and less than invitational values.
- We lose our 2S range ask (which was also used as a takeout to 3C).

Natural bids

2H/2S: Natural and non-forcing

Opener can 'super-accept'.

A direct raise to 3H/S is a barrage bid with 4-card support and a minimum weak NT.

We have two options with 4-card support and a strong hand (7-losers); these are 2NT and a break to a useless doubleton. The latter is very useful as responder could have an 8-loser hand that is improved by the bid.

Following a break to 2NT a new suit by responder also shows a useless doubleton which may improve opener's hand. With a singleton or void responder should simply bid game.

3C/3D/3H/3S: Game invites

We gave up using these as the traditional Acol slam try a long time ago; they rarely come up and waste a valuable bidding resource. All of these bids promise a 6-card suit and about 10 hcp:

- 1NT-3m invites 3NT
- 1NT-3M invites 4M (the 3M bidder promises a 7-loser hand)

Note that these bids also have pre-emptive value.

3NT/4H/4S:

All 'to play'; avoiding transfers which can be doubled and lead to sacrifice bids. 4H/S can be pre-emptive or full value.

2D: Combined major suit and range ask

•
This combines the functions of Stayman and a 2S range ask; however, it cannot be used to take out to a minor. If opener is max, or responder has game values; then either of them can show a 5-card major.

Responses are:

2H: min with 4/5 hearts

- after a 2H response a raise to 3H shows a 3-4-3-3 hand and is GF
- a bid of 2S is GF with 5 spades

2S: min with 4/5 spades

- after a 2S response a raise to 3S shows a 4-3-3-3 hand and is GF
- any other bid at the 3-level is GF with a 5 card suit

2NT: min with no 4cM

- after a 2NT response a bid of 3M shows a 5 card suit and is GF

3C: max (0/1 majors)

Continuations after 1NT-2D-3C:

- 3D: asks for a 4-card major (3NT denies)
- 3H/S: game force with a five-card suit
- 3NT: to play

3D: max both majors (4/4)

3H: max with 5 hearts

3S: max with 5 spades

Note that after any reply by opener a new suit by responder is forcing.

Example:

Board 7

Oliver Cowan EBU Winter SIM Pairs

2025.01.14

Dealer	W	♠	Q 3				
Vul	None	♥	Q T 7 5 4				
Scoring	MP	♦	A 9 4				
		♣	A 8 3				
♠	7 6 2			North		♠	J 5 4
♥	A 8 3			West		♥	6 2
♦	Q J T 7			East		♦	8 6 3
♣	K 6 4			South		♣	Q J T 7 5
		♠	A K T 9 8				
		♥	K J 9				
		♦	K 5 2				
		♣	9 2				

When this board was played:

- those who opened a weak NT played in 3NT after 1NT-2H-2S-3NT
- those who opened 1H played in the much better contract of 4H

We played in 4H via 1NT-2D-2H-2S-3H-4H

Two-suited hands or weak with a long minor

2NT: both minors (at least 5-5) or weak with 6+ diamonds

Opener is expected to bid their better minor.

Continuations:

3D: to play

3H/3S: splinter and game try

2C: puppet to 2D

Responder may pass or bid:

2H: weak, 4+H and 5+ other (2S is pass-or-correct)

2S: weak, 4+S and 5+ minor (3C is pass or correct)

2NT: invitational with 5/4 in the majors, 3C then asks for xfer to 5cM

3C/3D: splinter with 5/5 in majors, invitational or better

3H: 5+Hearts and 4+Spades, game force

3S: 5+Spades and 4+hearts, game force

3NT: Slam try, long minor.

If 2C is doubled then opener should redouble if 4-4 in the majors and pass otherwise.

Responder will have one of:

a) 5+D

b) 6+C

c) At least one 4-card major

Example:

Board 14

Oliver Cowan EBU Winter SIM Pairs

2025.01.14

Dealer	S			♠ J 5		
Vul	EW			♥ 8 3 2		
Scoring	MP			♦ K T 8 6 2		
				♣ 7 6 4		
♠ K 7 6	W North		E	♠ A 8 4		
♥ A Q T 9	e		a	♥ J 7 6 5		
♦ A 9 7 5	s		s	♦ 4 3		
♣ 8 2	t South		t	♣ K Q J 3		
				♠ Q T 9 3 2		
				♥ K 4		
				♦ Q J		
				♣ A T 9 5		

Auction

I decided to open the South hand with a weak NT (likely to be a controversial choice) and partner bid 2C. I passed East's double which West assumed to show clubs. North's 2D then bought the contract.

2D-1 was worth 97% of the matchpoints with E-W in a heart part score or game at most tables.

Escape from 1NTx

After 1NT-(x)

2D also becomes natural and non-forcing

2C is 4+ clubs and at least 3-2 in the major OR 6+clubs
(note that we also use this idea in our defence to 1NT and short 1C/D)

Redouble is Stayman but opener bids better minor with no major (so can be used with completely flat hands; guaranteeing at least a 4-3 fit).

After 1NT-(p)-p-(x)

Opener redoubles to show 4-4 in the majors or passes.

Responder cannot be weak with 5D/H/S or 6C as they would already have taken action.
Responder will also not have a weak 2-suiter.

So:

2C is natural and non-forcing

Redouble is Stayman but opener bids better minor with no major (so can be used with completely flat hands; guaranteeing at least a 4-3 fit).