



Conventional Wisdom Lite

Filling out a basic 2/1 convention card – part 1

BY LARRY COHEN

In this six-part series, Larry Cohen will take the reader through completing a basic 2/1 game forcing convention card. He will explain procedures and conventions to help prepare newer

players for the world of duplicate bridge – particularly tournaments, which require partners to carry matching, filled-out convention cards. The card is a tool for establishing agreements with your partner before you play and for making those agreements known to your opponents. Your opponents should each have a card at the table so you know what they play as well.

Throughout the series, Larry makes choices about which conventions to recommend. There's more than one way to play any call. If there weren't, the convention card wouldn't come with blank lines and empty boxes. Larry recommends that newer players interested in duplicate use 2/1 Game Forcing from the get-go. Because 2/1 is the system used by most tournament players, playing it will make you more marketable as a partner.

For those who prefer an even simpler card without a 2/1 game force, the ACBL offers one on its website. For a sample "fat-free" convention card, go to acbl.org/fatfree. That card is a great resource for beginner-level Standard American players. There hasn't been a similar resource for beginning 2/1 players – until now. At the conclusion of this series, Larry's card will also be available online. Some parts of the card pertaining to advanced conventions will be shown faded out on the sample card. Ignore them for now. Other conventions are discussed briefly. For those wanting to know more, there are numerous articles and books available explaining these conventions in greater detail. Two such resources are acbl.org/common and larryco.com.

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This month we will explore a few sections of the convention card, but let's first get some preliminaries out of the way.

Some special conventions – most of which are outside the scope of this series – require Alerts. They are shown in red on the convention card. The partner of the person making that special bid will say "Alert," and if asked by the opponents, will explain. On the few occasions where I mention one of those conventions, I will also tell the reader if an Alert is required. If your opponents ever say Alert, you are entitled to ask the meaning, but only when it is your turn to bid.

There are some bids that aren't "Alertable" but are "Announceable." What's that mean? When the bid is made, the partner of the bidder immediately makes an Announcement to the table. Those are shown in blue on the convention card. Some of them will be mentioned in this first article.

One other part of duplicate bridge which can intimidate newer players is the director call. We'll look at some of the main reasons a director might need to be summoned (always politely – all directors have the same last name, which is "please," as in "director, please"). This list isn't complete, but covers at least 90 percent of director calls. There is no need to be shy or uncomfortable about any of these – it is just part of the game.

- A player counts his cards and discovers he doesn't have 13 (you do count your cards, right?).
- One of the players makes an insufficient bid (such as 1♥ after his opponent opened 1♠).
- One of the players bids out of turn. This includes a pass or double out of turn.

- One of the players has made the opening lead face up when it was actually his partner's opening lead.
- One of the defenders accidentally faces/plays a card when it isn't his turn.
- There is a problem with a claim. For example, declarer says "I have the rest of the tricks" – but maybe it isn't so clear he is right.
- It is discovered that somebody revoked (failed to follow suit.)

Most of these things happen due to lack of concentration, but they are quite common among inexperienced players. With the litigious but important procedural stuff out of the way, we can start with the bridge discussion.

NAMES

The first thing on the convention card to fill out is your name and partner's. First and last, please. This might seem trivial, but it is important. It sets a nice tone at the table if your names are available, should the opponents wish to glance at your convention card. Laziness – or arrogance – is not an excuse to leave this easy-to-fill-out section blank.

NOTRUMP OPENING BIDS

This is perhaps the most difficult section of the convention card to fill out. There is no universal system here, so it involves choices. Here is a mainstream way to play:

1NT range: 15 to 17. Because it is in blue, the partner of the 1NT opener must Announce the range aloud. As soon as 1NT is opened, the partner says: "15 to 17." Why are there two sets of blue lines with ranges? Some pairs play different ranges in special situations (based on vulnerability or whether they are dealer, second, third or fourth seat). Just fill out the top lines and leave the other ones blank. Check the box underneath which says "5-card Major common." The current trend is to open 1NT with any 5-3-3-2 hand pattern if it is in the 15-17 point range.

"System on over" deals with interference. How dare they step into your notrump auction! Eventually, your partnership can study how to cope with the interference, but for now, you can leave out this section and hope to just "wing it."

For 2♣, check the black Stayman box.

For 2♦ and 2♥, check the blue box to indicate you play Jacoby transfers. Since it is blue, the partner of the transferer (who opened 1NT) makes an out-loud one-word Announcement: "transfer."

GENERAL APPROACH

- If you check the "Game Forcing" box next to "Two Over One," there isn't much else that needs to be filled out in this section.
- The "Very Light" section can be skipped unless you are playing in a partnership that has specifically addressed this issue.
- The Forcing Opening is 2♣. Check the black box, and you are done with the General Approach.

NAMES Susie Smith and Joe Jones

2/1 GENERAL APPROACH

Two Over One: Game Forcing Game Forcing Except When Suit Rebid

VERY LIGHT: Openings 3rd Hand Overcalls Preempts

FORCING OPENING: 1♣ 1♦ 2♣ Natural 2 Bids Other _____

NOTRUMP OPENING BIDS

1NT 15 to 17 to _____

5-card Major common System on over _____

2♣ Stayman Puppet

2♦ Transfer to ♥ Forcing Stayman

2♥ Transfer to ♠

2♠ clubs

2NT inv

3♣ diamonds

4♦, 4♥ Transfer

Smolen Lebensohl (____ denies)

Neg. Double

Other: _____

2NT 20 to 21

Puppet Stayman

Transfer Responses: Jacoby Texas

3♠ _____

3NT _____ to _____

Conventional NT Openings

There are several ways to use responses of 2♠, 2NT, 3♣, 3♦, 3♥ and 3♠. It can get complicated. I will give you a very simple way to get by for now:

- 2♠ = Transfer to clubs (this one is an Alert – not an Announcement).
- 2NT = Natural and invitational, showing 8-9 HCP.
- 3♣ = Transfer to diamonds (also an Alert).
- 3♦/3♥/3♠ = Just leave them blank and don't make these bids.

Optional: 4♦ and 4♥ could be marked as transfers if you and your partner use "Texas transfers." Because it is in blue, it is Announceable, not Alertable, by the partner of the transferer.

For 2NT, mark the common range of 20-21. This is always a balanced hand (no singletons or voids). Use Stayman and transfers.

You can mark 3NT as 25-27. Don't hold your breath waiting. Or if you have learned Gambling 3NT, you can write it in here. If you use 2♣ for all 22+ HCP hands and never open 3NT, you can leave it blank.