

A COMPLETE SYSTEM FOR THE TOURNAMENT BRIDGE PLAYER

Tuğrul Kaban

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A close-up photograph of several playing cards, including the Ace of Spades and the Ace of Clubs, with a semi-transparent green overlay. The cards are slightly out of focus, showing the texture of the paper and the white markings on a green background.

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Contents

Contents	1
Introduction	7
Acknowledgements	11
1 Choice of Basic System	13
1.1 Artificial systems	14
1.2 The future	15
1.3 A solid basic system	17
2 2/1 Game Force	19
2.1 Main principles	20
2.2 Responder's minor-suited hands	22
2.3 Responder's first bid in a 2/1 environment	23
2.4 Opener's second bid	24
2.5 Responder's second bid	26
2.6 Opener's third bid	28
2.7 You've arrived	30
3 Wide-Range 1NT Response to 1M	31
3.1 When the wide-range 1NT response applies	33
3.2 Opener's second round options	34
3.3 Responder's second bid	37
3.4 When the wide-range 1NT response does not apply	39
3.5 Passed hand responder	39

3.6	Drury	40
4	Transfer Responses to 1♣	43
4.1	The rationale	43
4.2	The transfer structure	44
4.3	If the second opponent passes	46
4.4	If the second opponent doubles 1♥* (transfer to spades)	49
4.5	If the second opponent doubles 1♦* (transfer to hearts)	52
4.6	If the second opponent intervenes in a suit	53
4.7	If either opponent intervenes with 1NT	55
4.8	Responder's rebid	55
4.9	3-way jump-transfer responses to 1♣	57
4.10	Defence to opponents playing similar transfer responses to 1♣	58
4.11	Summary	59
5	Minor Suit Sequences	63
5.1	1♣ opening bid on a 2+ card suit	63
5.2	1♦ opening bid on a 4+ card suit	64
5.3	Inverted raise with a difference	65
5.4	Impossible major as good raise of minor	69
5.5	Weak jump shifts	71
6	Major Suit Sequences	75
6.1	3-card raises	76
6.2	Bergish raises	76
6.3	Passed hand Bergen	78
6.4	Jacobyish 2NT raise	79
6.5	Two-tiered splinters	80
6.6	If they overcall our 1M opening bid	82
6.7	Transfer responses when our 1M opening bid is doubled	83
6.8	Responder's 2NT rebid as game-force after major-suit agreement	85
7	1NT Sequences	89
7.1	1NT shape considerations	90

7.2	Breaking transfers	92
7.3	Responder's options with both majors	94
7.4	Other 1NT sequences	97
8	2♣ Puppet Stayman	101
8.1	When 1NT opener reveals a 5-card major	102
8.2	When 1NT opener reveals a 4-card major	103
8.3	When 1NT opener has no majors	105
8.4	If our 2♣ enquiry is doubled	106
9	Interference With Our 1NT	109
9.1	Artificial interventions	110
9.2	Rubensohl	112
10	Overcalling Opponents' 1NT	115
10.1	Basic system	116
10.2	Intermediate overcall hands	117
10.3	Weak overcall hands	119
10.4	Strong overcall hands	122
10.5	If second opponent intervenes over our 2♣ overcall	123
10.6	Dealing with misfits	125
10.7	Our other overcalls	126
10.8	Passed hand overcalls	127
10.9	Other considerations	127
11	Weak-2 And Multi Sequences	129
11.1	Multi-2♦	129
11.2	Muiderberg 2♥ and 2♠	135
11.3	Unusual 2NT opening bid	138
12	Strong-2 Sequences	143
12.1	Strong 2♣ and Kokish-style responses	143
12.2	Strong balanced hands	147
12.3	2NT-3♣ Puppet Stayman sequences	150
12.4	Strong 3-suited hands	153

13 Blackwood Collection	157
13.1 Either/or responses to side-Kings enquiry	158
13.2 Either/or responses to trump-Queen enquiry	159
13.3 When responder has a void	160
13.4 When enquirer has a void (Exclusion-RKCB)	161
13.5 Minor-suit RKCB ('MSRKCB')	162
13.6 Step-responses to trump-Queen enquiry in Exclusion and MSRKCB	164
13.7 Step-responses to side-Kings enquiry in Exclusion and MSRKCB	165
13.8 Our RKCB matrix	166
13.9 When opponents interfere with our RKCB	167
14 Two-suited Hands	169
14.1 Our 2-suited overcalls	169
14.2 Leaping and Non-Leaping Michaels overcalls	174
14.3 When opponents make a 2-suited overcall	176
14.4 2-suited intervention to opponents' strong-♣ systems	177
15 Competitive Tools	181
15.1 Composite negative and support doubles	181
15.2 When opponents double our Stayman, FSF or NMF bids	184
15.3 Switched meanings of pass and double when they cue- bid our suit	188
15.4 Transfer advances following partner's overcall	190
15.5 3♣ intermediate opening bid	193
16 Fine-tuning	195
16.1 Lebensohl	195
16.2 New Minor Forcing ('NMF')	199
16.3 Cue-bidding and 'serious 3NT'	204
16.4 5NT Grand Slam Force or Pick-A-Slam	208
17 Opening Lead	211
17.1 Ace for attitude, King for count	212

17.2 Third-and-fifth leads against suit contracts	214
17.3 Coded Nine and Ten leads	217

18 Carding And Discarding **221**

18.1 Carding	221
18.2 Carding priorities	224
18.3 Discards	226
18.4 Smith peters with a difference	229

Appendix - Convention Cards **233**

World Bridge Federation (WBF) convention card	
American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) convention card	
English Bridge Union (EBU) convention card	
Supplementary Notes	

Introduction

This book is intended as a ready-made practical full system for the tournament bridge player. It also lends itself to good use by a partnership wanting to experiment with some new ideas which they can take up with little additional discussion and no further research.

The book does not try to teach you how to play bridge. All that is taken for granted. Rather, you are presented with a full selection of conventions that cover all practical aspects of bidding and carding. There is no claim that this is necessarily the “best” collection of all possible conventions. But it is a thought-through and tried-and-tested set of conventions which sit comfortably within the book’s basic system choice of strong no-trump and 5-card majors in a 2-over-1 game-force setting.

Each part of the system is explained in turn in the book and the appendix contains ready-made conventions cards (WBF, ACBL and EBU versions) together with 20-page supplementary notes. These notes also serve as a handy summary of the entire system discussed in the book.

Some of the conventions I suggest are a little outside the mainstream, such as Muiderberg, Rubensohl, Questem, to name a few. How about playing Puppet-Stayman not just over 2NT but also over 1NT? Many players will have come across these before although they may not have experimented with them personally. There is a certain consistency of the chosen conventions with each other and also with the overall system.

The more common conventions in the system are not explained but presumed, although I sometimes like to change some aspect or invert some meaning, in which case these are fully reasoned. Notwithstanding my minor changes to the better known conventions I owe them all to their original creators, far too many to mention by name and far too great to need my acknowledgement here.

There are also some methods in the book that are my own creations for the most part which I have been quietly playing to good effect for many years. These include my version of transfer responses to a $1\clubsuit$ opening (which have a different approach than most other transfer schemes in this area) and my structure for overcalling opponents' 1NT (which caters for having one or both majors and at the same time distinguishes between weak, intermediate or strong overcalls).

I also have some definite preferences which diverge from standard-American. For example, $1\clubsuit$ in this book promises only 2 cards in the suit (and $1\diamond$ shows 4+ cards), with the rebid usually clarifying the hand pattern. The idea of a 1NT-opener containing a 5-card major may also be anathema to some old-timers, but it is not so unusual anymore.

There are many useful smaller tools and gadgets in the book. For

example: composite negative doubles and support doubles (depending on claims on the majors by either side in the prior bidding); switched meanings of pass and double when opponents cue-bid our suit (so we don't give them additional bidding space); stopper-showing passes when opponents double our artificial bids (and how we reconvene our sequence); and a lot of transfer-bidding (not just in response to $1\clubsuit$ opening but also when our $1M$ opening is doubled and after partner overcalls opponents' opening bid). These are all very user-friendly and extremely effective tools in competitive situations.

Indeed I hope that you will find the whole book user-friendly and readily adoptable with your willing partner. And finally, in the book's bidding sequences the opener is a 'she' and the responder a 'he'. This is not just my small contribution to gender balance in the use of language but also a practical way to differentiate between the two hands during the rest of the bidding and commentary.

Tuğrul Kaban

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Acknowledgements

I owe a debt of gratitude to Stuart Brown, my brother-in-law, who introduced me to bridge when I was 16. That introduction duly took care of my last couple of years at school in Turkey and all my years at university in the UK. I then took a complete break of 17 years from the game for family and work reasons but returned with a vengeance in 1998 since when I have been fortunate to have a succession of some great partners.

Notable among them are Barry Davies, 27 years my senior, with whom I played until 2003 and who sadly passed away since then; then Andrew Lee, my contemporary in age and an uncanny likeness of bridge mind, who unfortunately had to discontinue competitive bridge for medical reasons in 2010; and latterly Tom Dessain, 27 years my junior, who undoubtedly has a great bridge life ahead of him at the top level well beyond my remaining years. Andrew and Tom selflessly tried and tested all my unusual system ideas with me over the years and at times contributed some of their own to the full system in this book.

I would not have been able to spend anything like as much time on my bridge without the patience and encouragement of my better-

half, Catherine, herself no bridge player. But I was delighted when my daughter Rosa took up the game at university and has since been playing regularly.

Both Rosa and Tom enthusiastically proofread the book for my English as well as its bridge content but any residual errors remain all mine. Credit is due to Tom also for reformatting the book into its present final shape.

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Chapter 1

Choice of Basic System

There are many basic systems in the bridge playing world which significantly differ in their approach to bidding. Some older systems have gradually been supplemented if not entirely replaced by their modern day equivalents over the years. The second half of the 20th Century also witnessed a fair amount of artificial systems developing.

Once upon a time Charles Goren's methods ruled the world (16-18 HCP no-trump, 5-card majors), with the notable exception of Acol prevalent in some parts (12-14 HCP no-trump, 4-card majors). The latter is still going strong in Britain today although it looks a little neglected, Albert Benjamin's 2-bids being its last significant update a long time ago and Eric Crowhurst's Acol Index being the only major attempt to codify it.

But the former changed not only its no-trump range to 15-17 HCP in becoming the Standard-American but also added layers to the depth

and sophistication of its still fairly natural bidding methods over the decades and in so doing became more like the world standard. So much so that in large parts of the world today and not just in North America, bridge players refer to it simply as *the* standard - a deserving shorthand of its full name.

1.1 Artificial systems

As for artificial bidding systems, the most enduring has been the Precision Club. It has a small but dedicated following in most places and it is in fact more like the norm in some parts of Eastern Europe such as Bulgaria. Multiple world champions Eric Rodwell and Jeff Meckstroth of USA are a testament to the durability of this artificial system although Meckwell play their own particular variant of Precision.

Some other systems are artificial only to the extent of certain multiple-meaning bids or that their popularity seems mostly geographical. Polish Club, for example, has near-total following in Poland but a limited take-up elsewhere. At times this can be a matter of strength for the system. The small nation of Iceland won the World Championships in 1991 thanks in no small measure to its Icelandic Club system.

Historically, though, Roman Club of the 1950s must have the biggest claim to success among artificial systems considering that it helped the Italian Blue Team to 12 World Team Championships, 3 Olympiads and numerous European and national titles.

Notable among the 21st Century hybrid systems is Fantunes, the

system played by the world's 1st and 2nd ranked players Fulvio Fantoni and Claudio Nunes who represented Italy at the highest level for many years before being recruited to Monaco more recently. Fantunes have few followers yet but a few more books on it will no doubt remedy that in time.

An element of artificiality is surely no bad thing. It can inject more science and fun into the game. However, purely artificial methods are not without danger either; when something goes astray in a relay sequence the two halves of a partnership may well end up with two very different scenarios of the bidding with disastrous consequences.

1.2 The future

What of the future? I believe that generally natural systems will continue to dominate. There will of course be an increasing amount of specialised undertones creeping into natural systems which will subvert them somewhat in the direction of artificial bidding. But, notwithstanding that arbitrary dose of artificial bidding in anyone's system, the fundamentals for most bridge players - their basic system - will no doubt remain firmly rooted in the realms of primarily natural bidding.

After all, newcomers to the game start inevitably with natural systems. And most will continue so. Adding complications to the system is not everyone's favourite pastime. It requires additional effort and time, which some would rather spend on actually playing the game as it comes. If it comes with any sense of completeness so much the better.