

Daniel Neill

STANDARD MODERN PRECISION

GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE

Second Edition

An Honors eBook from Master Point Press

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Introduction to the Second Edition

This book was originally published privately a few years ago as two e-books: Standard Modern Precision: Getting from Here to There and Standard Modern Precision: Advanced Topics. Appearances of the SMP framework used in the bidding challenges in the Bridge World and ACBL bulletin are testimonies to its popularity.

This edition incorporates valuable feedback from an increasing number of SMP practitioners. Many additional practical examples and quizzes with clear explanations and instructions will enhance the reader's learning experience.

Bridge Base Online's Vugraph and Partnership Bidding Room are godsend for any student of the game. We can practice hundreds of hands from the comfort of our home with anyone across the hall or across the world. I provide instructions to configure this valuable tool to practice specific areas of focus as you progress through this book. Besides learning to review your hands, I provide guidance on who to watch live when possible and to research hands played by expert partnerships using SMP framework. What a great time to learn a strong club system!

As an aid to filling out your convention card I have included a sample ACBL convention card for your reference.

Finally, I have combined both original books into one with three sections. Part 1 has plenty for anyone wanting to enhance their game by learning this system. Part 2 covers Advanced Topics and Part 3 covers gadgets used by professional partnerships using the SMP framework.

For Molly Kindley
For being herself, my love,
And a great bridge student

Preface

Have you ever wanted to find out more about Precision but were afraid to ask, or judged the gap too wide to cross? Or have you learned a variant of Precision and found that nobody else plays it or that it has too many problems? This book is for you. The theme of this book is how to get from SAYC or 2/1 to a modern Precision framework based on what you already know, and with good explanations of the new bids. The system you will learn is played by lots of top players, and a growing number of tournament players.

This is the standard Precision of the future.

What makes this book different from all other books on Precision?

I can answer this by describing my own experience with learning the system. I first read about the classic C.C. Wei Precision as described in Goren's *New Bridge Complete*. It was an anecdotal description of the opening bids and the basic responses. *It seemed so foreign* when the rest of the hundreds of pages of the book was dedicated to a classical American bidding system, where men were men and the more you bid the more you had.

Fast forward to my graduation to playing in local club games or sectionals. Occasionally I would come across a pair playing a strong club. But they did not win that much more than other comparably-experienced pairs, and it was noticeable that they would get some wild results, through no apparent effort of my own, and they would start arguing with each other. Plus, no local power players I knew chose to play a strong club. *It didn't seem like a winning system.*

As a self-admitted systems geek, I would still inquire about such systems and sometimes find that there wasn't much detail. It seemed every strong club pair would use a different flavor, or ones they devised from scratch. Who (besides that pair) would know the system if I wanted to play it? *The systems didn't seem completely-written or widely-played.*

Fast forward again to travelling to tournaments. After becoming a bridge teacher and occasional partner-for-hire, I knew I had to observe the best in the world (using online vugraph or bridge magazines) to make sure I was learning what the winning players used so I could play their systems to achieve my best results. It turns out that professionals *did* play a strong club at the national level with some frequency.

For most of the 1990's and early 2000's there was still no clear consensus among top American players at ACBL Nationals on a top system – 2/1 Game Force was common along with a variety of home brew strong club systems in use (Hamman-Soloway, Rodwell-Meckstroth, Ekeblad-Rubin, Woolsey-Stewart), and when two pros were forced into a new partnership on a team, “hastily-filled-out convention card” was as good as anything else to win events.

But as professional bridge exploded and the general level of quality in bidding rose (especially with the Law of Total Tricks [LOTT] and the influx of European players to U.S. tournaments), sponsored teams needed all pairs to play good methods, even the client-pro pair. At some point, a version of Hamman-Soloway-Rodwell strong club, greatly simplified, was given to clients who gave it to pros who gave it to other clients and so forth until it became the *lingua franca*. Pros who found themselves paired regularly would adopt it for convenience, and many American junior pairs have chosen the system as their favorite.

This book is a description of that *widely-used* (in the American tournament world) strong club system, *played by world-class professionals* that is *clearly superior* to standard bidding and is *well-documented* and *well-developed* but not too complicated to learn and remember with practice, with *lots of examples* to illustrate.

That is what makes this book different from other books before it. I call this system **Standard Modern Precision** (or, **SMP**).

Why play Standard Modern Precision?

In case you are not quite convinced that you should attempt to learn an expert system, I promise it is worth it. Here's why:

- a) It is fun to open the light openings – rather than pass.
- b) It is what a good percentage of the top players play – that can't be bad!
- c) You do not need to wear protective gear to use it, unlike a chainsaw (joke).
- d) It will improve your understanding of bridge concepts that apply to any bridge system.
- e) SMP is allowed in all ACBL games – you do not have to pre-alert it.
- f) This book has a helpful cheat sheet in Appendix D so you can quickly start an auction and look up how to continue.
- g) ...It is **effective!**

Why Precision is effective – light, limited openings

Precision is a more effective system because of the **light, limited openings**.
Why is that?

Light openings are frequent

The following chart¹ lists the probability of picking up a hand with a certain number of HCP:

HCP Count in One Hand (n)	Cumulative Percentage Probability (n or more HCP)	Individual Percentage Probability (of exactly n HCP)
18	4.09	1.61
17	6.45	2.36
16	9.76	3.31
15	14.18	4.42
14	19.88	5.69
13	26.79	6.91
12	34.82	8.03
11	43.76	8.94
10	53.17	9.41
9	62.52	9.36
8	71.42	8.89

Precision gets to open about 9% more hands than in 2/1 by reducing the minimum HCP requirements to a good 10 HCP, which the chart shows to be the highest frequency count. Opening a couple more times a session on average is fun! But there is more to this...

Opening causes more problems for the opponents than passing

It's just a fact of bridge life that the opener has the advantage. Books are written (you are reading one) entirely based on the fact that *we* have opened

¹ https://www.bridgehands.com/P/Probability_HCP.htm

the auction, not the opponents. Taking the opponents out of their preparation is a tactic that applies to any game. It's a fun way to play the game.

Here's a simple case:

2017 Open USBC, Final, Segment 5/8

Board 1			
North Deals	♠ A Q 7 3		
None Vul	♥ Q 9 6 3		
	♦ K 8 7		
	♣ 5 3		
♠ 10 8		♠ K J 5	
♥ J 7 4		♥ A K 8 5	
♦ Q J 10 9 4		♦ A 6 5 3 2	
♣ 10 8 7		♣ J	
	♠ 9 6 4 2		
	♥ 10 2		
	♦ —		
	♣ A K Q 9 6 4 2		
West	North	East	South
<i>Weinstein</i>	<i>Greco</i>	<i>Levin</i>	<i>Hampson</i>
	1 ♦*	1 ♥	2 ♣
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

At this table, North playing SMP could open with a balanced 11 HCP hand. East's cheap overcall did not present many problems. South could push the auction cooperatively to find game.

Look at the other table:

Board 1	♠ A Q 7 3		
North Deals	♥ Q 9 6 3		
None Vul	♦ K 8 7		
	♣ 5 3		
♠ 10 8		♠ K J 5	
♥ J 7 4		♥ A K 8 5	
♦ Q J 10 9 4		♦ A 6 5 3 2	
♣ 10 8 7		♣ J	
	♠ 9 6 4 2		
	♥ 10 2		
	♦ —		
	♣ A K Q 9 6 4 2		
West	North	East	South
<i>Diamond Katz</i>	<i>Katz</i>	<i>Platnick</i>	<i>Nickell</i>
	Pass	1 ♣*	3 ♣
Pass	Pass	X	Pass
3 ♦	All pass		

Playing typical 2/1 style, North had to pass the 11-count. It is well-known that you should take liberties when partner is a passed hand, not to mention over a strong club opening, so South chose to preempt and North could not imagine there was a game. East's reopening takeout double found a 9-card fit. 11 IMPs to the strong club team.

The ranges are narrower, less guesswork

While light openings harass, the range helps reach a reasonable contract more often, especially in competition.

Not counting the rare 22+ HCP hands, in 2/1, opener passes with 0-11(-) HCP (a 12½-HCP range) and opens 1 of a suit with 11(+)-21 HCP (a 10½-HCP range).

In a strong club, opener passes with 0-10(-) HCP (an 11½-HCP range), opens 1 of a suit with 10(+)-15 HCP (a 5-HCP range), and opens 1♣ with 16 to 21 HCP (a 6-HCP range).

The passed hands ranges are about the same between the two systems, but the other two ranges defined by the initial call in Precision are half the size as in 2/1.

Therefore it is easier to guess how strong opener is, which is important in the modern competitive game. We will discuss how to take advantage of this to the maximum in Part 2 of this book, but common sense says that if partner opens with 10(+)-15 HCP, you should be able to determine what to do more often after, say, 1♥-(4♦)-? than in 2/1 which shows 11-21 HCP, since opener will never have so many HCP that they will feel pressured to punish you by overbidding.

Organization of this Book

Part 1 introduces you to the system and assumes you have played SAYC or 2/1 Game Force but never a strong club. If you have played Precision before you will find several differences from your variant but will not find it difficult to adjust. You should practice the system as described in Part 1 until it feels very natural before proceeding to Part 2. There are several examples and quizzes for illustration but it is imperative to practice with your partner.

Part 2 ensures that you will be playing the system to your distinct advantage over the field by filling in a lot of the blanks left by the earlier section of the book. You may even look ahead to this Part while practicing Part 1 if you have a question on a yet-unexplained area of the system.

Part 3 is for the scientists, professionals and daredevils who enjoy practicing with a regular partner and want to optimize their results in many types of auctions at a considerable memory cost.

Appendix A describes how to use Bridge Base Online to learn the system with your partner by setting up SMP openings in a bidding room.

Appendix B explains how to discover vugraph records with SMP and learn from replaying them.

Appendix C contains a sample convention card to guide you when filling out your own cards for this system.

Appendix D is a cheat sheet to let you quickly decide what to open and respond, with page numbers in the book to find the follow-ups – use this when practicing or as an index reference

A note about notation:

- Bids in parentheses, like 1♠-(2♥)-3♣ are opponents' bids. Otherwise it is assumed the opponents are passing.
- Hand shape is in ♠-♥-♦-♣ order, so 4234 shows 4 spades, 2 hearts, 3 diamonds and 4 clubs. If order does not matter, (4441).

Part 1:
Getting to Know Standard Modern Precision

Standard Modern Precision Opening Bids

1♣	16+ HCP (or 17+ HCP balanced), artificial, any shape, forcing
1♦	Natural good 10 to 15 HCP, or 11-13 NT – denies a 5-card major unless has 6 diamonds, may be as short as 2 cards
1♥, 1♠	5+ cards, good 10 to 15 HCP
1NT	14-16 HCP, includes 5M(332) or 5m(422)
2♣	6+ cards, good 10 to 15 HCP, not forcing, may have a side 4- or 5-card suit
2♦	Good 10 to 15 HCP, 4414/4405/4315/3415 exactly (short diamonds)
2♥, 2♠	Normal weak two, 6 to bad 10 HCP
2NT	20-21 HCP balanced
3 of a suit	Preempt, 7 cards (in a minor, occasionally 6 cards, since 2♣ and 2♦ are unavailable for preempts)
3NT	Gambling
4 of a suit	Preempt, 8 cards

1♣ Opening – 16+ HCP (or 17+ balanced)

The definition of a 1♣ opening could be stated as: “wants to be in game opposite a random 8 HCP”. Therefore you may upgrade a 15-HCP hand with good distribution and suits.

The strong 1♣ opening is the weakness of Precision, ironically. Your object is to survive competition and get to a reasonable contract – not to outbid everyone else.

The way to develop the auction with a strong hand is to show shape as soon as possible. That way, responder knows what opener actually has. Remember, 1♣ could be *any* shape. Quite a menagerie to sift through. The system will provide all the necessary ways to do so without overstepping the limit of the two hands.

Ready for a quiz?

Quiz:

What do you open?

♠AQxx ♥Kxxx ♦AKx ♣Qx

1♣. 17-19 or 22+ balanced opens 1♣. With 14-16 open 1NT.

♠KQJxx ♥AQxx ♦Axx ♣x

1♣. 16 HCP unbalanced fits the definition of 1♣. Notice that the hand has a singleton club. This is because the 1♣ opening is completely artificial.

♠Ax ♥x ♦KQxx ♣AKQxxx

1♣. This strong hand actually has clubs! But responder should still keep in mind opener could have *zero* clubs. Your job is to reveal the clubs later.

♠Kxx ♥AQxx ♦Qxx ♣KQx

1NT. This hand has 16 HCP, true, but 1♣ would require at least 17 HCP if balanced.

♠KQxxx ♥AJx ♦AKx ♣Kx

2NT. This balanced hand is well clear of the 17 HCP requirement, but it fits into the 2NT opening. The 5-card major will never stop you from opening or rebidding some number of notrump, if the hand is balanced. You would open this 2NT in a standard system as well – there is lots of overlap in openings in SMP and standard.

♠AQJx ♥AKQxxx ♦KQxx ♣—

1♣. Before you would open this juggernaut with a strong 2♣. Now you open just as artificially with 1♣.

♠KQJxx ♥Kxx ♦x ♣Axxx

1♠. Just like in standard. Not strong enough for 1♣ (16+ HCP).

♠AKQxxx ♥x ♦Axxx ♣Qx

1♣. This hand has just 15 HCP, but the trick-taking potential and loser count upgrade this to a 1♣ opening. Does a random 8 HCP opposite this hand make a game (in spades most likely)? Yes.

Negative 1♦ response to a 1♣ opening

The 1♦ response indicates that game might not be possible. 0-7 HCP, any distribution. This is the ice to the fire of 1♣.

Opener's rebids after a 1♦ response

We still do not know anything about *either* hand's shape. What's trumps? How high do we go?

At this point, it's time for opener to start the ball rolling to investigate a suit fit.

Rebidding with balanced hands

The first opportunity for opener to describe her hand is actually a nice time to look again. Is the hand balanced? If so, we should rebid some number of notrump.

Opener	Responder	
1♣	1♦	
1NT		= 17-19 HCP
(Open 2NT)		= 20-21 HCP
2NT		= 22-24 HCP
3NT		= 25-27 HCP

After a 1NT rebid, talk about easy, responder simply bids as if opener has *opened* 1NT. Stayman, Transfers. The whole thing. Just bear in mind you need only 6 HCP to invite game.

After a 2NT rebid, same idea: respond as over a 2NT opening.

25-27 HCP balanced rebids 3NT. Optionally, you can play Kokish to give yourself tighter HCP ranges ($1♣-1♦-2♥ = 5+♥$ or big balanced hands) if you play Kokish over a 2♣ opening already in 2/1.

PLAY THE SYSTEM NATIONAL CHAMPIONS PLAY

Over the last 20 years a consensus bidding system among American national champions has been chosen and is now the *lingua franca* for hundreds among the pro circuit, top junior players and strong tournament players. This book will introduce you to the system, called Standard Modern Precision (or SMP), with lots of examples, quizzes and real-life hands bid by actual world champions.

Part 1 covers the basics, and provides a working knowledge of the system so you can start playing and winning right away. A partnership may choose to continue on to Part 2 (The Full System) or Part 3 (Optional Gadgets). Also included are step-by-step instructions for setting up hands to practice on Bridge Base Online and a cheat sheet for reference when bidding.

It's time to start winning with the high-octane system that more tournament players are using, just like the pros.



DANIEL NEILL has been helping bridge students reach their potential for 15 years through his website www.bridgewithdan.com. When not competing nationally, he provides insight into experts' thoughts as a popular vugraph commentator on Bridge Base Online. His interest in showcasing unique or complex bidding styles has led to a library of over 80 systems and treatments, serving as a valuable resource to both students and seasoned players alike.