

AN HONORS eBook FROM MASTER POINT PRESS

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# Transfer Responses to One Club with Relays

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## INTRODUCTION

Nearly fifteen years ago I came out with a book called *The Millennium Club*. Since that time, I have been playing a version of the system with several partners. Three significant developments have occurred since then which caused me to want to write this new book.

The system arising out of *Transfer Responses to 1♣* openers, although it has not completely taken hold, has vastly increased in popularity from fifteen years ago, when it was nearly unknown. Now Transfers have considerable popularity among a significant number of expert bridge players from several European countries. A few top American bridge players have taken up the methods as well. I have played *Transfer Responses to 1♣* with various partners in the Washington DC area. Everyone I have played them with like the system, and it has produced good results. Others have taken up variations of *Transfer Responses* with different partnerships around my area.

The system of *Transfer Responses to 1♣* with Strong Notrumps has until recently been classified as a Mid-Chart convention with the American Contract Bridge League. Since the ACBL instituted its new classifications, *Transfer Responses* can be played in most any ACBL sanctioned event unless specifically prohibited by the Club Manager.

Most of the time my partner and I were able to play our system as outlined in this book. There were times when we had to make the 1♣ opening bid show at least fifteen HCP and play Weak Notrumps in order to use the Transfers. This was the structure used in *The Millennium Club*. That structure is playable and may be attractive to some, particularly those who like to play NT openers to show about 12-14 HCP. The Weak Notrumpers must make some adjustments to deal with certain issues. First, playing Weak Notrumps there will be significantly fewer 1♣ opening bids.

Balanced 15-17 HCP point hands are less frequent than balanced 12-14 HCP point hands.

Second, with 4-5 in the Minors it is much more comfortable to open 1♣ and then make an appropriate rebid holding a minimum opening range hand. With any minimum opener with five Clubs and a singleton somewhere, we have a reasonable rebid option. Playing Weak Notrumps holding five Clubs and minimum values with shortness somewhere there may be no reasonable rebid option. We could not open 1♣ because that would show 15+ HCP, and therefore we would have to skew our other opening bids. This would force the partnership to agree to play 2♣ openers as likely showing just five Clubs. This treatment we have found to be much more of a problem than playing 2♣ openers to usually show 6+ Clubs.

Finally, those playing the Weak Notrump have the disadvantage of trying to distinguish between hands that are strong enough to open 1♣ and hands just slightly better that might be too strong to open 1♣ then rebid INT. It is nice to have balanced hands calling for 1♣ opening bids to show either about 12-14 HCP or about 18-19 HCP based on the rebid.

While playing the system for the last fifteen years we have been able to eliminate many of the original flaws and added multiple improvements that have considerably helped our bidding accuracy. Even if you prefer to play Weak Notrumps, we suggest that you use this system as a foundation and then make some adjustments to suit your taste and to conform to the constraints of the Weak Notrump. Over the years we have made a lot of adjustments to the original Millennium Club that have improved the methods immeasurably. This is a natural progression. We have experienced the flaws that were built into the original system. This book allows the reader to reap the benefit of all that we have learned over the past fifteen years to make the system more efficient and easier to use.

The book has added Relays which were not part of the Millennium Club. This is not the best or most scientific Relay system ever devised, but it does have the merit of relative simplicity. A 1NT response to an opening one-level suit bid starts a Relay sequence. After a 1♣ opening bid, the 1NT response alerts Opener that we are in the possible slam range right away. The 1NT responses to 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠ openers immediately tell Opener that Responder has a game forcing hand. Detailed description of Opener's distribution permits Responder to bid more accurately when the partnership has game going values or better.

We urge you to try the system out. You may wish to make whatever adjustments that suit your bidding style and preferences. Enjoy!!



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## 1. THE 1♣ OPENING BID

We play Transfer Responses to 1♣ openers, with Strong Notrumps and natural 1♦ openers. So, when do we open 1♣, when do we open 1♦, when do we open 1NT, and when, something else?

We open 1♣ with various types of hands. It is forcing so we can clarify as the bidding proceeds. The hand types are as follows:

- Most common: A Weak Notrump (11-14 HCP with balanced pattern).
- A semi-balanced, minimum opening bid with primary Clubs, 5-4-3-1 or 5-4-2-2 pattern.
- Any Strong Two-Bid.
- Any 4-4-4-1 hand except a singleton Club (We would open 1♦ with a singleton Club).
- Other hands where Clubs is the primary suit with more than a minimum opener. Hands not suitable for a 1NT opener where we can rebid 3♣ or Reverse.
- A balanced hand with 18-19 HCP.

Let's elaborate:

The Weak Notrump type hand must be 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, or 5-3-3-2 shape with no five-card Major. With 5-4-2-2 we bid our five-card suit. With a six-card Club suit we open 2♣. With 5-3-3-2 we open 1♣ whether the five-card suit is Clubs or Diamonds. The 1♣ opener only promises two Clubs except when the hand is a Strong Two-Bid. Clubs can be, and often are, shorter than our Diamonds.

The 1♦ opener is reserved for unbalanced or semi-balanced Diamond hands. There is one exception. If we are 5-3-3-2 with five Diamonds, we would open 1♦ if the Diamonds are very strong, and there are two weak suits outside of Diamonds. We can rebid this hand 1NT if it is our hand, and if the opponents win the auction, we can be sure of getting a Diamond lead.

We prefer opening one of a Major with 5-3-3-2 with the five-card Major for two main reasons. If your bidding philosophy is different, go for it. Opening 1♣ with a five-card Major is playable within our system. The two reasons that we prefer opening the Major are that if we do open the Major, it is easy for us to bid over it, and we will never lose the 5-3 or 5-4 Major fit. Secondly the 1♣ opener does not take up the opponents' bidding space, so it makes it easier and less dangerous for them to get into the bidding than if we had opened in the Major.

With 5-4-2-2 hands or 5-4-3-1 hands with primary Clubs we can open 1♣ and then either show support for Responder's Major or rebid Notrump. Playing Transfers this works perfectly as we will see when we discuss responses and rebids. Occasionally we will be playing in 1NT with a 2-2 or 3-1 fit somewhere, but it will be very rare, and if it happens the opponent's will have missed a big fit of their own that they could have played at the two-level.

With a Strong Two-Bid we open 1♣ because it is 100% forcing. Therefore, we can use the 2♣ opener to show minimum hands with usually 6+ Clubs. We have easy rebid methods to signify a Strong Two-Bid. This also gives us an extra round of valuable bidding space to assist the strong hand in finding out more about Responder's distribution. Anything that qualifies as a Strong Two-Bid in your methods suffices in this system. We also add to that hands where Opener has a strong 1-suiter in Clubs or Diamonds, too strong for a jump rebid but not strong enough to force to game. More about those methods later.

Where we have primary Clubs and extra values, we can open 1♣ and then Reverse or Jump Shift if we have a second suit or jump in Clubs to show a classic jump rebid. In competition we have methods to distinguish between hands where we have a Reverse, and hands where we have Strong Two-Bids.

With 18-19 HCP balanced we have the same requirements to distinguish between a 1♣ opener and a 1♦ opener. We open 1♣ with all 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2 and 5-3-3-2 hands except if we have a five-card Major. We have the advantage of playing in one of a Major on hands where Responder has about 0-6 HCP, and Opener has 18-19 HCP balanced with three-card support., or a jump rebid in Clubs with three-card support for Responder's Major. If Opener has 5-4-2-2 with five Clubs and a strong hand, we can open 1♣ and then Reverse over Responder's bid.

This covers hands where we open 1♣. In the next chapter we will get to Transfer Responses to the 1♣ opener, and then the rebids to see how everything fits in.

The general rules for all other opening bids are as follows:

1♦ openers promise distributional hands. They may not be as distributional as you might envision. Since we have NT rebids available, and a 2♣ rebid available to describe different types of hands after 1♦-1M, semi-balanced hands like 5-4-2-2 and 6-3-2-2 can be opened 1♦ without precluding playing in Notrump. If the bidding goes 1♦-1M-1NT, Responder knows that Opener has 5-4-2-2, 5-4-3-1, or occasionally 5-3-3-2 with very strong Diamonds, or possibly 6-3-2-2 with no fit for the Major and a minimum hand. More about this later. It is a massive advantage in bidding accuracy to know that Opener has a distributional or semi-distributional hand in Diamonds as opposed to a flat hand.

One of a Major opening bids have the same requirements as those playing five-card Majors in a Standard American or 2/1 structure. Just because 1♣ is forcing does not mean that the 1M opener is limited. It is only limited to the extent that it denies a Strong Two-Bid. Again, we prefer opening 1M with 5-3-3-2 distribution.

1NT in this structure is 15-17 HCP balanced. You can also play it as a good 15 to a bad 18 HCP if you wish to partly compensate for

Responder's obligation to bid over 1♣ openers no matter how bad his hand is. This keeps you out of 2NT with a bad 18 HCP opposite nothing. There are some semi-balanced hands with Club length where we might have to open 1NT. If we are semi-balanced with Diamonds, we can show our Diamonds and we have rebid methods to take care of those hands.

With six Clubs, Strong Notrump range and 6-3-2-2 distribution we might prefer to open 1NT rather than open 1♣ and rebid 3♣. Similarly, with 5-4-3-1 distribution with five Clubs, or 4-4-4-1 distributions with four Clubs in Strong Notrump range we occasionally prefer opening 1NT rather than other options. This would most likely be the case with a singleton high honor. With a small singleton, it would usually be better to treat the hand as a Weak Notrump with a bad fifteen HCP and Reverse otherwise.

2♣ openers show 8-14 HCP with Club length. We have at least six Clubs almost all the time. With a hand where all the values are concentrated in Clubs, such as AKJ10x, and one outside stopper, we can make an exception and open 2♣ instead of 1♣, so we can get to Clubs when we belong there. We would do this with a side four-card Major and two or three weak suits outside of Clubs. On these hands we are choosing to emphasize the Clubs by opening 2♣ instead of suggesting a Weak Notrump by opening 1♣. We choose a wide range for the 2♣ openers so that with a hand which looks like a Weak 2- Bid in Clubs we can open the bidding. Why Pass with a hand such as AKJxxx and a side Jxxx suit. We have the choice of putting this hand in our range of opening bids. Our style for responding and contesting the bidding after 2♣ openers will be discussed in another chapter. Suffice to say that the 2♣ opener has been very effective both with respect to constructive bidding, and with respect to making it much harder for the opponents to bid accurately.

The 2♦ opener we play as a Weak Two-Bid. It is the most common hand type of all the favored uses for the 2♦ opener. Again, it maximizes our chances to get into the bidding. The 2♦ opener does not deny a four-card Major. 2♣ and 2♦ openers follow the same theme - Maximize our chances to get into the bidding. We play 2♦ openers as slightly constructive.

We have found that it has not been helpful to open Weak 2's with five-card suits, or with garbage five and six counts, or even some hands with very bad trumps. The most common result seems to be the opponents get to 3NT and Partner leads the wrong suit. What we do is play them as two way - either a standard Weak Two-Bid with a six-card suit and about six to a very bad eleven HCP, or 5-5 with a five-card Major and an outside five-card Minor. Of course, we have methods to ask over that, but this increases our chances to get into the bidding with mildly constructive hands by about 50%.

2NT openers have the same range as with most methods, about 20-21 HCP, but we like to limit our 2NT openers to strictly balanced hands. In theory we think that we can bid strong hands better than the average bridge player, so we try to bid our very strong hands as scientifically as possible.

## EXAMPLE HANDS

♠AKQxx ♥AJx ♦KJxx ♣x. Open 1♠. 1♦, 1♥ and 1♠ openers are only limited to the extent that we cannot have a Strong Two-Bid.

♠Kxx ♥Kxx ♦AQ10xx ♣Jx. Open 1♣. This is a balanced Weak Notrump hand. If we play in a NT contract the opponents don't need to know our Minor suit distribution. If Partner transfers to a Major, we can accept the Transfer to show three-card support. We only will show our Diamonds if Partner makes a reopening Double asking us to bid something.

♠AK ♥AKQx ♦AQJxx ♣xx. Open 1♣. When we have a Strong Two-Bid we open 1♣. Later in the auction if uncontested we show the Strong Two-Bid by rebidding 2♣. We can find out more about Responder's hand with the extra round of bidding.

♠xxx ♥A ♦KQxx ♣QJxxx. Open 1♣. Always open 1♣ with 4-5 in the Minors. If Partner shows Hearts, we will rebid 1NT to show one or two Hearts. If Partner shows Spades, we will accept the Transfer to show three-card support.

♠Axx ♥xx ♦xx ♣KQ10xxx. Open 2♣. Isn't it nice to be able to open the bidding on this hand to compete and make it harder for the opponents to bid accurately?

♠x ♥AQxx ♦AQxx ♣Jxxx. Open 1♣. With 4-4-4-1 (singleton Club), open 1♦. Otherwise we always open 1♣ with 1-4-4-4, 4-1-4-4 and 4-4-1-4.

♠K ♥AKx ♦J10xx ♣AJxxx. Open 1NT. If you open 1♣ you will have no rebid available if Partner responds showing Spades.

♠Axx ♥x ♦AKQJxx ♣KQx. Open 1♣, intending to treat this hand as a Strong Two-Bid. We have methods to show hands with a long strong Minor that we cannot force to game, but that are too good for a jump rebid in the Minor.

♠KJxx ♥Qxx ♦AKxx ♣AQ. Open 1♣. If Partner shows Spades, we can invite in Spades. If Partner shows Hearts, we can bid 1♠, staying safely at a low level in either case. Partner will take another bid if we have a game.

♠KQJx ♥x ♦xx ♣AQJxxx. Open 2♣. This is about the maximum for a 2♣ opener. If Partner asks with a 2♦ bid, we can jump in Spades.

## A NEW APPROACH TO BIDDING

Transfer responses and relays in the context of a forcing club system have been gaining in popularity in Europe for some time. Now, however, some top American pairs are using these methods, and recent changes in ACBL classifications mean that they can be played in most ACBL-sanctioned events. This book is an ideal introduction for players wanting to try an effective new approach to bidding, that is not too complicated, and capable of extension and refinement as the partnership gains experience with it.



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