



*Ken Rexford*

**OVERCALLING  
OPPONENT'S  
1NT**

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# Introduction

Bridge is a fascinating and evolving game, especially as it pertains to bidding theory. Every so often, it seems that we stumble onto a new thing under the sun. It might seem unlikely, considering the vast number of wildly unusual systems and conventions out there, but I believe that a concept that I have stumbled across may be truly unique in bridge theory.

The idea started a few years ago. In several partnerships with friends who are advancing players, I was dragged kicking and screaming into playing a Two Spades response to a One No Trump opening as showing either clubs or diamonds, the old-school “transfer to a minor.” I thought about this response for a while and decided that the utility of that call might be improved by having Opener rebid Two No Trump to show preference for diamonds. This became a sort of pre-accept, but it had a meaning of preferring the higher minor.

Using that simple tweak meant that Responder could now respond to One No Trump by bidding Two Spades with either minor *or with both minors!*

So, for instance, if you are dealt the ugly hand ♠ x x ♥ x ♦ K J x x x ♣ Q x x x x, you now would have a good option. Bid Two Spades. If partner prefers diamonds and thus bids Two No Trump, you rebid Three Diamonds. If partner prefers clubs and bids Three Clubs, you pass. If you had a one-suited hand with diamonds, you bid Three Diamonds whatever partner

prefers. And, if you have a single-suiter with just clubs, you pass Three Clubs or convert Two No Trump to Three Clubs.

So, consider three possible hands:

♠ x x   ♥ x   ♦ K J x x x   ♣ Q x x x x  
 ♠ x x   ♥ x x   ♦ K J x x x x   ♣ Q x x  
 ♠ x x   ♥ x x   ♦ K J x   ♣ Q x x x x x

If partner prefers clubs, the auction is:

1NT   2♠  
 3♣   ?

- (a) Pass with ♠ x x   ♥ x   ♦ K J x x x   ♣ Q x x x x
- (b) 3♦ with ♠ x x   ♥ x x   ♦ K J x x x x   ♣ Q x x
- (c) Pass with ♠ x x   ♥ x x   ♦ K J x   ♣ Q x x x x x

If, on the other hand, partner prefers diamonds, the auction is:

1NT   2♠  
 2NT   ?

- (a) 3♦ with ♠ x x   ♥ x   ♦ K J x x x   ♣ Q x x x x
- (b) 3♦ with ♠ x x   ♥ x x   ♦ K J x x x x   ♣ Q x x
- (c) 3♣ with ♠ x x   ♥ x x   ♦ K J x   ♣ Q x x x x x

The key to all of this is that Opener's Two No Trump call preferring diamonds is below the lowest suit – clubs – and therefore does not self-preempt the

partnership out of club contracts. Thus, by incorporating this unique call, we can handle one or both minors by way of the Two Spades response.

For several years, that is as far as the theory went.

Recently, however, I started thinking about this unique call, a bid two levels below a two-suit combination. Two Spades is two calls below clubs and diamonds and is therefore low enough to allow the next step up to show preference for the higher of the two suits, which is low enough for partner to still show just the one lowest of the two suits. This structure allows the two-under call to show one or both of the two suits. This structure, it seems, is unique, one to which I cannot find a parallel in any other mainstream convention. In fact, I posted an online request for anyone to note a parallel, and no one had any suggestions. So, I think this is unique.

I then started thinking about how this same structure might be used for two other suits, focusing first on both majors. The strain that is two below the major suits is clubs, and we often bid clubs for one or both majors anyway. I mean, Stayman asks for a major, but the person using Stayman may well have one or both four-card majors. So, the idea of using a club call to show one or both majors is not that unique. What would be unique, however, would be a diamond call to then show spade preference, which seems rather unusual but full of opportunities.

I then had a core structural advancement into two-under for one or both suits, namely a club call to show one or both majors. Once that eureka moment struck, a world of possibilities emerged. Let's see where this leads us.



## Chapter One: Good-Bad for One of Both Majors over Notrump

When the opponents open a weak One No Trump, an immediate problem is created. On the one hand, we do not want to have their One No Trump call preempt us out of competitive bidding, and therefore we want to overcall with somewhat light values. On the other hand, we also are afraid that we might be missing a game and therefore want overcalls to show values.

This conflict has not been resolved satisfactorily. I mean, if you overcall Two Spades with a hand that would qualify for a Weak Two Spades opening, partner is loathe to invite unless he has full values, and you might miss a game if the Overcaller actually had a hand that looks more like an Intermediate Jump Overcall. If, on the other hand, your Two Spades overcall is made only with sound values, then you are forced to pass with weak hands with long spades where you might want to get in there. If you bid with anything and invite with impunity, you will end up in Three Spades down one too often. The same problem occurs if you have both majors.

This problem serves as the inspiration for the first example of a two-way approach to handling major-oriented hands. We will discuss a new approach that involves direct bidding with values hands but that enables weaker hands to be bid through one simple convention. However, that convention is unique.

The idea, which will be explored, is to incorporate a Two Clubs overcall to show one or both majors. This is possible because of a very subtle tweak to Advancer's options. He will bid the next-up suit to show preference for the higher-ranking suit. This will enable the person who overcalls to handle a major two-

suit or either major one-suit effectively, without ever being forced to the three-level to show his suit or suits.

This structure will be useful for overcalling 1NT in and of itself. However, you will be able to expand this call into enabling other, more involved structures. Plus, it will also have applications to other sequences, solving many other bridge problems that have to date had unsatisfactory solutions.

First, however, let us explore the simple call of Two Clubs for one or both majors.

## USING TWO-UNDER OVERCALLS FOR ONE OR BOTH MAJORS, OR FOR ONE OR BOTH MINORS

Author Ken Rexford has developed an intriguing new approach to overcalling 1NT openings that may revolutionize this area of bridge. If you are unhappy with Cappelletti, DONT, Brozel, and the like, this book introduces you to a new approach for tackling the opponent's 1NT opening, with an entirely new way to handle one or two-suited hands. Can your current approach tell partner whether you have a strong or a weak overcall at the two-level? Can you tell partner which suit of your major-or-a-minor is longer? Can you identify the specific minor with your major, again at the two-level? All of these are possible using Ken Rexford's methods. Imagine describing more hands than the Woolsey defense handles, all with easy but novel methods that fit (unlike Woolsey) into the ACBL's General Convention Chart!

You can also use these methods to improve your response structure to your own openings and in other auctions. For example, after a Four Diamond overcall of partner's Two Clubs opening, you can bid any new suit as a natural one-suiter, use double as cooperative, and yet still have the room needed to describe any specific two-suiter, without bypassing the game level. Impossible? Not with this new technique. Can you show one or both minors and slam interest after a 2NT opening, and tell partner which specific minor you have, at the three-level? Yes, using Rexford's methods.



**KEN REXFORD** (Ohio) is a bridge player with 30 years of tournament experience. His first book, *Cuebidding at Bridge*, introduced the bridge world to a modern approach to Italian cuebidding. His most recent books for Master Point Press are *Modified Italian Canapé System* and *New Frontiers for Strong Forcing Openings*.

