

Lebensohl

The Basics and More

By Mike Savage

Lebensohl is a convention created to define some of responder's bids after partner has opened **1NT** and there has been an immediate 2-level overcall. In order to differentiate between competitive and forcing bids at the 3-level, **2NT** is used as an artificial bid, forcing **3C**. Then you can pass or make a competitive bid at the 3-level in a suit lower ranking than the overcall. The most common usage is: **1NT-2** of a suit overcall- **2NT (Lebensohl)-P 3C-P-P-P**. An example of this would be: **S: xx H: xx D: xxx C: QJ10xxx**.

The use of **Lebensohl** gives up the natural, invitational meaning of **2NT**, based on the theory that better than inviting a game in no-trump—which may not exist—is to double the opponents and get a one/two or more trick set. And as to the hands that have marginally invitational values but you can't be sure of a set—well, they just don't come up very often. You'll find it's better to just pass with these rare hands and use **2NT** as **Lebensohl** instead.

You can still play **2H** and **2S** on weak hands with a long suit and no game interest. **Lebensohl 2NT** is commonly played over a **2D**, **2H** or **2S** overcall. When **Lebensohl 2NT** is used over a two-level overcall and then, after the forced **3C** response, responder bids a suit that he *could* have bid at the 2-level, this shows an invitational hand with a long suit.

Many experienced partnerships using **2NT** as **Lebensohl**, also use it to differentiate between game forcing hands that have a stopper in the opponent's suit and those that don't. There are two sequences that show this difference. The *first* one is **1NT: 2-level overcall-2NT-P-3C-P-3NT**—showing values for game, including a stopper in the opponent's suit. As opposed to **1NT: 2-level overcall-3NT** - showing values for game, *without* a stopper in the their suit. The *second* one is **1NT: 2-level overcall-2NT-P 3C-P-Cue bid of the opponent's suit**—this is major suit Stayman, including a stopper in the opponent's suit. As opposed to **1NT: 2-level overcall-Cue bid of the opponent's suit**—this is Stayman *without* a stopper in their suit. In brief, bidding **2NT** on the way to **3NT** before Stayman or **2NT**, then **3NT** shows a stopper and bidding Stayman or **3NT** directly denies a stopper.

There are *at least* two other usages of **2NT** in a **Lebensohlish** way. First: after a weak **2H** or **2S** opening-**Dbl** (by partner)-**P-2NT**. Second: after **1 of a suit** (by partner)-a weak **2H** or **2S** jump overcall-**P-P Dbl-P-2NT** (example: 1H-2S-P-P Dbl-P-2NT). Both of these **2NT** bids can be used to show weak hands (0-6/7 HCP), forcing a **3C** rebid by the doubler (unless he has a good suit of his own to bid and/or too many points to risk **3C** being passed). After a **3C** bid (and partner doesn't pass), a bid of a suit that wasn't available at the 2-level shows a weak hand and suggests that it be passed. Since **2NT**, after a **Dbl**, shows a weak hand, now a non-jump response at the 3-level should be constructive (about 8-10/11 HCP).

On **page 2** you will find a popular bidding structure that covers bidding after a two-level overcall by the opponents over a **1NT** opening by your partner—including the ways **Lebensohl** can be used to show weak hands with long suits; to show or deny no-trump stoppers with forcing hands and sometimes, to show an invitational hand with a long suit.

Bidding after an overcall of partner's 1NT (Featuring a standard bidding structure, utilizing **Lebensohl**)

1NT-Dbl (not for penalty): All your systems over **1NT** are on. **Rdbl** is for penalty (8+HCP)

Dbl (is for penalty): Systems on and **Rdbl** forces **2C** in order to play **2C** or **2D**

1NT-2C (overcall, not showing the majors):

Dbl = Stayman

All the rest of your systems over **1NT**, above **2C**, are still on

1NT-2D (overcall): **Dbl** = Penalty

2H = Natural, to play

2S = Natural, to play

2NT = **Lebensohl**, forces **3C**

3C-P-3D = Stayman, with a stopper in the opponent's suit

3H = Invitational, usually a six-card suit but could be five

3S = Invitational, usually a six-card suit but could be five

3NT = Shows game values *with* a stopper

3C = Invitational to game

3D = Stayman *without* a stopper

3H = Forcing with at least a five-card suit

3S = Forcing with at least a five-card suit

3NT = Shows game values *without* a stopper

1NT-2H (overcall): **Dbl** = Penalty

2S = Natural, to play

2NT = **Lebensohl**, forces **3C**

3C-P-3D = Natural, to play (some play this mildly constructive)

3H = Stayman *with* a stopper in the opponent's suit

3S = Invitational, usually a six-card suit but could be five

3NT = Shows game values *with* a stopper

3C/3D = Invitational to game

3H = Stayman *without* a stopper

3S = Forcing with at least a five-card suit

3NT = Shows game values *without* a stopper

1NT-2S (overcall): **Dbl** = Penalty

2NT = **Lebensohl**, forces **3C**

3C-P-3D = Natural, to play (some play this mildly constructive)

3H = To play but can be raised with a fit and a maximum

3S = Stayman *with* a stopper in the opponent's suit

3NT = Shows game values *with* a stopper

3C/3D = Invitational to game

3H = Forcing with at least a five-card suit

3S = Stayman *without* a stopper

3NT = Shows game values *without* a stopper