

Systems On vs Unusual

After 1NT-2NT By Mike Savage

After your partner opens a strong 1NT it is very rare that the next hand will make an Unusual 2NT overcall, showing the minors. However, when it happens (and it eventually will) your partnership should have some agreements in place to cope with it. If your partnership hasn't yet discussed *what* means *what* over a 2NT overcall, what's the best approach to use and which conventions should your partnership play?

You might think Unusual vs. Unusual would be the convention of choice here as the opponents *did* make an Unusual Notrump overcall of a strong 1NT. However, U vs. U was created to handle showing support for opener's suit as well as invitational and forcing hands with the unbid suit. After partner's 1NT opener, there is no suit to show support for and there are two unbid suits, both majors, and thus Stayman is very useful.

So here is a better approach to handle 2NT over 1NT: If responder bids in the immediate seat, play the usual conventions that you use over 1NT and also play that a double is strength showing and penalty oriented, but *after passing* on his first turn to bid, a double by responder on his second turn to bid is a weak takeout for the major suits and 3♥ & 3♠ are natural competitive bids with a long suit and not much more.

This simple structure is easy on memory and handles well most of the hands you might want to bid on: "Systems on" immediate action with invitational & forcing hands while balancing action is just competitive.

1NT (strong)-2NT (minors):

Db1 = Strength showing, usually ready to penalize at least one of the two minor suits, but does not guarantee another bid if opener passes a 3♣ or 3♦ bid by your Left Hand Opponent (LHO).

Pass = Shows nothing but *might* be intending to balance over three of a minor.

3♣ = Stayman (you could also use Puppet Stayman and if so, the Romex version is recommended).

3♦ = No four-card major.

3♥ = Shows five spades and four hearts (Smolen).

3♠ = Shows five hearts and four spades (Smolen).

3♦ = Transfer to hearts (should have at least mildly invitational values).

3♥ = Bid with two hearts or with a minimum 1NT opener and three hearts.

4♥ = Bid with (almost) any 1NT opener with four hearts or with three and a maximum.

Responder shows at least some game interest, so stretching to bid 4♥ is suggested.

3♥ = Transfer to spades (should have at least mildly invitational values).

3♠ = Bid with two spades or with a minimum 1NT opener and three spades.

4♠ = Bid with (almost) any 1NT opener with four spades or with three and a maximum.

Responder shows at least some game interest, so stretching to bid 4♠ is suggested.

Balancing bids by the responder to the strong 1NT opener after their three of a minor bid:

1NT-2NT-P-3♣-P-P:

Db1 = Shows a *constructive* major two-suiter, asks opener to bid three (or four) of his longer major. Should be made with five-five or longer in hearts and spades and some game hope.

3♦* = Shows a *weak* major two-suiter and forces opener to bid three of his longer/better major.

3♥* & 3♠ = To play, but just *might* be raised to four with a good fit and a *super* maximum.

* Probably better but more memory intensive, play 3♦ & 3♥ as major transfers, right-siding play.

1NT-2NT-P-3♦-P-P:

Db1 = Shows a *constructive* major two-suiter, asks opener to bid three (or four) of his longer major. Should be made with five-five or longer in hearts and spades and some game hope.

3♥ & 3♠ = To play, but just *might* be raised to four with a good fit and a *super* maximum.