

Lebensohl over 1NT

More and more players are bidding over your strong 1NT openings more aggressively than in the past. Lebensohl is a convention which was developed to deal with interference over your opening bids of 1NT. In all cases, it is assumed that your partnership opens a strong 1NT, that is 15-17 HCP. Let us suppose that your partner opens 1NT and RHO overcalls 2♥ (natural).

Without playing Lebensohl, these are the bidding tools that you have at your disposal.

1NT(2♥)-Double

Penalty.

1NT(2♥)-2♣

To play. Remember that transfers are off over interference.

1NT(2♥)-3♣ *or*

1NT(2♥)-3♦ *or*

1NT(2♥)-3♠

Natural and gameforcing.

1NT(2♥)-3♥*

The Qbid is gameforcing Stayman. Opener will rebid 3NT without a holding of 4 or more spades.

1NT(2♥)-3NT

Natural and gameforcing.

1NT(2♥)-2NT

Natural and invitational.

But there appears to be a problem in this whole structure. When would you ever want to bid 2NT over their 2♥?

Presumably, you would need at least one sound heart stopper and some values to bid 2NT. There is an alternate bid available when holding this hand: it is **Double**.

Once you realize that a natural 2NT can never exist, you are halfway towards understanding Lebensohl. Instead, we use a bid of 2NT to describe hands which cannot be handled by the above structure. Don't you wish you had a way of competing in a suit below the rank of the overcalled suit? How about some natural invitational bids? Welcome to the fruits of Lebensohl.

Here is the new structure:

1NT(2♥)-Double

Penalty (no change).

1NT(2♥)-2♣

To play (no change).

1NT(2♥)-3♣ *or*

1NT(2♥)-3♦ *or*

1NT(2♥)-3♠

Natural and gameforcing (no change).

1NT(2♥)-3♥*

The Qbid is gameforcing Stayman (no change), but this sequence tends to deny a stopper in the enemy suit (see below).

1NT(2♥)-3NT*

Natural and gameforcing (no change), but this sequence tends to deny a stopper in the enemy suit (see below).

1NT(2♥)-2NT*

Lebensohl. Opener is forced to bid 3♣ and then responder will describe his hand further.

1NT(2♥)-2NT*-3♣*-Pass *or*

1NT(2♥)-2NT*-3♣*-3♦

To play. Any bid after the Lebensohl relay below 3 of the overcalled suit is signoff.

1NT(2♥)-2NT*-3♣*-3♠*

Natural and invitational. Any bid after the Lebensohl relay above 3 of the overcalled suit is invitational. Why? Because we already have shown two sequences to describe a gameforcing hand with spades and a signoff hand with spades. There aren't any other possibilities.

1NT(2♥)-2NT*-3♣*-3♥* *or*

1NT(2♥)-2NT*-3♣*-3NT*

What do you think these sequences should show? The standard agreement is that the **slow Qbid** is still gameforcing Stayman and that the **slow 3NT** is still natural and gameforcing. The main difference is that this sequence shows a stopper in the opponent's overcalled suit. (Hence the mnemonic "**slow shows**.")

You can generalize this structure for interference over any natural overcall at the two level. The only thing that you must keep in mind are the suits which are above and below the enemy suit so that you can distinguish an invitational sequence from a signoff sequence.