

Boehm on Bridge



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Simple defenses to common conventions — part 6

When an opponent opens artificially, you receive an Alert. Is your partnership prepared for Flannery and the gambling 3NT?

Flannery is usually defined as a 2♦ opening bid, showing four spades, five hearts and about 11–15 high-card points. To defend against it efficiently, you want agreements to show a strong, balanced hand, or a three-suited hand short in hearts, or a minor two-suiter.

Accordingly, double should show the strong balanced hand, 15+ points. You don't want to release the opponents when you may have them nailed. If partner holds a long, weak minor, the opponents will escape the ax, but partner can compete effectively. When partner has scattered values and a balanced hand, he is invited to double their runout.

The 2NT bid can be reserved for both minors, the two "live" suits. I think it should deliver extra values, either HCP (15+) or distribution (6–5) because your LHO is poised to double, having been given a clear picture of opener's hand. Also, if the opponents outbid you, made more likely when they hold the majors, you don't want to squeal on your distribution and assist declarer. 2NT becomes a hefty unusual notrump.

Against Flannery, the suit you are unlikely to name as trumps is hearts, opener's five-card suit. Therefore, use the 2♥ overcall, a *virtual* cuebid of a suit the opponent has shown artificially, as a three-suited takeout of hearts. Values should be similar to any two-level intervention. A 2♠

overcall ought to be natural with long, strong spades, say a minimum suit of ♠KJ10842. You can easily withstand four trumps on your right; the deal may belong to your side in a spade partial or game, so there must be a way to introduce the suit.

Other overcalls are natural and normal. If your partnership wants to add to the menu, consider the possible meaning of a 3♥ as asking for a heart stopper.

If the opponents use 2♥ as Flannery, some adjustments are in order. Since they have taken away your cuebid, use double as takeout of hearts and 2NT as natural to show the two most important hand types; other bids remain the same.

Versus a gambling 3NT opening, which shows a long, running minor — perhaps with an outside ace or king, perhaps not, according to their agreements — your primary objectives are to identify the strong notrump type and to be able to show a major two-suiter. These hand types are the swingy ones where you may be able to extract a sizable penalty or make a major suit game or slam.

Because 3NT isn't forcing, second seat can't afford to adopt a wait-and-see strategy.

Therefore, if you hold the strong balanced hand (15+), double. If your LHO runs to 4♣ (pass or correct), partner can bid a long suit or double with values. Logically, penalty doubles against a solid suit gambling 3NT are not based on trump tricks but on general defensive values.

To show the majors, second hand

can bid 4♣ and reserve 4♦ as natural. A better alternative is to use both 4♣ and 4♦ as major suit takeout. Intervenor should enter the auction with either:

1. ♠AK863 ♥AQ964 ♦A6 ♣7 or
2. ♠QJ972 ♥KJ10643 ♦96 ♣—.

Obviously, there is a huge difference in strength, and if only one takeout is available, the 3NT preempt will often jostle you out of the best contract. To compensate for the loss of bidding space, let 4♣ show the strong hand No. 1 and 4♦ reflect the distributional hand No. 2. The reason 4♣ represents the strong hand is related to bidding space — a 4♣ intervention allows advancer to mark time with 4♦ when holding slam interest, or sign off in 4♥ or 4♠ with less.

Naturally, once you adopt this method, you will soon encounter:

♠A8 ♥2 ♦AKJ10742 ♣754.

When RHO opens 3NT, you must either overbid with 5♦ or pass — there is no free lunch. Actually, you could double. If they run to 4♣, then a 4♦ overcall is about right. If they stick it out in 3NT doubled, the 3NT opening will earn its adjective, one way or the other. □