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# Claim with Colchamiro

## Recognizing defenses

### Mirror, mirror on the wall — part 3

#### What does it all mean?

Last month we saw that the expert panel overwhelmingly believes that mirror doubles come at too high a cost — the loss of the ability to use double as takeout or penalty. Ten respondents thought that a double of a natural two-level overcall after a strong 1NT opening should be negative. Two respondents said they would play doubles as penalty if partner wanted to. None of the respondents suggested you play mirror doubles except over 2♣.

#### Mel's proposed solution

Whenever an opponent overcalls your 1NT opening in a natural suit, double by your side is negative — that means takeout. A negative double doesn't always guarantee four cards in the unbid major.

Here's an example: Suppose your partner opens 1NT and right-hand opponent bids 2♥. You would make a negative double, if you held:

♠K 8 6 ♥7 4 ♦A J 4 3 ♣9 7 4 3.

You might ask, "Why can't I bid 2NT with the hand above showing 8–9 points, invitational?"

That's a good question. The answer is that you need 2NT for something

else. That something else has a weird name: lebensohl.

In order to handle all the situations that come up when they interfere over your 1NT opening bid, you need a full arsenal of counter-defenses. In modern bidding, there are many cases in which 2NT has been assigned an artificial meaning. For example:

1♥ – Pass – 2NT is usually Jacoby, showing a forcing heart raise, while 1♥ – 2NT is meant as the unusual notrump showing the minors. The auction 2♥ – Pass – 2NT is usually played as either asking for a feature or as Ogust, and 1NT – Pass – 2NT is often played as a transfer to diamonds.

#### Simple lebensohl

I suggest you use what is called simple lebensohl. It allows the responder to compete in a long suit without getting the partnership overboard.

Assume the bidding is as follows:

Partner	Opponent	You
1NT	2♠	?

Look at these two sample hands:

- ♠4 ♥A 5 ♦K 8 7 6 ♣A J 9 7 6 4,
- ♠4 ♥7 5 ♦8 7 6 3 ♣A J 9 7 6 4.

With the first hand, your side has game or perhaps slam. So you bid 3♣ (forcing) to see what your partner rebids. But with the second hand, we want to play 3♣. Obviously, we can't bid 3♣ on both hands because partner won't understand our intentions.

Simple lebensohl comes to the rescue. With No. 2 we bid 2NT, forcing the opener to bid 3♣. Opener then waits to see what the responder had in mind.

With the second hand, you will pass 3♣. By the way, if you had the same kind of hand as hand No. 2, but instead had long diamonds (or hearts), you would still bid 2NT. After partner bids the required 3♣, you would correct to 3♦ (or 3♥). That is a signal for opener to pass. If you had game aspirations, over 2♠ you would have bid your suit directly, instead of bidding 2NT.

When you have a hand that you might want to bid 2NT as natural and invitational, you can make a negative double showing 7 or more high-card points.

To summarize:

1. A double is negative (takeout) at the two or three level.
2. A new suit bid at the two level shows a length of five or more, is natural and not forcing.
3. A new suit bid at the three level shows a length of five or more, is natural and forcing.
4. 2NT is simple lebensohl and is a relay to 3♣.

#### What's next?

You now have a playable system in place. Next month, you'll see how it works with various hands that you might face after an enemy overcall of partner's 1NT opening.

*My first book, How You Can Play Like An Expert (Without Having To Be One), has great winning tips, Zia, Catherine Zeta-Jones and much more! It's available at my web site: www.melbridge.com (lots of free stuff, too) or e-mail me at mcolch@optonline.net.*