



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(53) Scrambling 2NT

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Level: 3

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

In competitive auctions where the opponents have found a fit, we will compete aggressively - especially at matchpoints. We will frequently use double (for takeout) with three-suited hands and sometimes with two-suited hands. If we have all three of the unbid suits, we have a traditional takeout double and we will be able to handle the auction relatively easily. But sometimes we will need to make a takeout double with less than perfect shape (i.e. - 2-suited hands with 5-4 or 5-5 shape.) We double with these "off-shape" hands because we have no better call and the player that is short in the opponent's suit should be the one who strives to compete. To handle these situations, we want partner (Advancer) to have a tool to help us find our best fit. As usual, in competitive auctions our choice of convention will be 2NT. This gadget is called *Scrambling 2NT*.

Scrambling 2NT

Remember, we like to live by the motto, "2NT is a convention, not a contract!" This is another example of putting that idea to work for us.

Example

1♠	P	2♠	X
P	2NT		

Opposite a takeout double when the opponents have found a fit, if Advancer has one clearly preferred suit, they bid it. But if Advancer has 2 suits, they have a choice to make. They could just guess which suit to bid, but a better option is to bid 2NT showing "two places to play." Over this *Scrambling 2NT* both Interferer and Advancer bid their suits up the line until they can agree on a suit.

Note: With a natural 2NT bid, the Advancer just passes the takeout double, converting it to penalty. Thus, 2NT is available to be used for our conventional call - Scrambling 2NT.

Example

1♠ P 2♠ X
P 2NT P 3♣
P 3♦ All Pass

In this example auction the bids show:

- X Interferer makes a takeout double.
- 2NT Advancer shows two places to play - with the *Scrambling 2NT*.
- 3♣ Interferer shows he has ♣.
- 3♦ Advancer shows that he does not have ♣ - he has ♦ and ♥.
- Pass Interferer passes because he prefers ♦ to ♥.

Other 2-Suited 2NT Bids

2NT can be used to show other 2-suited hands in competitive auctions where the opponents have found a fit. We use it as the *Unusual 2NT*, showing the 2 lowest unbid suits, when we jump to 2NT. But when we compete or balance with 2NT directly we often need it to show “two places to play.”

Example

1♠ P 2♠ P
P 2NT

In a modern bidding style, this shows 2 suits, not just the minors. It is generally ♣ + ♦ OR ♣ + ♥. It is not ♦ + ♥, because when we have the two highest suits we can double and if partner bids ♣ we can correct it to ♦ to show ♦ + ♥ (this is not a strong “double and bid” hand, since we passed previously.)

Conclusion

2NT is often used in competition to show many different types of hands. Lebensohl uses 2NT to differentiate strength (and stoppers), while Unusual Notrump or Scrambling 2NT use 2NT to show 2-suited hands (2 places to play.) The key is that 2NT continues to be the most useful conventional bid in all of bridge and we will proudly continue to look for more ways to use it!