



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(188) Woolsey

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Level: 6

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General

There are many artificial systems for competing over the opponent's 1NT opening bid. These systems vary dramatically in their goals. The focus can be on a variety of different goals -- penalizing the opponents, finding Major suit fits, or competing with shapely hands as cheaply as possible. Systems that keep double as penalty (i.e. Cappelletti/Hamilton) are built around a balance of penalizing the opponents and competing in the bidding. Systems like DONT or Meckwell are built more around finding a fit and competing in the bidding as efficiently as possible – allowing us to show all our suits at the 2-level. One downside of playing DONT or Meckwell is when we show a 2-suited hand (like a Major + minor) then we do not know which suit is longer (either one could be a 5-card or 4-card suit). This can lead to missing a Major suit fit. There is another system, called Woolsey (named after its creator Kit Woolsey, one of the top bidding theorists) that is focused on finding Major suit fits while allowing us to compete as cheaply as possible. Let's see how this system works.

2♣ Landy - Both Majors

Part of the Woolsey system is the use of an old gadget called Landy 2♣. This 2♣ bid over the opponent's 1NT is used to show both Majors (at least 4+4+ shape, but usually more distributional). This is the most constructive bid to use for both Majors because it allows Advancer to bid their longest Major at the 2-level or bid 2♦ with equal length in the Majors (2-2, 3-3, 4-4, etc..) This 2♦ bid asks Interferer to bid their longer (or better Major with equal length) allowing us to find our best fit instead of Advancer just guessing which one to bid.

Example

Here is an example hand where Landy (part of Woolsey) allows us to get to our best fit.

♠ AK874	♠ Q32
♥ KT64	♥ A83
♦ K94	♦ Q76
♣ 7	♣ T653

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1NT 2♣* P 2♦*

P 2♠

Major - Minor 2-Suiters

When we have a 2-suited hand we aggressively compete in the bidding with at least 5-5 shape, but we want to compete in the bidding with decent values and 5/4 shape. One of the issues is that we would like for partner to know when our 5-card suit is the Major suit – so that with equal length partner can choose to play in the Major suit fit. Woolsey does this by using two types of bids for these M + m hands.

These bids are used to show at least a 5-card Major.

1NT

- —
- 2♥* 5+card ♥ and 4+card minor
- 2♠* 5+card ♠ and 4+card minor

With a 5-card Major and a 4+card minor we simply overcall our Major suit. This bidding has the advantage of clarifying for partner that our 5-card suit is our Major (Notice this has the disadvantage of getting us to the 3-level if our fit is in the minor suit.)

Note: With no fit for Interferer's Major, Advancer bids either 2NT or 3♣ (partnership choice) to ask partner to bid their minor suit.

With a 4-card Major and a longer minor (4-5 or 4-6, etc.) then we use a special conventional double to show this hand. Advancer then knows that we have only a 4-card Major and that our longer suit is in the minor, allowing them to choose to play in our minor suit if they do not have a 4-card Major. Here is how Advancer bids:

1NT X* P —?

- 2♣* "I want to play in your minor!" -- pass or correct to 2♦.
- 2♦* "I want to play in your Major!" -- bid it!
- 2♥ Natural and to play, usually a 6+card suit
- 2♠ Natural and to play, usually a 6+card suit

One Long Suit

You will notice that the one bid that we have left out of our system description, 2♦, and the one hand type we have not yet discussed is one long suit. In Woolsey we use 2♦ to show a 1-suited hand with a long ♥ or ♠ suit ("one long Major").

1NT 2♦* 1-long Major, usually at least a 6+card suit

Note: With a hand that has one long minor suit we simple jump to 3♣ or 3♦ (preempting the bidding) again ending up at the 3-level when our long suit/fit is a minor suit.

After a 2♦ overall Advancer bids 2♥ to say I want to play in your suit at the 2-level, pass or correct to 2♠. If Advancer has a large fit for a Major suit then they bid based on assuming partner has their “worst” fit. If Advancer has a large fit for both Major then they bid at even higher levels.

Some of Advancer’s bidding options after a 1-Major 2♦ Woolsey bid.

1NT 2♦* P ___?

- 2♥ Pass or correct. Wants to play 2♥ if ♥ is your suit, but at least 2♠ if ♠ is suit.
- 2♠ Pass or correct. Wants to play 2♠ if ♠ is your suit, but wants to play at 3L+ if ♥ is suit.
- 3♥ Pass or correct. Wants to play 3♥ if ♥ is your suit, but at least 3♠ if ♠ is suit.
- 3♠ Pass or correct. Wants to pay 3♠ if ♠ is your suit, but 4♥ if ♥ is suit.
- 4♥ Pass or correct. Play 4♥ or 4♠

Example

1NT 2♦* P ___?

With 5-card ♠ and 2-card ♥ you bid 2♥ – assuming partner has a heart suit. If partner next bids 2♠ (showing they had ♠, not ♥) then we can bid 4♠.

(Advanced) Multi-Ogust

If Advancer has a good hand with a fit for both Majors and wants to try for game after a 2♦ bid showing 1-long Major then they can use 2NT to show game interest not matter which suit partner has. Interference describes both their suit and strength of their hand as follows:

1NT 2♦* P 2NT

P ___?

- 3♣* Good hand with ♥
- 3♦* Good hand with ♠
- 3♥ Bad hand with ♥
- 3♠ Bad hand with ♠
- 3NT Solid Major (AKQxxx+)

Complete Woolsey System

1NT ___

- X* 4-card Major and a longer minor
- 2♣* Both Majors (at least 4-4)



- 2♦* One Major (usually at least 6+cards)
- 2♥* 5+card ♥ and 4+card minor
- 2♠* 5+card ♠ and 4+card minor
- 2NT Both minors
- 3L Natural and preemptive

Conclusion

Woolsey is an interesting system for competing over the opponent's 1NT opening bid. This system sometimes forces us to the 3-level when our fit is a minor suit (compared to DONT or Meckwell that may allow us to play at the 2-level). But Woolsey's focus on Major suit bidding allows us to more precisely find our fit, specifically a Major suit fit. X, 2♣, and 2M all allow us to show two suits and find our best Major suit fit. If you and partner are looking for a new system to try over the opponent's 1NT opening bid consider giving this one a shot!