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This Week in Bridge

(230) Modern Lebensohl and Modern Transfer Lebensohl

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Level: 6

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General

The traditional Lebensohl convention (or even Transfer Lebensohl) has some flaws that modern expert players have attempted to address. One of these flaws has to do with jumping to 3NT to deny a stopper – “Fast Denies.” This method is reasonable in that it shows values, a relatively balanced hand, no interest in a Major suit, and no stopper in the opponent’s suit. This says a lot about Responder’s hand, but it also eats up all of our bidding space and can make it difficult to determine where to play. Another flaw with traditional Lebensohl occurs when the Advancer gets into the auction and raises their partner’s overcall. If Responder has bid 2NT and Advancer raises to the 3-level then it may become difficult for Responder to show their hand. Modern expert players have come up with a slightly better way to deal with this situation. Let’s see how it works!

Modern Lebensohl (Transfer Lebensohl)

The modern version of Lebensohl is used when the opponents overcall 2♥ or 2♠ after our 1NT opening bid.

Here is a brief outline of how Modern Lebensohl (and Transfer Lebensohl) works:

- The bids at the 3-level of new suits are unchanged (still natural or transfers).
- 3NT is natural and to play – showing a stopper.
- Cuebid is a Western Cuebid – asking for a stopper.
- The 2NT relay is used to show 4-cards in the other Major.
 - 2NT relay then Cuebid is 4-cards in other Major and no stopper in their Major.
 - 2NT relay then 3NT is 4-cards in other Major and stopper in their Major.

The key component of this system is that cuebids and 3NT are natural sounding. Using the 2NT relay and then making either of these bids shows the same thing but also shows 4-cards in the other Major suit.

Example – Regular Modern Lebensohl

- 1NT 2♥ —
- 2♠ Natural, 5+card ♠, To play
 - 2NT* Relay to 3♣*
 - 3♣ 5+♣, Game Forcing values (Natural)
 - 3♦ 5+♦, Game Forcing values (Natural)
 - 3♥* Game Forcing Values, no ♥ stopper, not 4-card ♠ (Western Cuebid Style)
 - 3♠ 5+♠, Game Forcing values (Natural)
 - 3NT Game Forcing Values, ♥ stopper (Natural)

- 1NT 2♥ 2NT* P
3♣* P —
- Pass To play, Long ♣ and a weak hand
 - 3♦ To play, Long ♦ and a weak hand
 - 3♥* Game Forcing values, 4-card ♠, no ♥ stopper
 - 3♠ Invitational values, 5+card ♠
 - 3NT* Game Forcing values, 4-card ♠, ♥ stopper

Bidding After Advancer Extends Preempt

One of the places where this new method can be helpful is after Advancer gets involved in the auction.

Example

- 1NT 2♥ 2NT* 3♥
P P —?

In this auction, especially playing Modern Transfer Lebensohl, no hand with values starts with 2NT unless it is relatively balanced. With a 5+card suit and values Responder bids directly at the 3-level. Let's now look at how this helps in this auction.

When the auction comes back around to partner at 3♥, then the hands where Responder has enough values to act are generally:

- A hand with a 4-card ♠ suit and ♥ stopper (planning to rebid 3NT before Advancer acted).
- A hand with a 4-card ♠ suit and no ♥ stopper (planning to rebid 3♥ before Advancer acted).

Now, when Responder acts in this position they must have 4-cards in the other Major, ♠. This is true whether Responder doubles or bids 3NT. 3NT clearly must

have a stopper in the opponent's suit, while double is generally takeout, showing 4-card ♠ and no stopper in the opponent's suit. At this point Opener is well placed to determine what to do.

No Modern Lebensohl Against 2D Preempts

This new method is effective when the opponents have shown length in one Major but not when they have shown ♠ because the relay is used to show 4-cards in the other Major suit. If we try to use this method after a 2♦ overcall then it will not be clear which Major Responder is showing and the auction will be too high to explore for a fit. This method is not effective against 2♦ interference and thus we continue using traditional Lebensohl (or Transfer Lebensohl) in these situations.

Modern Lebensohl Against 2-Level Preempts

When applying Lebensohl after a 2♥ or 2♠ preempt by the opponent and then a takeout double from partner, this Modern Lebensohl system makes a lot more sense than traditional Lebensohl.

Example

- | | | | |
|----|------|--------------|---|
| 2♠ | X | P | __? |
| • | 3♠ | | Game Forcing values, no ♠ stopper, no 4-card ♥ suit |
| • | 3NT | | Game Forcing values, ♠ stopper, no 4-card ♥ suit |
| • | 2NT* | relay to 3♣* | then 3♠ GF values, no ♠ stopper, 4-card ♥ suit |
| • | 2NT* | relay to 3♣* | then 3NT GF values, ♠ stopper, 4-card ♥ suit |

Conclusion

By changing the meaning of Lebensohl responses so that 3NT is natural and a cuebid is more like a Western Cuebid, asking for a stopper, then Responder's bidding is more practical and effective (like jumping to 3NT when you know that is where you want to play). Using 2NT to start showing the hands that have 4-cards in the other Major allows Responder to be well placed in many other auctions that become more competitive. If you are looking for an upgrade to your competitive bidding systems, give this approach a try.