

DEFENSE AGAINST TRANSFER BIDS

The following defenses against transfer bids will allow you to show any two-suited hand with one call. They apply not only against Jacoby and Texas transfers, but against any bid that shows another specific suit (e.g., opening 3♥ to show a preemptive bid in spades). One disadvantage of transfer bids is that they give an opponent two opportunities for action: immediate or delayed. This aid to defensive bidding accuracy should be utilized.

When Your Side Has Been Silent

When the transfer bid occurs before your side has bid or doubled (e.g., vs Jacoby or Texas response to a 1NT opening, or vs an opening preemptive transfer bid), use the following defense:

-- A notrump bid asks for a preference between the lower two suits, excluding the one indicated by the transfer bid.

-- A double of the transfer bid shows the higher two suits.

-- A "cue bid" (in the suit indicated by the transfer bid) is top-and-bottom, asking for a preference between the top and bottom suits.

For instance, after a 2♦ Jacoby response to a 1NT opening:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♦	2NT - both minors
			Dbl - spades/diamonds
			2♥ - spades/clubs
			2♠/3♣/3♦ - one-suited hand

The double can be made with less strength than any of the other two-suited calls. One of the suits indicated by the double is the suit bid by the opponent, so partner can pass with an unsuitable hand. This sequence has an easy mnemonic: Dbl for Diamonds and the other major, Cue bid for Clubs and the other major. Bids over a 2♥ transfer to spades has the same mnemonic.

When given a choice of suits in which you have equal length, prefer a major to a minor, hearts to spades, and clubs to diamonds. Partner can keep this in mind when deciding whether to overcall or pass with a marginal hand.

The immediate overcall with a one-suited hand should be quite sound. With a doubtful hand, just pass and reopen the bidding if the transfer suit gets passed:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	Pass	2♠/3♣/3♦

These reopening bids can be made with moderate hands, since partner is marked with some high cards when the opponents stop at the two level.

The soundness of immediate natural overcalls applies at higher levels, too:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	4♦	4♠/5♣/5♦ - sound bids 4NT - for the minors, may be speculative

It has to be remembered that a direct 4NT bid is for the minors and a balancing 4NT bid is natural. That is the general rule, and for the sake of consistency it must be followed even at this level.

With a doubtful hand, perhaps taking a deliberate save with many playing tricks but little defense, East can pass on this round and bid next time. This policy may help partner when he has to make a double/bid/pass decision.

You may sometimes have a three-suited hand with shortness in the suit indicated by the transfer bid. In that case just pass the transfer, then double for takeout on the next round. You can do this with a huge hand, since the transfer bid is forcing; there is no need to jump into the bidding immediately:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♥	Pass
2♠	Pass	Pass	Dbl - takeout double if 1NT was strong

If 1NT was weak this double is optional, just showing a strong balanced hand. See section 12-3, Marvin Vs Weak Notrump Openings.

When the transfer is an opening bid that shows a preemptive bid in the next higher suit, the same principles apply. An immediate notrump overcall still shows the lower two "unbid" suits. A reopening notrump bid is therefore natural:

South	West	North	East
3♦	Pass	3♥	Pass
Pass	Dbl - normal takeout double	3♠ - competitive reopening bid	3NT - natural

South's 3♦ shows a preemptive 3♥ type hand. The double is not a reopening action, since an immediate double would show a two-suited hand with spades and diamonds. It is true that passing 3♦ with a nine-trick notrump hand gives North a chance to make a preemptive raise in hearts, but that must be chanced. There are two advantages to this approach: (1) a two-suited hand in the minors can be easily shown by an immediate 3NT bid, and (2) the general principles of countering transfer bids remain the same, with no exceptions.

South	West	North	East
3♣	Pass	3♦	3♥/3♠/Dbl

Believe it or not, East is actually making a reopening call. North has indicated that he would have passed a normal 3♦ opening bid, so East pretends that is just what has happened. He is no worse off than he would be with a normal preemptive 3♦ opening. This is especially true if he is short in diamonds. The hand that is short in the opposing suit must be quick to act, since partner probably cannot.

Against Strong NAMYATS

The NAMYATS convention uses a 4♣ opening to show hearts and a 4♦ opening to show spades. In the "strong" version a 4♥ or 4♠ opening is weak in high cards, while a 4♣ or 4♦ opening shows a good hand that would welcome a slam contract. The fact that there is an intervening suit between the transfer bid and the indicated suit affects the usual defense against transfer bids:

-- Passing and then doubling opener's major on the next round retains the same meaning: a strong three-suited hand short in opener's suit.

-- Immediate overcalls in the ranking suit (i.e., the suit lying between opener the opening bid and opener's major) may be weaker than overcalls in the remaining two suits. If you don't bid now, you have to bid higher next time.

-- Immediate overcalls in the remaining two suits are very sound, because you can pass and bid on the next round with a sacrifice type hand, at the same level that an immediate bid would require.

-- Jump overcalls are extra strong.

-- The immediate double, "cue bid" of opener's suit, and notrump bids all retain the same meaning: major/diamonds, major/clubs, and both minors, respectively:

South	West
4♣	Dbl - diamonds and spades
	4♦ - diamonds, may be a stretch
	4♥ - clubs and spades
	4♠/5♣ - good hand, not a stretch
	4NT - minors
	5♦/5♠ - extra strong

With a sacrifice sort of 4♠ or 5♣ bid, West could pass and bid on the next round. The immediate overcall shows a good hand both offensively and defensively. The difference may be important if partner has to decide what to do when the opponents go to 5♥.

There are two ways to show spades and a minor: double/cue bid, or bid 4♠ and then bid the minor (if you get the chance). Choose the the natural bid when spades are strong and longer than the minor, the conventional call otherwise. You are not going to run if 4♠ gets doubled, so the spades had better be pretty good. When you show the suits conventionally, partner will not take a false preference in order to play the major suit.

There at least two ways of showing both minors: bid 4NT immediately or on the second round. Common sense says that an immediate 4NT bid is stronger than a delayed one. The immediate bid promises a good hand, both offensively and defensively, while a delayed bid implies poor defense.

When the opening is 4♣ you can also show diamonds and clubs by just bidding them instead of overcalling 4NT, which provides a third way of showing both minors. Show the minors this way when the clubs are not longer than the diamonds. Partner will then prefer diamonds with equal length. After a 4NT bid, he prefers clubs with equal length.

There are also three ways to get to 5♦ after a 4♣ opening: bid 5♦ immediately; bid 4♦, then 5♦, or pass and then bid 5♦. The jump is stronger, the delayed bid (passing first) is weaker. Bidding diamonds twice (a seemingly illogical action) gives room for partner to bid 4♠, so it could be based on a good hand with some spade support.

When the opening is 4♦ it is the immediate major suit bid that may be a stretch:

South	West
4♦	Dbl - diamonds and hearts
	4♥ - may be a stretch
	4♠ - clubs and hearts
	4NT - minors
	5♣/5♦ - sound bids
	5♥ - extra strong

West has three ways to get to 5♥: bid 5♥ immediately, obviously the strongest action; bid 5♥ on the next round (weakest); or bid 4♥, then 5♥, which is somewhere in-between.

There are two ways to show hearts and a minor: double/cue bid, or bid both suits. With hearts longer than the minor, bid 4♥ and then the minor. When the two suits are of equal length, or the minor longer, double or cue bid.

There is no way left to double opener's eventual game bid for business, unless you are able to overcall in the ranking suit and then double on the next round. That is not a big deal, because doubling a strong NAMYATS game bid is seldom profitable and often disastrous.

Against Weak NAMYATS

When the opening bid of 4♣ or 4♦ shows a weak major suit preempt, we must have a way of doubling the major for business. The delayed double therefore becomes a little more optional than takeout, not necessarily a three-suited hand. Otherwise the defense is the same as against the strong version of NAMYATS.

Action vs NAMYATS by Fourth Seat

When the opening has been passed by second seat, third seat will either bid four of partner's major or bid the next higher suit (as a query bid, or as a "retransfer" to let opener play the hand).

-- When third seat signs off in opener's suit, a double is for takeout and a 4NT bid shows both minors:

South	West	North	East
4♣	Pass	4♥	Dbl - takeout
			4NT - minors

Against the weak version of NAMYATS, the double of 4♠ is more optional than takeout, just as it would be over a normal preemptive 4♥ or 4♠ opening.

-- When third seat bids the ranking suit so that opener can play the hand, that is treated like a transfer bid:

South	West	North	East
4♣	Pass	4♦	Dbl - spades and diamonds 4♥ - spades and clubs 4NT - minors

South	West	North	East
4♦	Pass	4♥	Dbl - hearts and diamonds 4♠ - hearts and clubs 4NT - minors

Other defensive actions are similar in meaning to those employed by second seat.

When Your Side Has Previously Bid a Suit

When the transfer bid occurs after your side has bid a suit (e.g., opponent's transfer response to an overcall), a double is merely suit-showing. If both partners have bid, a cue bid in either the overcall suit or the suit indicated by the transfer bid is a "telling cue bid," showing that suit stopped and suggesting that partner bid notrump with the other suit stopped.

South	West	North	East
1♣	1♦	2♣	2♥ - transfer to spades Dbl - hearts 2♠/3♦ - telling cue bid, showing a stopper

See section 10-14, Miscellaneous Cue Bids, for more on telling cue bids. If partner has not previously bid, it is difficult to come up with a meaning for a cue bid in either suit:

South	West	North	East
1♠	2♣	Pass	2♦ - transfer to hearts Dbl - diamonds 2♥ - takeout, spades and five diamonds 3♦ - very strong two-suiter

When Your Side Has Bid Notrump

Suppose a 1NT opening is overcalled with a transfer bid:

South	West	North
1NT	2♥ *	?

* transfer to spades

A double is merely suit-showing, denying the strength for a bid at the three level. A 2NT response has the same meaning as if the overcall were natural. It is clear that a cue bid of the indicated suit (spades, in this case) is Stayman, asking for a major and showing at least a game-invitational hand. In the auction above,

South must bid 3NT or 4♥ in response to 2♠ with a maximum opening, since 2NT or 3♥ is likely to be passed.