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IN the first two articles I discussed how to defend against artificial pre-emptive openings. In this last one I shall look at stronger artificial openings and responses.

Transfer openings and responses

You may meet a pair playing transfer openings (such as a 1♦ opening showing hearts). You are more likely to come across transfer responses to a 1♣ opening, which are becoming popular in some circles. For simplicity, I recommend the same defence against both opening and responding transfers:

Double: take-out of the suit or suits they have shown.

All others: as if they have opened or responded in their suit.

For example, over a 1♠ opening showing hearts, 2♥ is the same as a 2♥ cue-bid over a 1♥ opening (probably some form of two-suited hand), and 2♠ is natural. 1NT is about 15-18 with hearts stopped and double is take-out of hearts.

If the transfer bid is below the suit shown (e.g. a 1♦ opening or response showing hearts) you also have the one-level 'cue-bid' available, which you can play as natural – this is particularly useful against four-card major openings! So over 1♦ showing at least four hearts, 1♥ is natural and 2♥ is a cue-bid showing a two-suiter.

Artificial one-of-a-minor openings

Here I am referring not to strong opening bids such as a Precision Club, but bids such as the 'Polish' Club (either natural, a weak no-trump or any 17+) or a Precision 1♦ opening which is either clubs or diamonds.

Defending against artificial systems

Part III

As long as the opening might be a normal opening bid with that suit, treat it as if it were natural. That is, double is take-out of the suit bid but with extra emphasis on the majors. Bidding the suit opened directly, or in response to partner's overcall, is a cue-bid. With length in the suit opened pass first then bid it later.

Artificial strong openings at the one or two level

Most of us are used to seeing a strong 1♣ opening (Precision or Blue Club), but there are other possibilities, such as the 'Romex' 1NT (showing any 18+), a strong 1♦ or of course the traditional Acol or Benjaminised 2♣ opening. As it is by far the most common, you might play a special defence to a strong 1♣, but against all the rest you won't go far wrong playing as follows:

Double: Both majors.

No-trump bids at the lowest level:

Both minors.

All others: Natural; jumps weak.

There are plenty of more complicated methods around, including several where the overcaller doesn't show a specific suit ('suction', CRASH etc). The advantage of the simple method above is that the defence is exactly the same whatever the opening bid actually is.

One difficulty is when you hold a strong hand in fourth seat, and partner bids over a strong opening. You usually assume that you are just trying to disrupt the opponents, but occasionally you might have a game your way, and you need a way to investigate. Bid no-trumps at the lowest level as artificial and forcing, asking for a further description of partner's hand. It's far more likely that you have a game based on distribution and fit, than you need to show a balanced hand.

Examples

♠ A Q 5 2		♠ K J 7 6
♥ A 7 5 3		♥ 6 4
♦ Q J 7		♦ A 10 5 2
♣ 7 2		♣ K Q 6

West	North	East	South
	1♦ ¹	Dbf ²	1♥
2♥	Pass	2♠	Pass
4♣	All Pass		

¹ Four or more hearts, opening bid values.

² Take-out of hearts.

♠ 10 6 2		♠ A 3
♥ A Q J 10 4		♥ 9 8 2
♦ 8 6		♦ A 10 9 5
♣ Q 10 3		♣ A J 9 2

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♦ ¹
1♥ ²	1♠	2♣ ³	2♠
Pass ⁴	Pass	4♥	All Pass

¹ Four or more hearts.

² Natural.

³ A good hand, tell me more.

⁴ Nothing extra.

♠ A J 5 4 2		♠ K 10 8 6 3
♥ K Q 9 2		♥ A 10 7 5
♦ 9 7 5		♦ 3
♣ 9		♣ 8 5 2

West	North	East	South
	1NT ¹	Dbf ²	Pass
2NT ³	3♦	3♠	Pass
4♣	5♣	Pass	Pass
5♠	All Pass		

¹ 18+, any distribution.

² Both majors.

³ Tell me more about your hand. □