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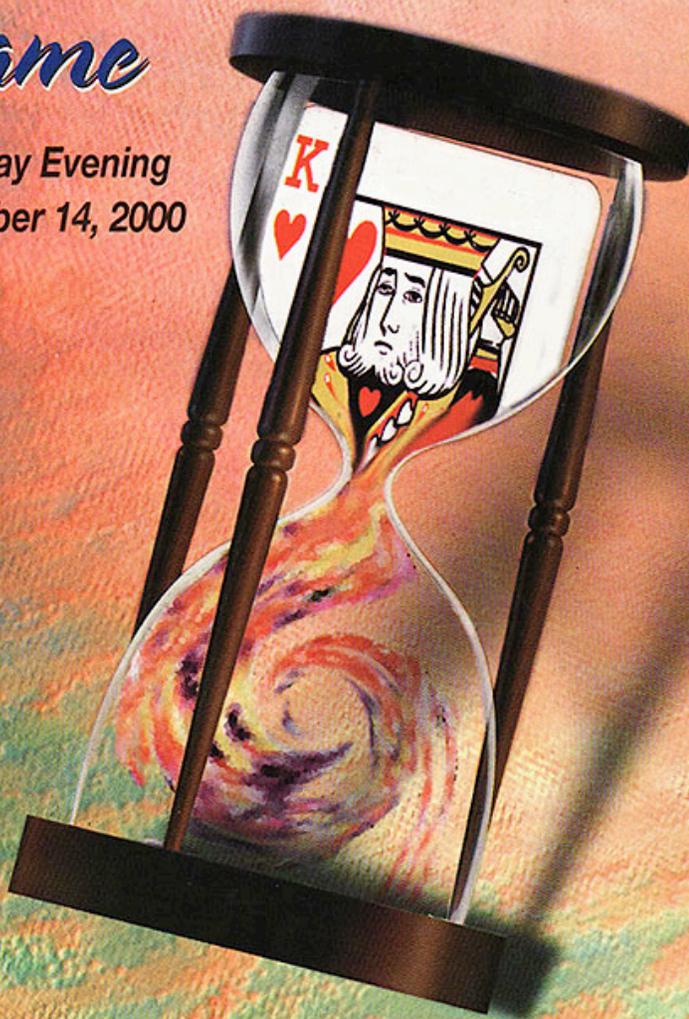
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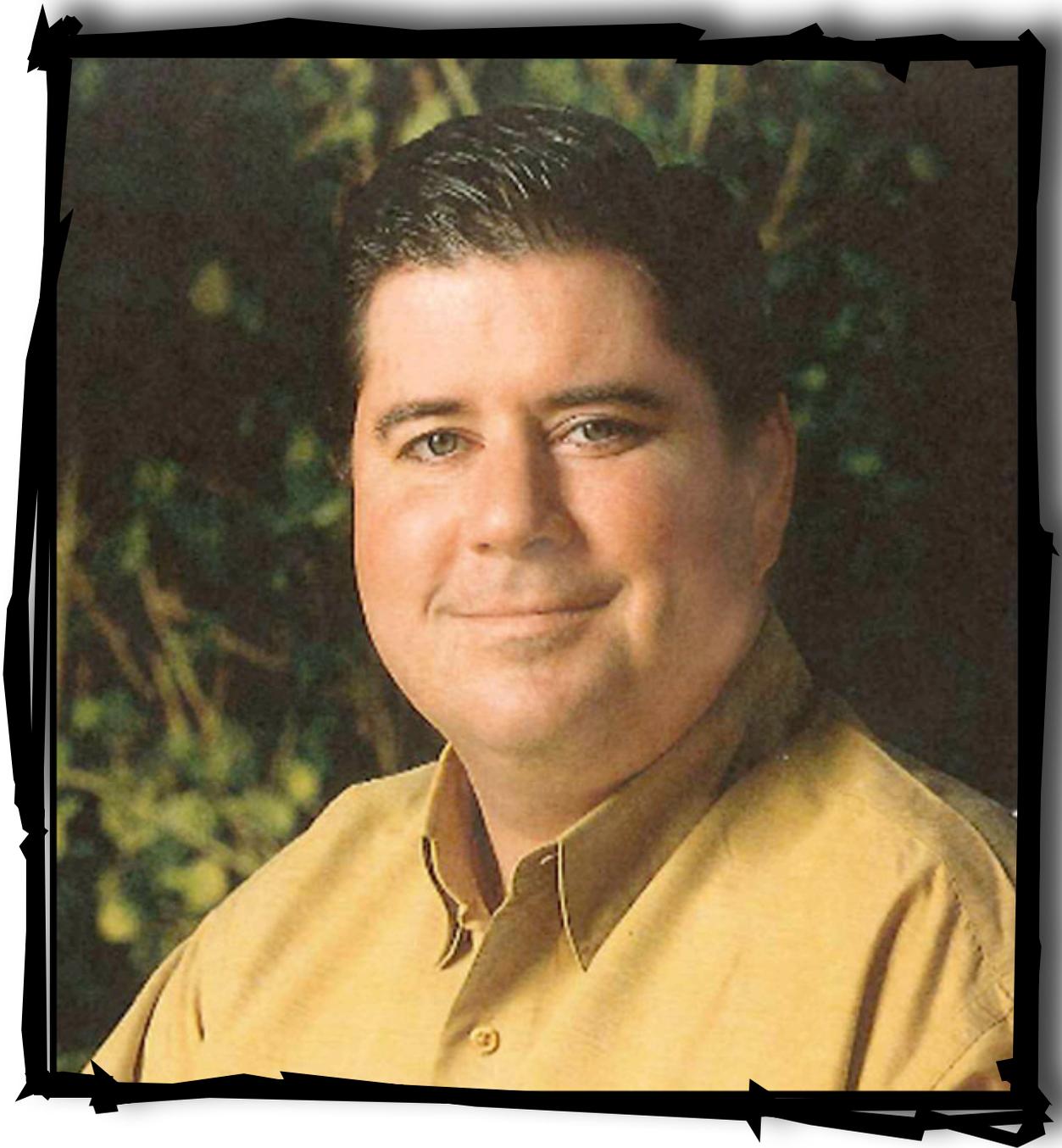


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Preferential Treatment

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There are two types of notrump overcall conventions: limited and comprehensive. A limited system, such as Landy, sacrifices some natural overcalls in order to use them for a more common or advantageous situation such as a two-suited hand. In the case of Landy, a natural bid of 2♣ is used to show an overcall with both majors. The overcaller's partner - which we'll refer to as the "advancer" - is then expected to place the contract in most cases.

By contract, a comprehensive convention attempts to show all varieties of one- and two-suited overcalls. The most popular examples of comprehensive systems are DONT and Cappelletti. In such a system, one natural call is stripped of its meaning and is used instead to show all types of one-suited hands. A relay by the advancer then permits the overcaller to name his long suit. The other overcalls remain semi-natural - they show a two-suited hand that includes the suit bid by the overcaller.

The identity of the other suit is known with some of these overcalls. A good example would be the DONT 2♥ overcall, showing a two-suited hand with hearts and spades. With some of the bids, however, the identity of the other suit is ambiguous. DONT, for example, has two such bids, 2♣ showing clubs and a higher suit, and 2♦ showing diamonds and a major. Cappelletti has two as well, 2♥ showing hearts and a minor, and 2♠ showing spades and a minor.

There is no comprehensive notrump overcall convention which doesn't use some ambiguous bids of this type. This can create a problem for the advancer. Too often, facing a poor fit for the known suit after such an overcall, advancer has a Hobson's choice of leaping into the unknown or remaining fixed by his system. If advancer is required to hold support for all the other suits before inquiring about the identity of overcaller's second suit, many opportunities will be missed to improve the contract.

This is a disadvantage at any form of scoring, but it's particularly costly at matchpoints if a major-suit fit is missed.

Consider a hand with a 2-4-3-4 or 1-4-2-5 distribution where partner has overcalled 2♦, showing diamonds and a major. With either of these hand shapes as advancer, you're constrained to pass and abandon the possibility of playing an eight- or nine-card fit in hearts due to the risk of landing in a worse fit in spades.

The underlying thread to this proposed structure is that all overcalls show either a two-suiter in the touching suits immediately above the overcall or a one-suited in the higher of those two suits. Double, in this scheme, is considered the call below 2♣.

The basic structure, therefore, is:

Dbl shows either (♣ & ♦) or ♦
2♣ shows either (♦ & ♥) or ♥
2♦ shows either (♥ & ♠) or ♠
2♥ shows either (♠ & ♣) or ♣

Initially assuming a two-suiter, the advancer takes a preference between the two suits. When the advancer chooses the higher suit, the overcaller would pass with either hand type. If the

advancer shows a preference for the lower suit, the overcaller corrects when he holds the single-suited hand. With no preference between the two suits, the advancer should bid the known suit.

The only two-suited combinations not covered by this basic structure, therefore, are clubs/hearts and diamonds/spades. To take care of this situation, the meaning of Double is expanded to mean (♣ & ♦) or (♣ & ♥) or (♦ & ♠).

It may look confusing but it's easy to use. As usual, the advancer assumes that the overcaller holds both clubs, and diamonds, and takes preference. If the overcaller has the hand with both minors, he simply passes. If he has the hand with long diamonds, the overcaller corrects to 2♦ if the advancer bids 2♣.

When the overcaller holds the other hand types, however, he corrects the minor-suit preference to the major he holds, thereby showing that major and the non-touching minor.

This system leaves the 2♠ and 2NT overcalls undefined. As all one- and two-suited hand types are already covered, these bids may be used to describe three-suiters. 2♠ shows any three-suiter with spades, while 2NT shows a three-suiter without spades, specifically 1-4-4-4 (or perhaps even a spade void.)

A suggested follow-up to the 2♠ bid would be 2NT to ask the overcaller if hearts is one of his suits. (A 3♠ bid would deny hearts, while 3♦ would confirm hearts. This arrangement allows the advancer to declare, placing the notrump opener on lead.)

Since a club one-suiter will always be played at the three level, and the 3♣ directly when holding this type of hand for its increased preemptive effect.

An advantage of this approach is that the opening side faces ambiguity after every overcall, yet the overcalling side has the information it needs to place the final contract.

Another strength is this convention's low number of three-level conversions, the chief drawback of Cappelletti. While DONT never requires a three-level preference, it does so at the expense of occasionally forcing the partnership to play in a 5-2 (or 4-2) fit when a superior fit is available.

If your goal is accuracy in finding your best contract when the opponents have opened 1NT, you may wish to take a preference to this treatment.