

# Conventions Today

Brian Senior



*Better Bridge Now*



## Better Bridge Now

# **Conventions Today**

**Brian Senior**



**CHESS & BRIDGE LTD**

First published in Great Britain in 2001  
by Chess & Bridge Limited  
369 Euston Road, London NW1 3AR

All rights reserved: no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written consent of the publisher.

© Brian Senior 2001

Distribution:

USA and Canada: Master Point Press  
331 Douglas Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5M 1H2;  
tel: (416) 781 0351; web: [www.masterpointpress.com](http://www.masterpointpress.com)

For all other enquiries, please contact the publishers,  
Chess & Bridge Limited, 369 Euston Road, London NW1 3AR;  
tel: 020 7388 2404; fax: 020-7388 2407;  
email: [chesscentre@easynet.co.uk](mailto:chesscentre@easynet.co.uk); web: [bridgemagazine.co.uk](http://bridgemagazine.co.uk)

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data.

A CIP record of this book is available on request from the British Library.

ISBN 0-9530218-2-3

Typeset by  
Wakewing Ltd, 73 Totteridge Lane, High Wycombe, Bucks HP13 7QA

Printed in Great Britain by  
The Cromwell Press, Trowbridge

# Foreword

There are millions of bridge players all over the world, but the vast majority of them have never read a single book on the subject!

However, if you have the desire to increase your knowledge and improve, then your watchwords should be 'read and play'.

The *Better Bridge Now* series provides you with the perfect opportunity to develop your bridge skills, by covering all the essential elements of the game.

No matter what system you employ, conventions will play a part. It was therefore an obvious choice for the *Better Bridge Now* series to include a title on the subject.

Brian Senior has long been recognised as one of the world's best player/writers, and in this book he breaks new ground by not only describing the most important conventions in modern use, but also by suggesting which will pay dividends.

This book will not only help you to decide what to incorporate into your partnership's armoury, but also help you to understand the many weapons that might be used against you at the table by your opponents. It may even inspire you to create a convention of your own!

Thanks must go to the American Contract Bridge League for providing many of the photographs.

If by some chance you don't find your favourite convention in this book, please let us know! You can email the London Bridge Centre at [bridgeshop@easynet.co.uk](mailto:bridgeshop@easynet.co.uk)

Mark Horton  
Editor  
*Better Bridge Now*

# Contents

Introduction	9
<b>Part 1 The Uncontested Auction</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>One of a Minor</b>	<b>12</b>
Better Minor	12
Modified Better Minor	12
Prepared Club	12
Walsh	12
Inverted Minor-suit Raises	13
Minor-suit Swiss	13
Strong Club Systems	14
<b>One of a Major</b>	<b>15</b>
The Forcing No Trump	15
Granville	16
The Jump Shift	16
Transfer Jump Shifts	16
Baron 2NT & 3NT	17
Swiss	17
Fruit Machine Swiss	18
Super Swiss	18
Splinter Bids	19
Jacoby 2NT	20
Bergen Raises	21
Mini-splinters	22
<b>Passed Hand Bidding</b>	<b>22</b>
Drury	23
SNAP	23
The Jump Shift	23
<b>One No Trump</b>	<b>24</b>
Stayman	24
Extended Stayman	24
Stayman in Doubt	24
Two-way Stayman	25
Puppet Stayman	26
Smolen	26
Jacoby Transfers	27

Four-suit Transfers	27
2♠ Range Enquiry	28
Texas	29
South African Texas	29
Gladiator	29
Modified Gladiator	30
<b>Two Clubs</b>	<b>30</b>
Acol-style	30
CAB Responses	31
Kokish Relay	31
Two-way Two Club Opening	32
Benjamin Twos	32
<b>Two Diamonds</b>	<b>33</b>
Flannery	33
Multi-coloured Two Diamonds	34
<b>Two of a Major</b>	<b>37</b>
Acol Two Bids	37
Herbert Negatives	38
Economical Jumps	38
Weak Two Bids	39
Ogust	39
2NT Opposite Random Style Weak Twos	40
Transfer Responses to Weak Two Bids	40
Lucas Two Bids	41
Roman Two Bids	41
Roman 2♣	41
Roman 2♦	42
Roman 2♥/♠	42
Tartan Two Bids	42
<b>Two No Trump</b>	<b>43</b>
Minor Two-suiter	43
Weak Pre-empt	43
2NT as a Strong Balanced Hand	44
Baron 3♣	44
Five-card Stayman	45
Puppet Stayman	45
Modified Baron	45
Flint	46
Jacoby Transfers	46
Full Transfer Systems	46
<b>Three of a Suit</b>	<b>48</b>
Alder Pre-empts	49
Transfer Pre-empts	49
Artificial Responses to Three of a Suit	50

4♣ Enquiry	50
<b>Three No Trump</b>	<b>51</b>
Gambling 3NT	51
<b>Four of a Suit</b>	<b>51</b>
Texas	52
South African Texas	52
<b>Four No Trump</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Five of a Suit</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Part 2 The Middle of the Auction</b>	<b>53</b>
Game Tries	54
Long-suit Game Tries	54
Short-suit Game Tries	55
Two-way Game Tries	55
Crowhurst	55
New Minor Forcing	56
Both Minors Forcing	57
Jump Reverses	57
Lebensohl After a Reverse	57
Majex	58
Wolff	59
Fragments and Splinters	59
Transfer Rebids Afer a 1NT Response	59
Directional Asking Bids	60
Fourth Suit Forcing	61
<b>Part 3 Slam Bidding</b>	<b>63</b>
Blackwood	64
Roman Blackwood	64
Roman Key Card Blackwood	64
Baby Blackwood	66
Kickback	66
Gerber	66
DOPE and ROPE	67
DOPI and ROPI	67
Cuebids	67
3NT To Start Cuebidding	68
The 'Serious' 3NT	69
Grand Slam Force	70
Roman Asking Bids	70
Last Train	71

---

<b>Part 4 The Competitive Auction</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Defences to a Strong Club</b>	<b>74</b>
Amsbury	75
Badger	75
Crash	75
Disco	76
Modified Crash	76
Panama	76
Trap	76
Trap With Transfers	76
Truscott	76
Responding to an Overcall	77
After 1♣ – 1♦	79
<b>Defences to One of a Suit</b>	<b>79</b>
The Simple Overcall	79
Pre-emptive Raises	79
Unassuming Cuebids	80
2NT as a Raise	80
Fit Jumps	80
Fit Non-jumps	81
The Takeout Double	81
Intermediate Jump Overcalls	82
Weak Jump Overcalls	82
<b>Two-suited Overcalls</b>	<b>84</b>
The Unusual No Trump	84
Ghestem	85
Roman Jump Overcalls	85
Michaels Cuebids	86
The Jump Cuebid	87
<b>Defences to One No Trump</b>	<b>87</b>
ANTI	88
Aspro	89
Astro	89
Asptro	89
Brozel	89
Cansino	90
Cappelletti	91
DONT	91
Landy	92
Lionel	92
Ripstra	93
Wallis	93
Coping With Intervention	94

<b>Defences to a Strong Two Club Opening</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>Defences to Pre-empts</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>Defences to Weak Two Bids</b>	<b>94</b>
2NT for Takeout	95
Hackett	95
Takeout Doubles with Lebensohl	96
Leaping Michaels	97
<b>Defences to the Multi Two Diamonds</b>	<b>97</b>
Dixon	97
Takeout Doubles with Lebensohl	98
Reverse Leaping Michaels	99
<b>Defences to Weak Three Bids</b>	<b>99</b>
Takeout Doubles	100
Responding to an Overcall	101
The General Cuebid	102
Responding to a 3NT Overcall	102
Fishbein	103
Lower Minor	103
Foxu	104
Film	104
Optional Double	104
Reese	105
Two-suited Takeouts	105
Halsall	106
Four-of-a-minor Two-suiter Takeouts	106
<b>Defences to Higher Openings</b>	<b>107</b>
Ripstra Over a 3NT Opening	107
Four of a Suit	107
<b>Artificial Pre-empts</b>	<b>107</b>
2♠/NT = A Pre-empt in an Unspecified Minor	108
2NT = A Weak Minor Two-suiter	108
3♣ = A Weak Minor Two-suiter	108
Transfer Pre-empts	108
<b>Part 5 General Competitive Bidding</b>	<b>109</b>
Lebensohl	110
Transfer Lebensohl	111
<b>Balancing in Fourth Seat</b>	<b>113</b>
1NT	113
2NT	113
The Jump Overcall	113
The Cuebid	114
<b>Doubles</b>	<b>114</b>
Competitive Doubles	114

---

Game Try Doubles	114
Lead-directing Doubles of 3NT	115
Lightner Doubles	116
Negative (Sputnik) Doubles	117
Negative Free Bids	119
Negative Slam Doubles	119
Responsive Doubles	120
Rosenkranz Doubles and Redoubles	121
Support Doubles	121
<b>Responding to Takeout Doubles</b>	<b>122</b>
2NT as a Scramble	122
2NT as Lebensohl (Good/Bad 2NT)	123
4NT as Two Places to Play	124
<b>Defending Two-suited Overcalls</b>	<b>124</b>
Unusual Over Unusual	124
Defences to Other Two-suited Overcalls	125
<b>Raising Partner in Competition</b>	<b>126</b>
Pre-emptive Raises	126
The Cuebid Raise	126
2NT as a Raise	126
Fit Jumps and Fit Non-jumps	127

# Introduction

The aim of this book is not to list every convention in current use. Were I to try to do so, the list would run comfortably into four figures and you could use this volume as an aid to body-building. Rather, my intention is to include only the best and (not necessarily the same thing) most popular conventions in any given area of bidding. You might say that these are the conventions that a social or club player might find useful and a tournament player should know about even if he does not actually wish to use them himself.

You will find here some new ideas which are likely to become more popular over the next few years, while one or two well-known conventions whose popularity is on the wane have been omitted.

To a degree, the choice inevitably reflects the personal prejudices of the author. Given the number of conventions in existence, it is almost impossible that any two experts would come up with exactly the same list. If I have omitted one of your pet conventions, my apologies, but then you do not need to read about something which is already so close to your heart. And if there is something here which you consider to be useless, rest assured that there will be plenty of other readers who hold the opposite view.

Each convention is described in sufficient detail that you should understand what is going on if your opponents use it against you or to allow you to give it a try yourself. I do not intend to cover every possible auction in all circumstances, rather give the basic structure plus a general overview. If you decide that a particular convention is worth adding to your system, you may need to discuss with partner some of the more exotic possibilities in the later auction.

I will also, on occasion, point out a particular strength or weakness of a method relative to the alternatives available, though the reader may often be left to work this out for himself by referring to the introduction to each section. But, at the end of the day, it is up to you what you choose to play and what not.

## **Part 1**

# **The Uncontested Auction**

## One of a Minor

If playing a four-card major, weak no-trump system, there is no particular need for a one of a minor opening to be other than natural, i.e. promising at least four cards. However, five-card major systems, and many strong no-trump players, need a way in which to open the bidding with awkward hands that don't fit in elsewhere. Accordingly, one or both minors are played as 'prepared' openings.

### Better Minor

Better minor means exactly what it says; with a balanced hand outside the no-trump range, the opening bid is made in the better minor, even though that may mean bidding a three-card suit.

### Modified Better Minor

In Modified Better Minor, 1♦ is only opened with precisely 4-4-3-2 shape, to avoid opening 1♣ on a doubleton, otherwise the prepared bid is 1♣, even with four diamonds and three clubs. Other players would still open 1♦ with that hand but open 1♣ with 3-3 in the minors even with substantially stronger diamonds than clubs. Different players have different styles in this area, covering the full range of possibilities, and they will almost all claim to be playing Better Minor when many of them are clearly not doing so.

### Prepared Club

The Prepared Club means that the opening bid on these hands is always 1♣, i.e. 1♦ is always a natural bid. It may churn your stomach to have to open 1♣ with a small doubleton, but it does make your bidding after a 1♦ opening a lot easier, so there is a significant pay-off to balance the obvious loss when you open 1♣. Not only does 1♦ promise four cards, but also 1♦ – 2♣ – 2NT is no longer needed to show a weak no-trump type – all of those start with 1♣. This is a significant improvement, as rebidding 2NT with a weak no-trump is a quite unattractive prospect – not only does it oblige you to play 1♦ – 2♣ as promising at least 11 HCP, but also, after the 2NT rebid, how is responder to know when to bid game and when not when holding 11 or 12 HCP?

### Walsh

There are several artificial responses of 2♣/♦ over 1♣/♦ and 1♦ over 1♣ in existence, but frankly I see very little point in them. Natural bidding generally works at least as well without any worries about remembering the system. One idea that does make some sense is Walsh.

One of the perennial problems associated with playing a prepared club is the question of whether to rebid 1NT to show the general hand-type or to

bid a four-card major at the one level despite having a balanced hand. If you choose the latter approach, how is partner ever to know whether or not  $1\clubsuit - 1\diamond - 1\heartsuit / \spadesuit$  includes a genuine club suit? Walsh is an attempt to reduce the scale of this problem.

The idea is that, if responder is only worth one bid, he bids a four-card major if he has one even with longer diamonds. If instead he responds  $1\diamond$ , he is known not to hold a four-card major unless he is strong enough to bid it anyway on the next round, so opener can afford to rebid 1NT to show his balanced hand whether or not he has a major. So a responder with 2-4-5-2 shape would bid  $1\clubsuit - 1\heartsuit$  with a weakish hand, then pass a 1NT rebid, but with 11+ HCP would respond  $1\diamond$  then bid  $2\heartsuit$  (forcing for one round) over a 1NT rebid. This is not perfect but, as I believe that letting partner know about your general hand-type is very important, I would suggest that it is the best compromise available.

### Inverted Minor-suit Raises

The idea here is to play that  $1\clubsuit - 3\clubsuit$  is pre-emptive, a weak hand with good trump support and distribution but not very much high-card strength, while  $1\clubsuit - 2\clubsuit$  is forcing for one round, just as if any other suit had been opened. Likewise, of course,  $1\diamond - 2/3\diamond$ . The less natural the opening bid, the more sense it makes to play this way, though even when one of a minor promises four cards there is a fair case for playing pre-emptive raises as, if you have a fit in a minor, the opposition may well have a fit in a major to be shut out. Also, in traditional bidding, there is no forcing raise in a minor suit. Opposite a  $1\diamond$  opening, a hand such as:

♠ A K 6  
♥ 6 5 3  
♦ A Q 10 5  
♣ K 8 2

has no sensible response. If  $2\diamond$  is forcing, you can hear what kind of hand partner holds at a convenient level.

After say,  $1\diamond - 2\diamond$  (inverted), should opener bid a four-card major with a balanced hand or rebid in no-trump? The latter makes more sense. If responder has a four-card major he must be strong enough to bid it over a 2NT rebid, otherwise he would have responded in the major in the first place. If he does not have one, there is no point your bidding it, unless you have a shapely hand and want to tell him so.

### Minor-suit Swiss

This is another solution to the lack of a forcing raise of a minor-suit opening. There are a number of variations, as with most conventions. One possibility is that:

- 1♣ – 3♦ = 12/13 HCP and a club fit
- 1♣ – 3♥ = 14/15 HCP and a club fit
- 1♦ – 3♥ = 12/13 HCP and a diamond fit
- 1♦ – 3♠ = 14/15 HCP and a diamond fit

All these bids are forcing to 3NT or four of the minor, though in practice it is rare to stop out of game.

Other variants have all the three-level responses as showing opening values and a fit plus four cards in the suit bid, or just the lowest stopper. However you play around with the bids, Minor-suit Swiss is a pretty ungainly animal. It uses up a lot of bidding space to give a rather imprecise message. Better to play inverted raises or, failing that, just bid naturally but occasionally invent a bid in a three-card holding in the other minor to hear partner's natural rebid at a convenient level.

## Strong Club Systems

A very popular tournament method is to play a system where a 1♣ opening is strong and artificial, either 16+ or 17+ HCP, just as a 2♣ opening is artificial in standard methods. This obviously creates a problem showing hands that would otherwise open 1♣, and puts extra strain on the 1♦ opening. Particularly when also playing five-card majors, some pairs even have to open 1♦ with a void! While this may sound strange, it does have some plus features in the freedom it allows in the rest of the system. I would not recommend such a style to a casual partnership, however.

There is no room here to go into great detail about strong club systems, of which there are many. A couple of ideas to help after the 1♦ opening are, however, to play that:

- 1♦ – 1♥ – 2♠ = A raise to 3♥ with an unspecified singleton or void
- 1♦ – 1♠ – 2NT = A raise to 3♠ with an unspecified singleton or void
- 1♦ – 1♥ – 2NT = 5-5 in the minors and a maximum
- 1♦ – 1♠ – 3♥ = 5-5 in the minors and a maximum

In the first two sequences, the next bid up can ask which shortage is actually held. This idea uses two bids which are pretty well redundant in a natural sense, because of the failure to open with a strong club, to improve your accuracy when deciding whether to bid game. As the cost is low, the idea is a good one.

The second two sequences help to show an awkward hand-type. Because the 1♦ opening may be based on a diamond suit, a club suit, or both, there are insufficient natural rebids available to show all the possible hands properly. While a trifle unwieldy, they are still better than nothing and again the cost, except in memory strain, is negligible.

## One of a Major

Four- or five-card majors – another of those perennial questions. The trend is definitely towards five-card openings, but four-card majors still have a substantial following and some definite advantages to balance the disadvantages, most of which come in competitive auctions.

There are an unbelievable number of different methods in use, in particular when it comes to raising partner's suit, and I have no intention of trying to list them all. As usual, however, here are the best and the most popular.

### The Forcing No-trump

When playing five-card majors, a popular idea is to play a 1NT response as forcing for one round. This helps responder enormously in describing his hand but has one significant weakness – the opener has to find a rebid even when he would prefer to pass, making a final contract of 1NT impossible and forcing him to bid a three card suit on occasions. A 5-4-2-2 hand is quite happy to rebid, as it always intended to show the second suit (at least, if that suit is lower ranking than the first one), but what about 5-3-3-2? Normally, this shape would either pass or raise no-trump. Hands that would otherwise have passed, must now bid a three-card suit. The normal agreement is to bid the lower three-card suit, irrespective of their relative strengths. Hence, a 5-3-3-2 hand rebids 2♦, while 5-3-2-3 and 5-2-3-3 both bid 2♣.

After 1♠ – 1NT – 2♣ – ?

2♦/♥	=	Long suit but a weakish hand
2♠	=	A poor raise to 2♠, usually only doubleton support
2NT	=	Balanced 11/12
3♣	=	Invitational
3♠	=	Balanced three-card raise, invitational

It is also possible to give meanings to jumps to 3NT and four of a suit. For example, an immediate bid of 4♦ could show a game raise with a diamond singleton; 1NT followed by 4♦ could show the same strength but a diamond void. What scheme you favour is not so important as the fact that the forcing no-trump has given you the possibility of showing twice as many different hand-types. Note that an immediate 1♠ – 3♠ is now known to be distributional, and an immediate 1♠ – 2NT can be used to show a forcing spade raise, a balanced 16+, or whatever takes your fancy. The advantages are very significant, but the price is also quite high. However, the forcing no-trump is quite popular amongst serious tournament players so the overall expert view seems to be in its favour.



The best and most popular conventions in every area of bidding explained. Whatever your preferred system of bidding, you and your partner will inevitably play a number of conventions. This book will not only help you to decide what to incorporate into your partnership's armoury, but also help you to understand the many weapons that might be used against you at the table by your opponents.

**Brian Senior** is a leading International player/writer and authority on the game who has represented England, Northern Ireland and Great Britain. His recent titles include: *For Love or Money* and *The Amazing Book of Bridge*.

Other books published by Better Bridge Now – For all aspiring players

#### **Play These Hands With Me**

One of the best selling Bridge books ever that allows you to discover how an expert thinks. £12.99

Terence Reese

0 9530218 2 3

#### **The Complete Book Of Bols Bridge Tips**

Everything you need to know to improve your bridge is contained in the advice provided by the world's best players and writers. This revised edition includes new photographs. £13.99

Sally Brock

0 9530218 4 X

#### **Reese On Play**

The secrets of what counts in play and defence are revealed in this all time classic by Britain's greatest ever player/writer. £12.99

Terence Reese

0 9530218 3 1

#### **Better Bridge Now**

Editor: Mark Horton

For details of these and other titles please write to:  
Chess & Bridge Limited, 369 Euston Road, London,  
NW1 3AR or visit our web site at [www.bridgemagazine.co.uk](http://www.bridgemagazine.co.uk) or email us at [bridgeshop@easynet.co.uk](mailto:bridgeshop@easynet.co.uk) or telephone us on 020 7388 2404 or fax us on 020 7388 2407.