



Ask Jerry

Jerry Helms

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Dear Jerry,

What do you think about “stolen bids”?

**Pat H., Barb D.
and a host of others**

Hi all,

I’ve discussed this topic before, but it’s a subject that comes up frequently, so below is my answer in a reprint of an article that has previously appeared in the Bridge Bulletin. It’s also available on my web site at www.jerryhelms.com, along with links to many of my other previously published columns, helpfully arranged by subject. I invite you to check it out.

Suppose partner opens 1NT and your right-hand opponent overcalls 2♣, “stealing” your intended Stayman response. Using traditional methods, responder’s double would be for penalty. However, by agreement, proponents of “stolen bids” use double to announce that they intended to bid 2♣. Opener then responds, as if to Stayman.

Some partnerships extend this agreement a little. When an opponent overcalls partner’s 1NT with 2♦, double becomes a Jacoby transfer to the heart suit. A 2♥ response would be a transfer to spades. Double of a 2♥ overcall would be a transfer to spades.

Some partnerships extend this agreement a lot. They play that if a two-level overcall removes the option to bid either Stayman or to make a

transfer, they simply respond at the three level, *i.e.*:

Partner	RHO	You
1NT	2♠	3♣ (Stayman)
		3♦ (Heart transfer)
		3♥ (Spade transfer)

Now that I have explained it, I have an opinion. (Surprise!) All suits have some importance and may need to be introduced into the auction. I teach and play “All Systems On” after 1NT has been doubled or overcalled by 2♣. After a penalty double, redouble is used to force 2♣, which responder can pass or correct to 2♦, otherwise the tools to inquire for a four-card major or to transfer to hearts or spades are still available.

2♣ overcalls of 1NT often carry conventional meanings (DONT, Hello, etc.) making it important to be able to maintain your normal structure after such nominal natural or artificial intervention. I can even live with playing “stolen bids” through overcalls of 2♦. Beyond this point, well ... let’s just say I cease to understand any further merit of “stolen bids.”

It has become increasingly popular to aggressively intervene over a 1NT opening bid. Say you held:

♠A7 ♥KJ1064 ♦J105 ♣972,

and heard the auction begin:

Partner	RHO	You
1NT	2♥	?

I would feel like standing up on my chair to make a high-decibel penalty double. But wait! If you’re playing full-fledged “stolen bids,” the double would be a transfer to spades. Aargh! Giving up penalty doubles of major-suit overcalls after 1NT is a major mistake (pun intended). Recently, my partner opened 1NT and RHO overcalled 2♠. I held:

♠K1064 ♥A7 ♦764 ♣9832.

I had intended to pass 1NT, which, with my 7 high-card points, we were likely going to be plus 90 or 120. With three near certain tricks in my hand, the double of 2♠ seemed routine and netted plus 300 for a top board. □