

The new *Orange Book* will apply in England and Wales as from 1st August 2006 and players will find several changes. Many of the differences may not matter – for example, the wording of some obscure rules has been tidied up. The most important changes affect the conventions and systems that are permitted to be played, an area which is wider than before, and alerting, which has had its first major change for more than a dozen years.

Bridge has changed, and in some ways alerting has not kept up. While some clubs still have a majority of players playing Acol Twos, there are also many clubs where nearly everyone plays Weak Twos – either as part of Benjaminised Acol, or Three Weak Twos, or some other, more esoteric arrangement. Currently all Weak Twos are to be alerted, which is pretty meaningless in such clubs, because all the two-bids seem to be alerted!

Announcements – what are they?

A successful idea is that of *Announcements*, first tried in North America, but nowadays also used in some other countries. Instead of alerting partner's call, the partner makes a short statement which gives a minimum of information to the opponents, but which often tells them all they need to know. This is not done indiscriminately, but only in one or two specified areas. It is now going to be brought in to England and Wales.

Announcements apply to natural opening two-of-a-suit bids, natural opening 1NT bids, and Stayman and Red-suit Transfer responses to a natural opening 1NT bid.

Let us see how it works with the natural opening two-of-a-suit bids. Suppose your partner opens 2♠, which is a Weak Two. Instead of alerting, you say: "Weak". What about if you do not play Weak Twos but Acol Twos? Then, when partner opens 2♠, you say: "Strong, forcing". Some players play Strong Twos which responder is allowed to pass with a bust: if you play them, when partner opens 2♠, you say: "Strong, not forcing". Finally, there are some Medium Twos around, like a Precision 2♣ opener which is natural, but shows ordinary opening values, maybe 11 to 15. If you play this, and your partner opens 2♣, you say: "Intermediate". "Intermediate" is anything between Weak and Strong.

Note that you do not give much detail with these Announcements. If opponents need to know the range of a Weak Two, or the minimum number of cards in the suit, or whether an Intermediate 2♣ is played as six clubs except when the hand also contains a

four-card major, or any other details, they can ask, or look at your convention card. The Announcements should just be what is stated above: "Weak", "Intermediate", "Strong, not forcing" or "Strong, forcing".

How about Lucas Twos? The Multi? An Acol 2♣ opening? Benjamin 2♣ or 2♦? *None of these are natural, so they are alerted.* Note that this *does* apply to Lucas Twos, which show the suit bid and another suit: when a second suit is guaranteed, then it no longer counts as natural. In fact, all opening two-of-a-suit bids will be either alerted or announced. That will help, because if there is a 2♠ opening, and there is no alert or Announcement, you know that your opponent has forgotten the new rules (or does not understand them), so you can remind him – politely, of course!

Does this sound confusing? Of course, new ideas often are. But once you get used to it you will find it works very well, and after a few months you will wonder how we ever managed without Announcements.

Announcements of 1NT opening bids

Now let us consider Announcements as regards a natural opening 1NT bid.

Your partner opens 1NT, which you play as 12-14: what do you do? Immediately, without waiting for a question, you say: "Twelve to fourteen". If you play some other range, like 15 to 18 or 10 to 12, then you say that: "Fifteen to eighteen," or "Ten to twelve".

These days it is permitted to have a singleton by agreement in your 1NT opening, but the opponents have a right to know, so if your agreement includes the possibility of a singleton, then you add ". . . may have a singleton". So you might say: "Twelve to fourteen, may have a singleton". Note that you do not go into any further detail: if you often have a five-card major (or never), if six-card suits are possibly included, if a singleton honour always carries its full weight, or only in the minors, or only in 4-4-4-1 hands, or any other details, and the opponents need to know, they can ask, or look at your convention card.

How about artificial 1NT openings, like the strong ones – Romex, Vienna or Dynamic – or even the medium ones like Aveyard, Stoker or Bowles? Since none of these is natural, they are alerted. As with the two-level openings described earlier, if there is no alert or announcement for a 1NT opening, you know that your opponent has got the new rules wrong, so you can politely remind him.

Announcements of responses to a 1NT opening bid

Now we consider the responses to natural 1NT openings. A response of 2♣ is usually Stayman: if it is, then it is not alerted, but announced: "Stayman". Does it matter

whether it guarantees a four-card major or not? No, not at all, it is still Stayman: if an opponent needs to know whether a four-card major is guaranteed or not, he can ask or look at your convention card.

You only announce Stayman if the responses are normal: 2♦ without a four-card major, 2♥ or 2♠ to show one. It is Stayman, whichever response is made with both majors. If you play Five-card Stayman or Puppet Stayman, or more esoteric responses like Keri or Gladiator, then you alert. No announcement or alert means that the bid is a weak take-out. Note that after an announced 2♣ response, the 2♦ reply needs no announcement or alert.

Red-suit transfers to the majors are also announced. If a 2♦ response to 1NT shows at least five hearts, you say: "Hearts"; similarly: "Spades" if a 2♥ response shows five spades. Transfers that could be made on four-card suits, or relays which are usually transfers but occasionally show some other sort of hand, must be alerted. As with a Stayman 2♣, no announcement or alert for a 2♦ or 2♥ response means a weak take-out.

All of these announcements of responses only apply in the simplest positions. They do not apply to 2NT, or 1NT overcalls, or 1NT openings when the next hand bids a suit or doubles. Possibly their use will be extended if they prove popular, but not yet!

Let us just go through an example to compare the future with the present. Suppose your left-hand opponent opens 1NT. Maybe you remember what it is, maybe you just do not know, or maybe you ask or look at the card, which are often bad ideas. From August, however, the other opponent will say: "Twelve to Fourteen" (or whichever range is applicable), saving you all the trouble.

In response, there might be a 2♦ bid and the inevitable alert. I expect you assume it is a Transfer, so you pass without asking. After all, if you were to ask every time . . . But from August the opener will say: "Hearts", saving you the trouble – or, more interestingly, he will alert. Perhaps it will be worth asking this time! You might find they play two-way Stayman, so you might double to ask for the diamond lead that eventually will beat the contract.

Give Announcements a chance!

As with all new ideas, this probably looks confusing, but players will get used to it easily because Announcements only apply in common positions.

I am sure you will learn to like Announcements and wonder why we did not use them before. Please leave it a few months to see them work before you write to complain – or, more probably, to say how good they are.

I expect Mr Bridge will receive plenty of comments on Announcements in the months ahead! ■

