

ANTI-BART

Josh Sher (Washington, DC)
Marc Umeno (Cleveland, Ohio)

One of the weaknesses of the forcing NT is that both opener and responder's hands are wide ranging in terms of strength and distribution. Opener, for a 2 of a minor rebid, may be balanced, or unbalanced and has anywhere from a shapely 10 HCP to a hand just shy of a jump shift. Meanwhile, responder has anywhere from 5-12 HCP and lots of possible shapes. How does the partnership know where to end up? This problem is even more serious when 1 of a major can be a strong NT (either you don't like to open 1NT with a good 5 card major, or you are playing a weak NT). How does opener with a strong NT know it is safe to try for game?

A typical example hand:

North

x
AQxxx
AKx
□ KJxx

South

QJx
Kxx
xxx
□ xxxx

A normal auction here would be: 1 -1NT-2□-2 -3 -3 -P. Wouldn't you rather stop at the 2 level here?

Opener with 17-18 HCP wants to get to game opposite a good 8 count but would like to stay as low as possible otherwise. Opener with 15-16 wants to get to game opposite a 10 count, can safely stop at 2NT opposite 8-9, but is at risk at 2NT if responder is weaker than 8. Opener with 14 HCP would like to get to game opposite 11 or 12, but would like to stop in 2M or at worst 2NT if responder is weaker. How do you sort all these ranges out?

Another example pair of hands:

North

x
Axxxx
Qxx
□ AQxx

South

KJx
x
Kxxxx
□ KJxx

A normal auction would be: 1 -1NT-2□-2NT-P

Wouldn't you much rather be in 3□?

Many variations of the Bart convention have been published. The main idea is that after:

1 -1NT(forcing)-2□

you give up the ability to play 2 in exchange for having responder give a better description of his hand. By using 2 as a puppet to 2, we get to show a number of hand types, and solve the problems faced in the hands above for 1 openers. After 1 -1NT-2□-2 opener knows to pass without looking at his hand. After, 1 -1NT-2□-2 -2 -2 (good spade preference) opener knows if game is a good bet.

Can we get similar precision after a 1 opener? The answer is we can in fact do even better. This is because of two reasons:

1. A 1 opener does not always have a suitable hand to accept the 2 puppet to 2 so the partnership is left guessing.
2. The weak 1=4=5=3 hand is a problem playing Bart. Do you pass 2□ (which may be 2 cards), play the 5-1 spade fit, play 3 (since you can't play 2) or aim for 2 and possibly play a 4-2 fit?

The Anti-Bart Convention:

After, 1 -1NT-2□ (Clubs, balanced or 4522 if not playing Flannery) we desire a way to differentiate a good heart preference (9-10) from a weak raise or weak preference. And as a bonus, we can distinguish a few other hand types as well.

The Anti-Bart convention works like this:

After 1 -1NT-2

- 2 is a good 8-10 HCP, 2 card preference.
- 2 is a 9-10 HCP club raise usually with exactly 5 clubs.
- 2NT is 11-12 balanced without club support
- 3 is a courtesy raise showing an unbalanced min hand with 5+ clubs and usually 6+.
- 3 shows 5- bad 9 HCP and 6+ Diamonds (this hand has to play a level higher than normal)
- 3 is the normal 3 card limit raise

2 forces (the exception is discussed later) 2 and shows a number of hands depending on the rebid.

With a bad heart raise or heart preference responder passes openers 2 rebid.

2 then 2 shows an 11- bad 12 HCP club raise. Basically a hand that wants to force to game if opener really has any clubs.

2 then 2NT shows 11-12 HCP with 4 clubs (occasionally 5 clubs with 3=2=3=5 shape).

2 then 3 shows an unbalanced 9-10 HCP club raise with 6+ clubs.

2 then 3 shows good 9-bad 12 HCP and a 6+ card suit.

2 then 3 shows a limit raise with a club fit on the side (Thus opener should up grade his hand if he really has clubs).

If opener had a hand just shy of a GF that can make game opposite 7-bad 8 HCP hand with 2 card heart support, he can ignore the 2 puppet and make a descriptive rebid. 2NT should show a 6332, 18 count with weak hearts (otherwise you would have jumped to 3). A new suit is a fragment, usually with a weak 6 card heart suit but perhaps with a chunky 5 card suit. 3 shows a 6-4 hand, and 3 shows a 5-5 hand.

The most important features in Anti-Bart are the distinction between the good heart preference and the bad heart preference and the distinction between a 2NT bid with or without a club fit. As you can see from some of the following example hands, this method allows a partnership to open aggressively and stop short of game opposite poorly fitting 11 or 12 counts.

Example Hands:

North

x
AQxxx
AKx
□ Kxxx

South

AJx
x
Kxxxx
□ KJxx

Normal Auction:

1 -1NT-2□-2 -3 -3 -P

Anti-Bart:

1 -1NT-2□!-2 !-2 !-P

North

x
Axxxx
Qxx
□ AQxx

South

KJx
x
Kxxxx
□ KJxx

Normal Auction:

1 -1NT-2□-2NT-P

Anti-Bart:

1 -1NT-2□!-2 !-2 !-2NT!-3□-P

North

xx
 AKJxx
 KQx
 ♠ Kxx

South

Axx
 Qx
 Axxx
 ♠ xxxx

Normal Auction:

1 -1NT-2♣-?? If responder overbids with 2NT he risks going down opposite a shapely minimum, or being raised to game on a 14 count. If responder bids a conservative 2♦, he risks opener passing with the given hand.

Anti-Bart:

1 -1NT-2♣!-2♦!(8-10 HCP with 2 hearts)-2NT-3NT

North

xx
 AKxxx
 Kxx
 ♠ Kxx

South

Ax
 xx
 xxx
 ♠ AQxxxx

Normal Auction:

1 -1NT-2♣-2♦!-2NT-3♣-P or 3♦-3NT

Anti-Bart:

1 -1NT-2♣!-2♦!-2♠!-3♣!-3♦-3NT-P

The difference here is that the normal auction shows 5+ clubs, and the Anti-Bart relay then 3♣ shows 6 cards so its easier to visualize the 9 tricks.

These next three examples demonstrate the 2♣ then 2♦ sequence. Few partnerships can stay out of game on the first example, but bid the correct game on the second and third examples.

North

Qxx
AKJxx
Qxx
□ xx

South

Kxx
x
KJx
□ KQxxxx

Normal Auction:

- 1 -2□ (GF) then end up going down or:
- 1 -1NT-2 - Guess to bid 2NT, 3□ or 3NT.

Anti-Bart:

- 1 -1NT-2□!-2 !-2 !-2 !-2NT-3□-P (or pass 2NT at mps)
- The 2 then 2 sequence says, "I have upgraded my hand to a GF if you really have help in clubs."

North

Axx
AKxxx
x
□ xxxx

South

Kxx
x
KJx
□ KQxxxx

Normal Auction:

- 1 -2□ (GF)-get to game or:
- 1 -1NT-2□-2 !-3□ - push to some game, but which?

Anti-Bart:

- 1 -1NT-2□!-2 !-2 !-2 !-4□-5□

North

xxx
 AKxxx
 xx
 □ Axx

South

Kxx
 x
 KJx
 □ KQxxxx

Normal Auction:

- 1 -2□ (GF) - get to game or:
 1 -1NT-2□ - guess what game to bid since opener will not co-operate.

Anti-Bart:

- 1 -1NT-2□ !-2 !-2 !-2 !-3 (Strong hearts)-3NT-P

Now what do we do with the 4153 hand that plagued us in standard BART? It's easy, just respond 1 to 1 and you will never get to a worse than a 7 card fit. Are there any negatives? Well, as with BART, you can't play in exactly 2 unless opener bids diamonds over the forcing NT. But in our experience this is a rare hand type that wants to stop in 2, and the gains we get from using 2 as a relay far outweigh the loss of 2 as a final contract. Try it, we are sure your bidding accuracy will improve.