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## Two-Suiter Club

Book Review by P. E. Garrisi - Translated by Carol Sims



The Two Suiter Club is a new system designed by the bridge scholar Gianantonio Castiglioni of Milan, a chemist and businessman who lives in Lugano.

It uses the Strong Club opening of 16 high card points, 5-card Major, Weak Twos, and 1NT with 15-17 high card points. Some characteristics are shared with Precision and thus before proceeding we need a description of Precision.

The basic ideas of Precision were created in 1964 by the Chinese Charles Wei, with the collaboration of Alan Truscott. The system was published in 1967 and became well known in 1969 when a team of not particularly strong players, four Chinese and two Thais, using the system defeated the strongest teams in the world, losing only to the Italians. Later others wrote about this system: Garozzo, Belladonna, Goren; modern texts are those of Berkowitz-Manley (Precision Today) and Groetheim-Sontag (Viking Precision). Castiglioni writes that Wei was inspired by the Blue Team Club of Forquet-Garozzo. In effect Wei studied the bidding techniques of the Italians and had close contact with them, but his result is completely different from the Blue Team Club of that period.

Wei's key idea is in the connection among the three openings: 1♣ with 16 points, 1NT with 13-15 points, balanced hand, 5-card Major. Taken singly these treatments are not recommended. The Strong Club with 16 points instead of 17 often causes embarrassment in hands with good distributional values but poor in high card points, too weak to open 1♣, but which you wouldn't like to open in a suit because all might pass. The 13-15 range 1NT opening is too weak from the point of view of safety and too strong to be used only for purposes of blocking the opponents. As for the 5-card Major system paired with the Strong Club, we cite Bob Hamman: "it's like mixing oil and water". However, taken together the three systems integrate themselves defining the limits of strength and distribution in a suit opening. The system didn't have the accuracy of the Neapolitan Club but it was a good meeting point between precision and ease of use.

In the Two-Suiter Club system, opening in a Major is 5 cards and the Strong Club starts at 16 high card points like Precision, but the 1NT opening is 15-17; this means that it doesn't combine with the other two openings but overlaps the 1♣ opening.

Replies to 1♣ are the following:

- 1♦ with 0-2 controls (Ace or 2 Kings) and less than 7 high card points;
- 1♥ with 0-2 controls and 7 or more high card points;
- 1♠ with 3 or more controls and a two-suiter or three-suiter hand;
- 1NT with 3 or more controls and balanced or one-suited hand.

Replies at a 2 level all show two-suiter hands with 0-2 controls and more than 7 high card points.

Example 1:

1♣ (16+ high card points) – 1♠: 3 or more controls, two-suiter or three-suiter hand;  
1NT interrogates – 2♦: two-suiter 4-4 or longer, Diamonds and Hearts;  
2♥ interrogates – 2NT: 5 Diamonds, 4 Hearts, singleton or void in Clubs;

And so forth.

Example 2:

1♣ (16+ high card points) - 2♦ two-suiter 4-4 or longer, Diamonds and Hearts, 0-2 controls, 7+ high card points;  
2♥ interrogates – 2NT 5 or more Diamonds, 4 Hearts, singleton or void in Clubs.

The novelty is in the privilege granted to two-suiter hands, to be shown preferentially, even if 4-4 and often also to the disadvantage of the declarer in No Trump contracts. We also note that the NT bid is not safeguarded. If it happens to hit a step response, the bid will be sacrificed as an interrogation or conventional response. In dealing with overcalls the peculiarity of the system is strongly evidenced.

Overcalls at 2 level and 1NT level are conventional; they show two-suiter hands with a minimum of 4-4 and 6-14 high card points. They are organized so that the reply can be made still at the two level. With a semi-balanced 5-3-3-2 hand and the same range of points, the overcall is at level 1, while with a weak 6-card suit the overcall is a jump bid.

The limits given by overcalls in two-suiter hands force a take-out double (bid by West on South opening) with any hand of at least 15 points, the old-fashioned system, a good hand of any shape. Replies are conventional, by steps; the first step shows a negative hand with 0-6 points; the following steps show 7 or more points and describe the distribution. Here also, the reply 1NT is included in the step responses without reference to a stopper.

The negative step reply to the take out double originates from the 1937 Vienna System of Walter Herbert, later taken up again and modified by Chiaradia. Herbert protected the 1NT reply. If the take-out double was against a 1♠ opening the negative conventional reply was 2♣. In Acol, as well, there was the negative reply of 2♣ but without regard to the opening suit. Finally in the English rigidly natural system of Richard Lederer in 1934, the negative reply was always 1NT. Lederer died during the war in 1941 at 47 years of age. According to the bridge scholar Hubert Phillips who wrote about it in 1947, Lederer had abandoned this convention, but didn't have time to publish a new edition.

In a natural system when West doubles, only rarely does he have a stopper in the suit of the opener. If he had length or values in the suit the hand would be inappropriate for an overcall. Thus in a natural system East could reply 1NT even without a stopper, if

there is an agreement with his partner. Either he has the stopper which will be determined by opportune cuebids and asking bids, or neither one has it and the game will not be 3NT. In Castiglioni's system, where double and overcall are artificial, it normally happens that West has the stopper and East is elected the No Trump bidder. This is the price paid for protecting the two-suiters. It is not small but the author does not believe it useful to look for an No Trump game over an opponent's opening.

Overcall on a strong 1NT opening is DONT-style (Disturb Opponents No Trump), which is Marty Bergen's convention to show weak two-suiters of nine or more cards. The original convention is as follows:

- Double – solid single-suit hand with 6 or fewer losers
- 2♣ - two-suiter with Clubs
- 2♦ - Diamonds and a Major
- 2♥ - Hearts and Spades
- 2♠ - weak single suit with Spades

The DONT creates a barrier between the adversaries giving little support for a penalty double. However, since the longer suit is not shown, sometimes you end up playing with a 4-3, and you could even end up with a 4-2. Also you must renounce making a penalty double, and also renounce the idea of game because the force of the overcaller is in a long interval. The characteristic of this convention with respect to other overcalls in two-suiter hands is that it keeps the contract at a 2 level.

Castiglioni's DONT is used also with the 4-4 two-suiter hands (Bergen's requires at least a 5-4) and is modified to give definite information about the Major suit holding, but the possibility to keep bidding within the 2 level is no longer guaranteed. The outline follows:

- Double – like Bergen
- 2♣ - Minors
- 2♦ - Hearts and Spades
- 2♥ - Hearts and a Minor
- 2♠ - Spades and a Minor

Suit openings are in the 11-15 high card points range; 1♠ and 2♣ have five or more cards in the suit. After opening in a suit, 2♣ is the forcing reply which starts the chain of interrogations and replies, the same as we have seen after the 1♣ opening and positive replies, with the difference that now it is the respondent who takes captaincy of the bid. The general criterion is that the captaincy must be assumed by the stronger hand. On the opening 2♣ the forcing reply is 2♦. If there is interference, the first two steps are *pass* and *double*, and the third corresponds to the first after the interference. The reply 1NT, after opening of 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠, is natural, and shows 6-11 points.

The 1♦ opening is a hand with an undefined number of Diamonds, even a singleton. In Precision, both Wei's and Berkowitz's, a singleton is excluded in a 4-4-1-4 distribution. The opening with this three-suited hand is 2♦. This is one of the inconveniences of mixing the Strong Club with the 5-Card Major system. In the two-suiter Club the problem is less important because with a strong hand the responder takes captaincy of the bid and eventually determines the singleton in Diamonds. But in competition for a partial score contract, Diamonds could remain hidden and there can be a problem even in a slam contract. The reply 1♥ is natural, limited, or forcing step.

On the 15-17 high card points 1 No Trump opening, which does not exclude 5 in a Minor, Castiglioni plays a simplified Stayman after the 2♣ interrogation. The opener has only three replies:

- 2♦ - no 4 card Major
- 2♥ - 4 Hearts, but not excluding 4 Spades
- 2♠ - 4 Spades, excluding 4 Hearts

In this way the respondent can get out of a 1 No Trump contract when he has a weak hand with singleton or void in Clubs, like these:

♠J654 ♥6432 ♦8652 ♣4 or  
♠9532 ♥865 ♦J9643 ♣7

He initiates a 2♣ interrogation and then passes on any reply of the opener.

Many incorrectly call this convention the "Garbage Stayman" considering it a modern variation by an unidentified author. Actually it is a convention from the 1940's invented by the Englishman Skidelsky John Simon (*Skid* for his friends) and described even in the Official Encyclopedia. Simon (1904-1948) was one of bridge's most important personages. His book *Why You Lose at Bridge*, (Devyn Press Inc.), (*Perché voi perdetevi a bridge*, (Mursia) is unanimously considered the best ever written.

*The Relay System.* The two-suiter Club belongs to this group of systems, those in which one of the partners assumes captaincy of the bidding. They were invented in 1950 by two French players, Renee Bacherich and Pierre Ghestem, world champions in 1956. The *captain* asks information with the most economical bid, the so-called *relay*. The responder describes his hand by steps, as we saw in the two examples. In the two-suiter Club system the sequence is started in three circumstances:

- After a 1♣ opening and positive reply, the captain is the opener
- After a suit opening and game force reply, the captain is the respondent
- After a take out double the captain is West.

The reigning principle is that the captain is the partner with the stronger hand. In other systems, for example the Delta system of the Pole Lukasz Slawinski, the captaincy is almost always assumed by the respondent.

According to the promoters of these systems, the advantages are that they hide a hand, they keep bidding low and they exclude mistakes such as a pass on a forcing bid. In addition, since non-relaying bids can be passed, a change of suit at the 2 level is sign-off, and so we avoid replying 1 No Trump with a weak hand and a long suit. An example from the book, whereby our partner opens 1♠, and we hold:

♠6 ♥AQJ108 ♦9752 ♣964.

Our reply is 2♥ which can be passed since the only forcing reply would have been 2♣.

There are many disadvantages, not the least of which is its high level of artificiality, which makes it difficult to memorize, but we will postpone this subject; in the near future we propose to open a debate on the subject of relays and their cousins, systems with a strong pass. For the moment we only make a statement which might provoke some dissension. The inventors of the relay systems underrate the importance of how indicative the bids are, that is they undervalue the principle which governs how to choose, from among natural bids which are equally acceptable, the one which gives most indication of the strength of the suits and the location of the honors.

Source



*Collana "I Giochi"*

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