

## “SANTA” Defense Over a 1NT Opening Bid

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“SANTA,” which stands for, Same As a NT Auction, is my simplification of the “HELLO” defense-over-notrump system, which Jerry Helms developed to improve on the *Cappelletti* defense method, which he co-developed. Play SANTA in both direct and balancing seat against both strong and weak notrump opening bids, including by a passed hand.

The key advantage of HELLO (and, SANTA) over *Cappelletti* and systems like *DONT* is that the LHO of the NT opener, the SANTA bidder (“SB”), can transfer the play of the hand to partner so that the NT opener is on lead and often is end-played on the opening lead. Another advantage is that SB can transfer and then raise, bid a new suit, or even jump-bid a new suit to show extra strength and shape.

Max Hardy said this about HELLO: “My own search for the best defense against the opponent's notrump opening and overcall came to a successful conclusion when I was introduced to HELLO, which I now use and teach to all my students.”

For the intermediate player, SANTA bids are much easier to remember than HELLO bids because they essentially *are the same bids you would make responding to an opening NT bid by partner*, except that *all* bids (except a double) are transfers.

The SANTA overcall bids are forcing for one round (if no interference) and are as follows:

Double is *strength showing*, and advancer can pull the double naturally with a weak hand (not to be used by a passed hand);

2♣: I have *at least 9 cards* in the majors (5-5 or better or 5 and a strong 4); bid two in your better major;

2♦: I have at least 5+ good hearts; bid 2♥;

2♥: I have at least 5+ good spades; bid 2♠;

2♠: I have at least 6+ good clubs; bid 3♣;

3♣: I have at least 6+ diamonds; bid 3♦; and,

2NT: An “Unusual NT,” saying that I have at least 5 cards in *both* minors; bid 3 in your better minor.

With a major and a minor two-suited hand, *transfer to the major and then bid your minor suit*. Advancer can either pass, letting you play in the minor, or correct to the major.

Unless advancer has a strong hand and very good suit (including the suit SB bid), they should always accept the transfer – even with a void or singleton in the transfer suit. SB could be bidding with a very long suit and a weak hand. If advancer does not accept the transfer (by passing or bidding some other suit), they could drive the misfit-contract higher.

And, there is the possibility when the transfer is to a major suit that the SB has a two-suited hand and will give advancer an opportunity to show preference between that major and SB’s long minor suit.

Deciding whether to use SANTA has much to do with vulnerability and suit quality. In direct seat, you can use Mel Colchamiro’s “Rule of 8” (*Bridge Bulletin* December 2007) to help decide: use SANTA if: (1) you have  $\geq 6$  HCP, and (2) the difference between the number of cards in your *two longest suits* and the number of losers in your hand based on missing aces, kings, and queens is  $\geq 2$  ( $6 + 2 = 8$ , thus “The Rule of 8,” which is the number of letters in “UseSANTA”). In balancing seat, use SANTA with *any* hand that has a void or a singleton or two doubletons.

Otherwise, you should defend.