

THE "NOTTINGHAM CLUB" SYSTEM AS DEVELOPED AT THE DEVA BRIDGE CLUB, CHESTER.

The Nottingham Club bidding system, developed at the Nottingham Bridge Club, was first published by Marjorie Burns in 1954. It was probably the first British strong 1♣ system and was adopted in a fairly big way by members of the Deva Bridge Club in the late 1950's. At one stage nearly 50% of the club members, including most of the "better" players, were playing "Nottingham". However, in practice, although its basic principle of the strong opening 1♣ with a negative response of 1♦ was found to be a very effective base on which to build an auction, the second and third rebids and responses were not very well systemised and left much room for improvement.

To make the system more playable, it has been modified over the years by various Deva club players notably Eric Figgis, David and Barbara Figgis, Dorothy Grunert, Wilf Fearn, Eric and Dorothy Dutton, Frank Dean, and more recently by Jim Stambridge and myself. The earlier modifications were generally added piecemeal as a need was recognised. The latest modifications, some suggested by various Deva players, some borrowed from the Blue Club and some fairly novel, have been incorporated to produce what is now an integrated system whose bids relate logically to one another and often have more extensive and closely defined meanings than hitherto.

Sadly, most of the players are no longer with us, and only a small handful of players are left at the Deva who play this system, which, for over 40 years they described as "Nottingham", but which, in fact, bore little resemblance to the original "Nottingham Club". It should be seen, especially in its latest development, as a system in its own right, the "**CHESTER CLUB**".

It is well understood that, for any new bidding system, or modifications to an existing system, there are always advantages and disadvantages. The thing is to choose the version which gives an advantage the most often, is logical, and feels comfortable to play. It is felt that the "Chester Club" System does just that and provides a very positive and essentially natural (some sophisticated players might say 'simplistic') bidding environment.

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OUTLINE of the CHESTER CLUB BIDDING SYSTEM

This system, like all systems, will very occasionally encounter a deal apparently concocted specially to frustrate it. In such rare circumstances a player is always free to depart from the system when, in his judgement, the probable outcome of such an action is to be preferred. Furthermore, the high card point counts specified are not set in stone and may be influenced by special distributional features etc. all according to a player's judgement

2NT	22 - 24 points. Fairly balanced.
1♣	All other hands with 16 or more points. This is forcing for one round. It is also used in place of the hitherto forcing to game bid of 2♦ (equivalent to an Acol opening 2♠). See discussion on the strong openings.
1NT	13 - 15 points. (May be shaded to a good 12).
1♥ & 1♠	12 - 15 points. 5 or more card suit.
2♣	12 - 15 points. At least 5 clubs. Unattractive for 1 NT. No 4 or more card major.
2♦	12 - 15 points. At least 5 diamonds. Unattractive for 1 NT. No 4 or more card major.
1♦	12 - 15 points. No 5 card major but guarantees at least one 4 card major and at least one other suit which may be any 4 card suit, or it may be a 5 or more minor. It follows that any opening bid of 1♦ will therefore automatically have at least one doubleton, singleton or void.
2♥ & 2♠	7 - 11 points 6 card suit. Blue Club responses. Restrictive on opening "two" with maximum values. (see notes on opening 2♥ or 2♠).

RESPONSES to Opening of 1♣.

Note: All minimum positive responses from previously unbid hands show 8 to 13 points and are essentially forcing to game.

1♦	The negative response. Fewer than 8 good points. The generally accepted principle that, with ordinary hands, a combined count of 25 is usually required for game, would suggest that the response of 1♦ should show fewer than 9 points. However, the minimum for a positive at Chester has always been 8, and it seems to work most of the time. The accepted minimum value for a positive response is therefore proposed as a good 8.
2♣	8 to 13 No 5 card suit except possibly clubs, but excludes 4-3-3-3 type distribution.
1NT	8 to 13 4-3-3-3 type distribution.
2♦, 1♥ or 1♠	8 to 13 5 or more cards suit.
3♣, 3♦, 2♥ or 2♠	14 or more and 5 or more cards suit.
2NT	14 - 15. No 5 cards suit.

Discussion of the Strong OpeningsThe 2NT Opening.

This opening shows 22 - 24 high card points, a fairly balanced hand and is treated as in most other bidding systems. Any of the usual conventions, Stayman, Transfers, Baron etc. may be agreed.

The 1♣ Opening.

This shows 16 or more points and is unlimited, but excludes those hands which qualify for an opening of 2NT. When an opener has 22 or more points he generally either opens 2NT, or if he has a 5 or more card major, he opens 1♣, then over a response of 1♦, he bids 3♥ or 3♠.

This is the equivalent of an Acol

2♣ - 2♦
2♥/2♠ - 2NT
3♥/3♠.

Thus the usual strong 2♣ or 2♦ (23+) in other systems are replaced with the bid of 1♣

Don't ask "What if he has 25 points or more?" - The same as any other popular system, he uses his judgement and goes for it.

The Auction after an Opening of 1♣.

When Responder responds 1♦ (Negative Response. Fewer than a good 8 points).

With 16 to a poor 19 and no 5 card suit, opener rebids 1NT. (This is treated by responder as an opening of 1NT on 16 to 18. Stayman and the Transfer system etc. will apply).

With 16 to a poor 19 but with a 5 or more card suit he makes a minimum bid in his long suit.

With a balanced hand and a good 19 - 21 he rebids 2NT (treated by responder as an opening of 2NT on 19 - 21 points. Stayman, Transfers etc. will apply), or with 5 or more cards in a suit, opener bids 3♣, 3♦, 2♥ or 2♠.

With a game-going hand and two 5 or more card majors he rebids 4♣.

With 22+ points and a 5 card major, he rebids 3♥ or 3♠.

Responses other than 1♦ are generally regarded as forcing to game.

The Principle of Fast Arrival. - According to this principle, when a game contract has been identified, a player with no slam potential will bid the game direct without further exploration. More protracted bidding in these circumstances would suggest slam possibilities.

When Responder responds 1♥ or 1♠ (8 to 13 points and a minimum 5 card suit).

With all positive responses to 1♣, the Principle of Fast Arrival is applied.

With support of 3 or more cards in responder's suit and minimal values, opener will usually jump straight to game in partner's suit. A slower passage to game in such an agreed suit leaves room for further investigation, and would generally indicate a possibility of a slam, bearing in mind responder's upper limit of 13 points.

Thus

1♣ - 1♥		1♣ - 1♥.
2♥ or 3♥	shows opener to have a stronger holding than	4♥.

However, in such a situation when opener has 4 cards in the other major, he would first rebid 1NT, then if partner does not respond in his 4 card major, opener jumps to 4 in responder's 5 card suit.

(This jumping to game with minimal values is a feature of the system which makes some players feel uncomfortable, preferring a more sedate route. In the given circumstances, this is the contract they will almost always reach in the end. On a very rare occasion it may miss a superior pairs score in NT which might or might not have been judged a good idea given more bidding).

When Responder responds 1NT (8 - 13 points. 4-3-3-3 type distribution).

A rebid by opener of 2♣ requires responder to bid his 4 card suit. (2NT if it is Clubs). Opener may do this for a number of reasons, the most common being to find a possible 4/4 fit in a major when he has a hand with a short suit and suitable, with such a fit, to play in 4♥ or 4♠.

N.B. In the previous version of "Nottingham" the following auction has been known to occur:-

1♣ - 2♣, 2NT - 3♥, 4♥ on hands each with 4 hearts and matching 3-4-3-3 distributions.

Slam Bidding when initial response is 1NT.

From the response of 1NT with its totally flat distribution and an upper limit of 13 points opener, with a very strong hand, can immediately judge the possibilities of a slam and, if it seems propitious, he can proceed as follows:

1. If after bidding 2♣ he gets a response in a major he may, with a suitable holding, support the major below game level thus setting the suit then, if necessary, ask for Aces etc.

2. With a 5 card suit he can bid the suit below game level, possibly setting the suit, then again, if desired, launch into a slam investigation.

3. He can make a quantitative bid of 4NT.

With no slam aspirations and an original response of 1NT.

If opener has deemed it desirable to rebid 2♣ and a 4/4 fit major is found, he bids 4 in the major or 3NT at his discretion.

If opener has 5 or more hearts or spades, he knows partner must have at least 3 card support, so, unless he wants to gamble for a possibly better pairs score in NTs, or has the strength to contemplate a slam, he simply bids 4♥ or 4♠.

When responder responds 2♣

This bid is made when responder has 8 - 13 points, does not have a 4-3-3-3 type distribution, and does not have a 5 card suit, except possibly clubs.

If opener has 5 card suits he bids them downwards, i.e. higher ranking first if he has two.

Opener with no 5 card suit, first bids 2 NTs then bids 4 card suits upwards.

If opener bids a major, showing at least 5 cards, responder may raise to 4 with at least 3 card support and minimal values. A raise to 3 would show a similar holding and better values with possible slam potential* (as when partner has opened on a suitable hand, usually with about 19 - 21 points). However, if responder has 4 cards in the other major, he normally would first show it, (remember he has already denied 5), because of the possibility of a superior contract on a 4/4 fit in that suit. Another way for responder to suggest slam possibilities, is to show a 4 card diamond suit at a suitable stage of the bidding. With no slam potential*, a four card diamond suit is generally ignored.

e.g. in the following sequence:

<u>Possible Slam Interest</u>		<u>No Slam Interest</u>	
1♣	-	1♣	-
16+ points	2♣		2♣
	8 - 13 Unbalanced		
2NT	3♦	2NT	-
No 5 card suit	4 card suit	No 5 card suit	3♥
			4 card suit
			(ignores 4 card diamond suit)
3♥	4♥	4♥	
4 card suit	4 card suit	4 card suit	

* By slam potential is meant probably about 12 - 13 points and rich in controls (aces & kings)

The Auction after an Opening Bid of 1♣ (Cont'd)

When Opener has 4-4-4-1 Type Distribution and 16 or more Points.

The bête noir of the system. There is no really satisfactory answer to this problem especially when the answer is 1♦.

Some players felt a rebid in the lowest ranking 4 card major the best option, and while the opening 1NT with a singleton was forbidden, this was generally adopted by "Nottingham" players. With the repeal of this restriction, some players feel that 1NT is the preferred bid. The situation does not arise often and there is at present little experience to prefer either way. The partnership must decide which approach they wish to take.

Some systems go to great lengths to cope with the 4-4-4-1 situation, generally reserving the opening of 2♦ for the occasion. We feel that, for our system, the 2♦ bid is better integrated into the system otherwise, and we are prepared to take a chance with these relatively rare strong 4-4-4-1 type holdings.

Jump Responses to Opening of 1♣

Jump responses are made in a suit with 5 or more cards and 14 or more points, Bidding then proceeds fairly naturally towards slam, - or not, depending on fits etc.

A jump response of 2NT to an opening 1♣ shows no 5 card suit and 14 to a poor 16 points. In such a case responder usually needs a little more than minimum values from opener to make a slam. Opener bids naturally or, on suitable hands, may make a Baron bid of 3♣ looking for a 4/4 fit.

If responder has a good 16 points or more, a slam is almost assured and responder takes charge of the bidding.

WHEN OPPONENTS OVERCALL AN OPENING OF 1♣

In club bridge you get to know the clever guys who, when not vulnerable, will nearly always overcall 1♣ on very weak hands in an attempt to disrupt the system. Generally speaking, in most cases, overcalls are more or less disregarded and the relevant system bids are made. In the event responder has values for a positive response and a holding like K,J,x in the overcalled suit, he may bid 1NT on a hand which he might otherwise bid 2♣. Similarly, with no guard in the overcalled suit and 4-3-3-3 type distribution, he may bid 2♣ allowing partner to play in any possible NT contract.

When opponent doubles, a redouble replaces the usual 2♣ response and a bid of 2♣ is now natural, showing positive values with a 5 or more card club suit. Otherwise bidding proceeds as normal.

Following a double by right hand opponent, a pass shows 5 - 7 points and a response of 1♦ shows fewer than 5 points.

There is a choice on how to handle right hand opponent's suit overcall when responder does not have the requirements for a positive response.

1. A double may be for penalties and in this case is almost certainly the best spot. This gives a really warm feeling when you have a suitable holding, which unfortunately is not very often but has been known.

Or

2. It may show 5 - 7 points, indicating the balance of points and leaving it up to opener.

It is for the partnership to decide which of these two options they want to adopt.

Discussion of the Weaker (<16 points) Openings.

The 1NT Opening

Shows the usual fairly balanced kind of holding with nominally 13 - 15 points. However, in the knowledge that Acol players will open 1NT on 12 points, if our 12 points are a good well textured 12, with a smattering of 10s etc. we also open 1NT. This is particularly true when we are not vulnerable because of the preemptive value of 1NT. Otherwise with a featureless 12, we are content to pass.

Stayman and transfers are recommended in the normal course of events. However it is recommended that transfer bids apply only when there has been no enemy action, otherwise all bidding reverts to natural.

Opening of 1♥ and 1♠

These show about 12 - 15 points and a 5 or more card suit.

Bidding is normal as for other systems with 5 card majors, but responder knows that an opener is limited to a

maximum of 15 points. Note in the sequence 1♠ - 2♥, responder is limited to a maximum of 11 points, because with a game forcing hand and 5 hearts, he would make a responder's reverse (see note on Responders Reverse). In such a sequence as 1♠ - 2♥, opener with certain holdings and a minimum hand may feel a pass to be the best option.

The Openings of 2♣ and 2♦.

These openings are made on hands which in Acol would be opened 1♣ or 1♦ and, over any level response, including 1NT, would be rebid 2♣ or 2♦. Whenever it does not appear to be potentially suicidal, hands with 5 clubs or 5 diamonds are opened 1NT. Generally speaking, openings of 2♣ or 2♦ will probably have 2 suits unguarded.

Responses to an Opening of 2♣

Since openings of 2♣ and 2♦ deny a 4 card major, there is little point in responder bidding any 4 card major he may hold. With one 5 or more card major and enough strength for game (about 12+ points), he forces to game in his major, or in NTs, depending on openers holding, by responding 3♥ or 3♠. He forces to game in this way because the opening bid of 2♣ (or 2♦) has crowded the space for approach forcing. With the game force thus taken care of, responding bids of 2♥ or 2♠ may now be used to define hands with 5 or more card majors and about 9 - 11 points. Opener then bids according to judgement having been warned that partner's holding is limited to a maximum of 11. There may well be occasions when the best rebid is a pass.

A response of 3♦ to an opening 2♣ is a general force to game or may be used to initiate a slam investigation. Since game going hands with one or more 5 card major are responded 3♥ or 3♠, and an immediate response of 3NT is also available, the bid of 3♦ is quite likely (though not quite necessarily) to be made on game going hands with 5/5 in the majors. Opener, with 2 suits probably unguarded, has little choice of rebid. He generally rebids in the lowest ranking major in which he has 3 cards, or he bids according to his judgement.

An initial response of 2♦ is natural and limited. It shows little tolerance for clubs and indicates at least 5 diamonds. It is not forcing. (*We are open to suggestions for an alternative use for this bid.*)

Responses to an Opening of 2♦.

Responses of 2♥, 2♠, 3♥ and 3♠ are similar as in response to an opening 2♣. A response of 3♣ is the general force similar to the response of 3♦ over an opening of 2♣.

Some players have said they are sometimes uncomfortable in responding to openings of 2♣ or 2♦ when they have relatively weakish hands. Look at it this way. Playing Acol, partner will open 1♣ or 1♦. Responder will have no difficulty with his response at the one level. Because of our specification for the 2♣/2♦ openings, opener is almost certain to rebid 2♣ or 2♦. Responder is thus in the same position with the same options as before.

The Opening of 1♦.

This is now the most descriptive bid in the modified system, and applies to fairly commonly occurring hands. The opening, known in the original Nottingham Club as the "loose" diamond, was once described as not so much "loose" as downright immoral. It has always seemed somewhat lazy and indeterminate. It was one of the few unmodified bids left to the Deva from the original Nottingham and it could announce a diversity of hands. It might, for example, be used to announce a hand with 5 or more diamonds, or it might be artificial, serving to introduce a 12 point 1NT, or again it might be a hand with 4/4 in the minors, or yet again it might be a hand looking for a 4/4 major fit. Basically, it simply showed the values to open the bidding, wasting an opportunity to start describing the hand. It was also often unclear how it compared with an opening of 1NT.

The current modified opening of 1♦ has the following precise implications:-

The texture of the hand is judged by the opener to be better suited to an opening of 1♦ rather than 1NT, (see notes on the logic of the 1♦ opening), and is geared to finding a 4/4 fit in a major. It has no 5 card major but is guaranteed to hold at least one 4 card major and at least one other suit which may be of 4 cards, or it may be a 5 or more card minor. The logical outcome is that an opening of 1♦ will automatically have at least one doubleton, singleton or void.

The Logical Sequence of the Current 1♦ Opening.

Bearing in mind the specification of the 1♦ opening, responder will almost always respond with a 4 or more card major if he has one, however weak his hand. When responder, not having passed previously, responds in a major and opener does not support, then opener does not have 4 cards in the responder's suit, but it follows he must have 4 cards in the other major. If partner responds 1♥ to your opening of 1♦ and you rebid 1NT or some other bid which denies 4 hearts, partner now knows you have 4 spades, so if he also has 4 spades, further bidding by him is similar to that which would follow a standard Acol opening by you of 1♠, generally with up to a poor 10 points he bids 2♠, with 11 points he bids 3♠ etc.

When opener rebids in a minor, he shows at least 5 cards in that minor and 4 cards in a major (the other one if responder has responded in a major).

When responder responds 1♥ and opener rebids 1NT, it is logical for responder to assume that opener's short suit is probably hearts.

When responder responds 1♥ and opener rebids 1♠ then, since a 4 card spade suit would be indicated with any other non-supporting bid, it is logical to assume that (1) he does not have 4 hearts, (2) he does not have a 5 card minor and (3) his duplicating bid of 1♠ is a warning that his short (and probably unguarded) suit is a minor. **It is then logical for responder to assume that opener probably has 3 hearts**, (a useful guide when responder has a weak hand and 5 hearts).

Thus the 1♦ opening, the response and rebid provide the partnership with a fairly extensive description of the hand. A slightly negative aspect of this however, is that your opponents are also absorbing the information provided. So before using an opening of 1♦, it may be a good plan to assess whether in the particular situation, the information exchanged is likely to serve you more than the enemy. For example, a problem may arise if responder responds 1♠ when you have opened 1♦ on a holding with 4 hearts, 3 spades, no 5 card minor and an unguarded shortage

in one of the minors. Now when you rebid 1NT, the diamond opening, the response and your rebid may have

released enough information about the hands to assist the opponents in their choice of lead and defence to a contract in NoTrumps. In this particular situation therefore, it may be considered better to open 1NT in the first place.

It is really a matter for judgement and personal taste but, by opening 1NT in this particular situation, you avoid giving helpful information to the enemy, which improves your chances of a lucky lead etc. In any case Acol players with 12 - 14 points would open 1NT, so you are probably not at a disadvantage in this respect. Also, if partner has 4 hearts and values, he may well Stayman.

On the other hand, if partner does happen to have 4 hearts and a weakish hand, you may then miss the opportunity to play in a more comfortable 2♥ contract.

The Openings of 2♥ and 2♠.

These bids are borrowed from the Blue Club where they are known as mini twos. They show 6+ cards in the suit and 7 - 11 points. When maximal, these holdings require careful consideration as hands with a good 10 or 11 points and a 6 card major often qualify for an opening of "One". Experience and judgement will often tell when to open two or one, but in general we follow the guidelines as laid down by the Italians, as follows:-

With a near maximum:-

Never open 2♥ or 2♠ with better controls than one ace and one king.

If you do have an ace and a king then you should not have a singleton or void as well.

Do not open 2 on any kind of 2-suiter.

In all these cases open "One".

Responses to an Opening of 2♥ or 2♠.

Again these are specified in the Blue Club.

The only forcing response is 2NT and is generally made on about 14 high card points.

Opener then rebids as follows:-

3♣ shows minimal points and denies 2 out of the top 3 honours (A,K,Q) in his suit.

3♦ shows minimal points with 2 out of the top 3 honours in his suit.

3♥ shows maximal points but denies 2 of the top 3 honours in his suit.

3♠ shows maximal points with 2 of the top 3 honours in his suit.

2NT shows a set up suit of 6+ cards to the A,K and Q.

SPECIAL CONVENTIONS

The Sputnik Double.

This is used only after an opening of 1♦, and may be used in accordance with partnership preferences, but the following procedures are recommended:-

A double of an overcall of 1♠ shows a holding of 4 hearts and a minimum of 8 points. A double of an overcall of 2♣ or 2♦ ideally shows both majors and a minimum of 8 points when vulnerability is equal or not favourable. At favourable vulnerability, doubles at the 2 level are always for penalties.

Checkpoint Blackwood

This is the preferred slam asking convention.

When a suit has been agreed directly or inferentially, a bid of 4NT asks partner to bid as follows:-

He counts the King of Trumps as an Ace. Thus there are 5 aces for the purpose of the convention.

With no "aces" or with 3 "aces" he bids 5♣

With one "aces" or 4 "aces" he bids 5♦

With two "aces" but not holding the Queen of Trumps, he bids 5♥

With two "aces" and the Queen of Trumps, he bids 5♠

A further bid of 5NT asks for Kings (respond 6♣ with none, 6♦ with one etc.)

When responder responds 5♣ or 5♦, the 4NT bidder may ask for the Queen of Trumps by bidding in the lowest ranking so far unbid suit. Partner responds 5NT or cue bids an outside king if he has the Queen of Trumps. Otherwise he signs off on the lowest available bid in the agreed suit.

SPECIAL CONVENTIONS (cont'd)

The Responders Reverse.

This convention is used in response to opening bids of 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠ to show a game-going hand (typically 12 or more points) and a so far unbid major of precisely 5 cards. Responder first bids a conventional 2♣, then bids his 5 card major at the next opportunity. This forces opener to bid game either in responder's suit or in NTs depending on his holding.

This convention serves to distinguish between a game-going hand with a 5 card major, and hands with 6 or more card majors. These are responded in the major suit which is then bid again at an appropriate level.

Its non application also aids clarification when responding 2♥ to an opening of 1♠.

TRIAD

(A device for two-suited overcalls when opponent has opened a natural one in a suit).

Triad overcalls typically require two suit of at least 5 cards and a willingness to play at the three level in one of them. In this last respect, they compare with the traditional overcall of the Unusual Two No Trump (UNT).

Triad Summary

When an opponent opens a natural one in a suit.

An overcall of 2NT shows the two lowest ranking unbid suits.

A jump overcall to three shows the suit in which the jump was made and the highest ranking unbid suit.

Thus:-

Over an opening of 1♣, 2NT shows ♦S & ♥S, 3♦ shows ♦S & ♠S, 3♥ shows ♥S & ♠S.

Over an opening of 1♦, 2NT shows ♣S & ♥S, 3♣ shows ♣S & ♠S, 3♥ shows ♥S & ♠S.

Over an opening of 1♥, 2NT shows ♣S & ♦S, 3♣ shows ♣S & ♠S, 3♦ shows ♦S & ♠S.

Over an opening of 1♠, 2NT shows ♣S & ♦S, 3♣ shows ♣S & ♥S, 3♦ shows ♦S & ♥S.

Triad is logical, relatively natural, and unlike some other two-suited conventions, (e.g. Ghestem), it preserves the overcall in opponent's suit for the rockcrusher hand.

It may also be viewed as a plus point that if partner does happen to forget and passes, at least you are likely to be playing in a 5 card suit, and you might even be in the best contract. (Just kidding).

Modified Splinter Bids.

These are similar to other splinter bids, but in view of the maximum limitation of 15 points on a 1♥ or 1♠ opening, the splinter should show a 'void' rather than a 'singleton or void'.

Thus, in response to an opening of 1♥ or 1♠, a response of four in another suit shows 4 card support for the opener's bid, the values for a goodish raise to game and a void in the splinter suit.

Transfer Bids in Response to Opening NTs.

These are generally well understood, but there is one choice which has to be made. The most usual way to take out 1NT into a minor is to respond 2NT directing partner to bid 3♣ which responder converts to 3♦ if that is the required suit. We prefer the bid of 3♣ to direct opener to bid 3♦ which ensures the lead will round to him. We regard this as a better use for the 3♣ bid than the alternatives but it is really a matter for personal choice.