

OVERCALLING OPPONENTS NT: HAMILTON (OR CAPPELLETTI) by Maritha Pottenger

Cappelletti (also called **Hamilton**). 2C is a relay to 2D—showing a one-suited hand. After one partner bids 2D (the relay), the other partner will pass (if her suit is diamonds) or correct to whatever her suit is. A 2D overcall of NT shows 5-5 in the majors; 2H shows 5 hearts and 5 cards in an unspecified minor; 2S shows 5 spades and 5 cards in an unspecified minor. 2NT shows 5-5 in the minors. Double is penalty oriented. Over 2H or 2S, 2NT by partner asks you to bid your minor suit. Again, if clubs is your suit, you must play at the 3 level and if you prefer a minor to your partner's major when s/he is 5-5, you will play at the 3 level. Therefore, **when you have a 6-card or longer club suit and elect to overcall an opponents NT opening, just bid 3C**. This takes away the opponent's chance to bid Stayman or transfers, and you have to play at the 3 level regardless. Playing against Weak NT openings, Hamilton (or any system including the penalty double) is advisable.

Remember, even when you find a fit with overcalling a NT, Advancer [partner of person who made overcall] should NOT be raising partner a level unless they have QUICK TRICKS and a really good fit. Generally **your aim is to try to play at the 2 level and get a plus score—or go down less than the opponents would have scored in 1NT**.

When partner bids 2C, you MUST bid 2D (unless RHO bids in which case you are off the hook). The one exception: if you have 7 clubs and a void in one of the other suits—you know that will be partner's suit, you can PASS. (With 6 really good clubs and a void you can also pass.) Or, if you are void in diamonds (highly likely to be partner's suit), you are allowed to bid 2H with 6 (or more) of them; or 2S (with 6 or more of them). If you are void in hearts, you can bid 2S with 6 or more of them. If you are void in spades, you can bid 2H with 6 or more of them. **Refusing the relay to 2D by bidding another suit tells your partner: “I am void in your suit. This is my suit. Pass.”**

When partner bids 2D (pick a major): you bid your LONGEST major. If you have equal length (particularly if things are dire, like you are 2-2 or even 1-1 in partner's suit), bid hearts first. If you get doubled there, you can try running to spades if it “feels right.” If you have 6 or more diamonds and are 1-1 or 2-1 in the majors, you can pass and hope for the best. (If you are doubled, you can “run” to the 2-card major you do have.

When partner shows a major and a minor, pass the major ANY time you have 3 or more cards in it—unless you have a GREAT fit with Aces and King in which case you can raise. If you have only 2 cards in partner's major, but have 3 or more cards in BOTH minors, bid 2NT—asking partner to name her minor. (If you have one minor with 2 or fewer cards, leave partner in the major. A 5-2 fit at the 2 level is a LOT better than a 5-2 or 5-1 fit at the 3 level!)

When partner doubles a NT opening bid, it shows EQUAL OR BETTER values, AND a good lead. Advancer (partner of person who doubled) is expected to leave the double in with ANY balanced hand. (If you have 0 HCP but a balanced hand, -180 is not the end of the world.) If you have a VERY weak hand (0-3) HCP and a 5-card or longer suit, you can “run” to your suit by bidding it. That tells partner to pass. Otherwise, choose to defend. Doubling a strong NT should show 16 or more HCP and a good lead. This means a decent 4-card or longer suit from which you can lead. An example hand would be: KQ109x; AQx; KQx xx. Here you have an excellent spade lead and 16 quality HCP. Double. By contrast, AJ9x KJ10x AQx Qx has 17 HCP, but your doubleton Queen is of questionable value, and you have no good lead. With all your tenaces (broken honor sequences), you will be end played, have to lead away from your honors into Declarer's honors every time you win a trick. PASS.

Some people choose to bid with 5-4 (or 4-5) hands rather than waiting for a 5-5 hand. That is partnership understanding. Sometimes it will work. Just be aware that partner will be unhappy if she is the one who has to play in a 4-2 fit because you bid on a 4-5 or 5-4 hand rather than 5-5.

Also watch vulnerability. **When you have a GOOD 6-card suit and an outside entry, it may be best to defend rather than bidding—especially if the opponents are vulnerable and you are on lead.** If you hold: xxx KQJ10xx Ax xx, and the opponents are vulnerable, try passing. If LHO also passes, lead your King of hearts. If partner has an entry in either spades or club, your side is likely to score 5 hearts, 1 diamond, and at least 1 spade or club. That will be -100. If that one winner is all that partner has, you would be down 1 in 2H. If partner has the TWO WINNERS that you need to make 8 tricks in hearts, the opponents will be -200 in 1NT—a superior score for your side.