

Defensive bidding over multi-way club and strong club openings

General Approach

There are a variety of systems including short club, Polish Club, and Carrot Club, Blue Club, Precision Club, Meckwell that basically use a one club opening bid to be a combination of a natural suit, a weak no trump, or any strong hand.

The first group I call multi-way club systems, where the opening one club bid can have a hand like a weak no trump. They may also contain any strong hand, but this option is far less likely than a weak no trump. Sometimes they are forcing (Polish Club), sometimes not (short club).

The second group is the strong club systems, where the opening one club bid is always strong and shows any hand that has 16+ points. The opening bid is completely artificial.

Defensive bidding over multi-way club systems

I propose a simple defence to these systems - treat them like a natural 1♣ opener. If you overcall, the advancer can bid clubs as a cue bid.

Do not be afraid to make an offshape takeout double when you have at least 4-3 in the major suits and values for a 'normal' takeout double.

The only changes I would make is to permit a 2♣ overcall to be natural and a 3♣ overcall to be a weak jump overcall. Of course, if 2♣ is natural then you lose your Michaels Cue Bid, so I recommend that you use 2♦ as the Michaels Cue Bid over both minor suit openings. Personally I do this over all 1♣ openings, even when they play Acol.

Defensive bidding over strong club systems

Strong club systems are most vulnerable when they have not exchanged any information about their hands, so our aim is to disrupt their communication and bid as much as possible before they know whether to penalise us or find their best contract.

So we pre-empt aggressively over the 1♣ opening bid, because neither opponent knows anything about each other's hands save that opener has some hand with 16+ points.

We pre-empt less aggressively over (1♣) - Pass - (1♦) because the strong hand already knows their partner has less than 8 points, so now knows the probable aim of the hand (partscore, game, slam) and is better positioned to penalise you.

We do not need points to bid over 1♣, we need distribution. So we double 1♣ to show a hand with both majors: this may be 4-4 at favourable vulnerability and normally 5-5 at unfavourable. We bid 1NT to show both minors, with at least nine cards between the two suits - this removes space from the strong club players and means that they can only start their conversation at the two-level. We use the same defence after (1♣) - Pass - (1♦), double is the majors and 1NT is the minors, but with a little more care.

If the bidding goes (1♣=16+) - 1NT (minors) - (Dbl=8+) - ? then you should pre-empt as high as you can. The opponents know that they have game values, but neither has even shown a suit yet!