

Rumpelsohl

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It has become widespread practice to use a device such as lebensohl when countering intervention over one notrump or when advancing a takeout double of a weak two-bid. Alternatively, an adherent of transfer techniques will use Rubensohl or transfer advances instead. But nowadays people are never satisfied, at least not until they have the best of two or more worlds. And indeed it is possible to combine both approaches into one, hoping to show more hand types than with either separately

This produces a scheme of meanings such as:

Opener		Responder
1 NT	2 (♠)	?

Two Notrump: Clubs or prelude to lebensohl sequence.
Three Clubs: Diamonds.
Three Diamonds: Hearts

So far, so good. Now, what meaning should we attribute to the rare sequences? Here are three different ways we might describe a hand with Hearts:

(A)

Opener		Responder
1 NT	2 (♠)	3 ♦
3 ♥		Pass

(B)

Opener		Responder
1 NT	2 (♠)	2 NT
3 ♣		3 ♥

(C)

Opener		Responder
1 NT	2 (♠)	3 ♦
3 ♥		bid

The prevalent, but in my view mistaken, attitude among players seems to be that the lebensohl sequence, (B), should be weak (as in common or garden-variety lebensohl) with sequence (A) invitational.

I'd say this is ineffective for two reasons. In the first place it is begging for trouble to play (B) as weak; it puts too much pressure on partner, who has every opportunity to bid but may not exercise that option (not even with quite a fair hand), for fear responder is extremely weak. Secondly, responder wants partner to accept the transfer calmly (and economically) whenever he, responder, needs the space to express his hand.

Therefore, I advocate: (A) is weak. Opener is at the mercy of responder, and that is just what a responder with a "please-let's-drop-the-auction" type of hand wants. (B) is invitational. Opener has plenty of room to make a decision, and that is just what responder wants when he has an "it-could-go-either-way" type of hand. (C) leaves responder with plenty of room to describe various types of strong hands.

Having the agreement outlined in the previous paragraph results in these meanings for responder's first call:

Two notrump: Clubs, any strength; or artificial: any suit in a limited but invitational hand.
Three Clubs: Diamonds, weak or strong.
Three Diamonds: Hearts, weak or strong.

In case of interventional over an ambiguous two notrump (always a sore spot), it may help opener to know that responder either has Clubs or a limited hand. If opener cannot envisage game, he will be comforted by the knowledge that when responder is not very weak with Clubs he will have a high card or two and be able to defend.

When I conferred with an acquaintance, we were both mystified by the question of what might be a proper name for this device. We considered lebensohl and rebensohl, but what could be more appropriate than to name it after Rumpelstilskin?