



JERRY HELMS

HELMS

TO

HELLO

AN EFFECTIVE  
DEFENSE TO INT





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*Thanks Gini and Big Jake.*

# HELMS

Many years ago (1974, to be exact), I modified a convention called Gladiator to use as a weapon to compete against opening notrump bids. Recognition that shape, suit length and quality are more important than high card strength, especially when competing after strong openings, led to the creation of the following convention.

## HELMS<sup>1</sup>

- 2♣ Relay to 2♦. Shows a single-suited hand. Pass the forced response to show diamonds or convert to a major suit.
- 2♦ Both majors.
- 2♥ Hearts and an undisclosed minor. Advancer<sup>2</sup> uses 2NT to ask for the minor.
- 2♠ Spades and an undisclosed minor. Advancer uses 2NT to ask for the minor.
- 2NT Both minors.
- 3♣ Clubs.
- dbl Penalty. More often based on tricks rather than just scattered high card strength.

Despite the immensely popular acceptance of this system, a significant weakness seemed obvious, as illustrated below:

<b>Hand 1</b>	♠ K x x	<b>Hand 2</b>	♠ K Q J 10 x x
	♥ A J 10 x x x		♥ x
	♦ Q x x		♦ x x x x
	♣ x		♣ K x

---

1. Fred Hamilton and Mike Cappelletti Sr. both claim to have originated this convention. Many people still refer to this treatment as Hamilton or Cappelletti.

2. *Bridge World* magazine suggested using the term "Advancer" to identify the player responding to overcalls or doubles. If it's good enough for them...

On each of the previous hands, the system bid of 2♣ allows the opponents the entire two-level to begin their exchange of information.

The problem, along with my solution, is documented by noted bridge author Max Hardy. “This convention ... loses the opportunity to block the opponents out of the auction which should be one of the goals of a bidder who holds a good major suit and hears an opening bid of one notrump by his right-hand opponent ... one theorist ... Jerry Helms took the problem into consideration and came up with a simple but effective solution. He interchanged the meanings of an immediate bid of two in a major suit and a bid of two clubs followed by a rebid in a major suit.”<sup>1</sup>

‘Constructive/obstructive’ is the term I use to define my principle of competitive bidding: Describe your hand to partner while consuming as much of the opponents bidding space as possible. My first revision, HELMS II, was a movement in this direction.

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1. *Competitive Bidding with Two Suited Hands* by Max Hardy, 1996, p117

# HELMS II

## HELMS II

2♣	Relay to 2♦. Confirm a natural diamond overcall by passing, or show a major/minor two-suiter by converting the forced diamond response to one of the majors. Advancer may use 2NT to discover the unknown minor.
2♦	Both majors.
2♥	Hearts.
2♠	Spades.
2NT	Both minors.
3♣	Clubs.
dbl	Penalty. More often based on tricks rather than just scattered high card strength.

Natural major-suit overcalls, as permitted in HELMS II, remedied the major fault of the previous system without sacrificing any positive attributes.

During the years that Jim Krekorian lived in Charlotte, we frequently discussed bridge theory, including improvements in HELMS II using transfer overcalls. The finishing touches of the original HELLO system evolved during the Jerry HELms and Bill LOhmann partnership. Perhaps HELKREKLO or some other variation would have been more appropriate, but...



# HELLO

(HELMs-LOHmann)

- 2♣ RELAY TO 2♦. Confirm a natural diamond overcall by passing or show a major/minor two-suiter by converting the forced diamond response to one of the majors. Advancer may use 2NT to discover the unknown minor.<sup>1</sup>
- 2♦ A transfer overcall to HEARTS.
- 2♥ BOTH MAJORS. Achieves transfer effect when Advancer chooses spades.
- 2♠ SPADES. A natural, space-consuming overcall.
- 2NT A transfer overcall to CLUBS.
- 3♣ BOTH MINORS. Achieves transfer effect when the Advancer chooses diamonds.
- 3♦ BOTH MAJORS. Massive playing strength. The forced transfer eliminates the risk of a pass of 2♥ (both majors) by Advancer.
- dbl PENALTY. Most often based on tricks from a good suit. Occasionally a very strong, balanced hand.

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1. An alternative here is suggested by Steve Weinstein: use 2NT as a 'heavy raise' of intervenor's major and 3♣ as 'pass or correct' to find his minor.

HELLO is a unique convention providing options to describe all single- or two-suited hands without giving up penalty doubles of strong notrumps. The transfer effect achieved on many auctions may be, according to Bill Lohmann, the strongest part of the system. With the exception of 2♣ (diamonds or a major/minor), all suits are known. This information is important to permit raises by Advancer, and for opening lead considerations.

Recognition that being *in* the auction is generally better than being *out* of the auction can be summed up by the following:

**LOOK FOR REASONS TO BID  
BEFORE FINDING EXCUSES  
TO PASS**

Using HELLO to apply the concept of ‘constructive/obstructive’ bidding should improve your results in competitive auctions.

The examples which follow assume equal vulnerability versus a strong notrump opening bid and are not intended to portray aggressive actions. Vulnerability, positional considerations and partnership sense of humor must always be considered. Always remember that guidelines will never replace judgment, and judgment in bridge comes only with experience. Enjoy yourself as you explore HELLO.

# APPLYING HELLO

W	N	E	S
			1NT
?			

<p>♠ xx ♥ xxx ♦ KQ1098x ♣ Kx</p>	2♣	Passing the relay response confirms diamonds.
<p>♠ AJxxx ♥ x ♦ xx ♣ KQ10xx</p>	2♣	Convert the diamond relay response to 2♠, showing spades plus an unknown minor. Advancer uses 2NT to ask for the minor.
<p>♠ Kx ♥ AQJ10xx ♦ Jxx ♣ xx</p>	2♦	A transfer overcall to hearts.
<p>♠ Jx ♥ KQJ10x ♦ xxxxx ♣ A</p>	2♦	A transfer overcall to hearts. With a suit this strong, best to emphasize what you really have.
<p>♠ x ♥ KJ1098xx ♦ QJ10 ♣ xx</p>	3♥	Do not forget to use a natural preemptive bid.

♠ K10xxx ♥ J10xxxx ♦ x ♣ x	2♥	Both majors. 'Six-five, come alive!' is a useful bridge phrase when holding unbalanced hands.
♠ AKJxxx ♥ AQJ10xx ♦ — ♣ x	3♦	Both majors, massive playing strength. Bid game after partner's forced preference. 2♥, also both majors, could have been passed.
♠ AJ10xxx ♥ x ♦ KJ10x ♣ xx	2♠	Natural bids are encouraged.
♠ x ♥ xx ♦ Q10xx ♣ KQJ109x	2NT	A transfer overall to clubs.
♠ x ♥ xx ♦ AQ10xx ♣ KQJ109	3♣	Both minors. The transfer effect will be achieved each time Advancer chooses diamonds.
♠ KJx ♥ AQx ♦ Kxx ♣ KJxx	pass	Facing a pure guess on opening lead versus 1NT doubled, simply pass.
♠ xx ♥ AKQJxxx ♦ xx ♣ xx	dbl	A 'fourth-best' lead will certainly defeat 1NT. Bid hearts when and if the opponents run.

♠ QJ109x      dbl  
♥ AQ  
♦ Kxx  
♣ Ajx

Not as secure as the prior example. With a clear opening lead and plenty of outside entries, take a chance.

♠ KQJ109xx    4♠  
♥ —  
♦ AQJxx  
♣ x

Bid what you expect to make opposite virtually any dummy. Do not bid 2♠ or 3♠, or consider 2♣ to describe a two-suited hand. Give up on slam with a practical, space-consuming bid.

# ADVANCING HELLO

Shapely hands with good playing strength always provide a reason to bid. To encourage aggressive actions in the direct seat over notrump opening bids, Advancer needs to be somewhat conservative. In auctions where obstructive bidding is advisable, the first player to bid should be given the most rope. In other words, don't hang your partner!

Assume a strong notrump with equal vulnerability.

W	N	E	S
			1NT
2♣ <sup>1</sup>	pass	?	

1. Relay to 2♦.

♠ Axx  
♥ Jxxx  
♦ x  
♣ QJxxx

2♦

Accept the relay and await your fate. Perhaps partner has a major/minor or very good diamonds.

♠ x  
♥ KJ10xxx  
♦ xx  
♣ Qxxx

2♥

A possible spade/diamond two-suiter by partner is a revolting thought. Failure to accept the relay is an attempt to play in your own suit. Partner is forewarned, but not barred, from further bidding.

W	N	E	S
2♣ <sup>1</sup>	pass	?	1NT

1. Relay to 2♦.

♠ xxx ♥ xx ♦ x ♣ QJ10xxxx	pass	A rare hand to justify this rare inaction. Partner may think you forgot the convention, however, the appearance of dummy may restore his confidence.
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♠ Axxx ♥ K10xx ♦ Qxxx ♣ x	2NT <sup>1</sup>	The 'Heavy 2NT'. A massive acceptance for diamonds or the possible major/minor two-suiter. This is a useful conventional agreement to guarantee a fit and issue the strongest possible invitation to game.
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After the 'Heavy 2NT', partner can sign off in 3♦ with a minimum single suited diamond hand, or sign off in 3♥/3♠ with a minimum two-suiter. With a good hand he can simply jump to the appropriate game, secure in the knowledge that dummy will provide excellent supporting cards.

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1. After any HELLO action, 2NT by the Advancer is always "fit-showing" and the strongest possible invitation to game.

## Say HELLO TO HELLO!

A simple but effective way to compete over 1NT openings, HELLO will fit easily into any system.

*'HELLO is an enjoyable, playable convention offering theoretical improvements over other systems.'* – Paul Soloway

*'My search for the best defense against the opponents' notrump opening and overcall came to a successful conclusion when I was introduced to HELLO, which I now use and teach to all of my students.'* – Max Hardy, 1996

*'Max considered HELLO the best overall convention for defending notrump opening bids ... and I still do.'* – Mary Hardy, 2006

*'A thorough, well-considered discussion on the theory of competing after notrump opening bids.'* – Eric Rodwell



**JERRY HELMS** (Charlotte, NC) is both a top-level professional player, with numerous tournament successes to his credit, and one of America's leading bridge teachers.

