

Defence to a Short Club

Far more partnerships are playing a Short Club system at the club and online these days, how should you defend against it?

Firstly, what is a Short Club system?

It is normally a pair playing five-card majors and they want a 1♦ opening bid to promise four diamonds, so they will open 1♣ when they hold 4-4 in the majors, 3 diamonds and 2 clubs. They often alert saying, "2+♣".

There is just one auction you need to discuss:

North	East	South	West
1♣ (alert)	2♣		

Summary: "Just treat 1♣ as natural and don't change anything"

I don't think club players need a defence to a Short Club other than to agree on the meaning of the 2♣ overcall; and I recommend that they do not change that from their usual meaning. This means you continue to play it as Michaels, or a very strong hand, or perhaps you play it as natural.

One reason for this is that the exact 4432 distribution does not come up very often so they will normally hold at least three clubs.

Even against Helen and myself, who open 1♣ on all balanced hands and may have two clubs with four or five diamonds, it is just not worth playing anything more complicated.

I recommend that the takeout doubles of the Short Club should be more flexible, doubling with opening values and at least 4-3 in the majors; the mantra is that the double focuses on the majors rather than the unbid minor.

I also think that it is important that the 1NT overcall shows a strong no trump and worry a little less about a strong club stop: the disadvantage of a Short Club system is that their partner never knows what to lead.

But the essence of the defence is that you treat the 1♣ opening bid as natural. For example, if your partner overcalls 1♥, then the **unassuming cue bid** (UCB) remains 2♣.

And aggressive weak jump overcalls are a good idea. The worst auction for a Short Club pair is:

North	East	South	West
1♣ (alert)	2♠		

For a serious partnership, I recommend playing the 2♣ overcall as natural and playing (1♣) 2♦ as Michaels.

For a very serious partnership, I recommend playing the 2♣ overcall as natural even if they are playing Acol and playing (1♣) 2♦ as Michaels all the time as it is much easier to remember.