

# » The Bocchi-Duboin System: review by Paolo Garrisi



Norberto Bocchi - Giorgio Duboin

## The Bocchi-Duboin System

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(Still not translated in English)

This book illustrates the Bocchi-Duboin System (B-D). Opening it, we must remember their seven European titles, the Bermuda Bowl in 2005, two World titles, two Olympic Games, etc. etc. We must remember all this because we must know that we will face a system by no means simple. The last team that have won something with a simple system have been the American one in 1954.

**The B-D (Bocchi-Duboin)**, was born for high level competition, so it's necessarily complex and it calls for learning beforehand of many sequences. But it's not obscure: even an intermediate pair can manage it, provided that studies and exercises. The system is in fact "accurate", ie a logic is behind every sequence: in some cases the logic comes from general principles, in other it emerges from the present situation; in either cases, the logical structure lightens a part of the burden on the memory.

**The opening at one level** covers a wide range of strength: 11-23, according with the common standards; however, aren't many choices in this matter: the Strong 2's opening shortens the range, but it would not solve the problem of the strong hands with weak suits; or, the opposite problem, the hands which strength doesn't lie on HCP but in long and well headed suits.

The strong 2's, furthermore, is technically inferior compared with the weak 2's because the latter is preemptive and greatly indicative.

**The 2? opening is forcing.** The 2NT is in the range 20-22 and it allows a fifth suit. The 2? is worth 18-19 points, it's balanced and doesn't allow a five card major. After the opening at level one, the jump to 2NT shows a two suiter hand in the range 19-23.

**The major opening**, in B-D, always needs a five card suit. No exceptions are written, so it must be assumed that it's true even in third and fourth place. The diamonds are always fifth but the 4-4-4-1 three suiter with singleton club. The clubs are two or more.

**Playing a 5CM system**, when the opening is 1? there's the risk to lose a 4-4 major fit. For this reason, also intermediate pairs employs the Walsh treatment: after South's 1?, North anticipates his four card major suit before the five card diamond one. In B-D, the problem is solved in another way, with wide use of transfers. The transfers emerge at any stage, not only in the first response

GLOSSARY. A **Convention** is a bid that gives or requests information unrelated to the denomination named. A **Treatment** is a natural bid that indicates a desire to play in the denomination named (or promises or requests values in that denomination), but that, also, by agreement, gives or requests additional information on which further action could be based [Official Encyclopedia, VI Edition, 2001]. The "Walsh" isn't natural because it hides a longer diamond suit, nevertheless it isn't a convention because it names a real suit. Then, it's a treatment.

**The transfers** emerge at any stage in B-D, not only in the first response, and these conventions make up the major complexity in the system. They are used not only in order to anticipate the major, but also for electing the declarer after a suit opening – not only after 1NT, as it's standard in most systems.

Furthermore, their use varies in similar situations: for example, the responses to 1? are transfers, but responding to 1? are not. But, if West overcalls on 1?, the transfers come back. And so on.

**The shape of 1NT opening** is balanced, or semibalanced 5332 with a fifth minor suit. It's also allowed a 5-4 minors two suiter, but with no less than Kx in both majors.

**The strength of 1NT** varies depending on situation, love or vulnerable, and the placing: I, II, III, IV. It sways from weak (12-14), and strong (15-17), but all this depends only on the opening side state. In many system the strength of 1NT depends on opponents' vulnerability too; for example, the "three quarters 1NT" is always weak but vuln vs love. Variants that ignore the situation of opponents, as B-D does, are rarely used. However, this character has its own peculiar logic: the 1NT opening is integrated with 1?. For example:

1? in III and vuln shows 12-14 balanced (or unbalanced with 11-23 and the suit).

1NT in II position shows 12-14 if not vulnerable; it shows 15-17 if vulnerable.

The complexity is only apparent. The Authors have been aware of the need to make clear the treatment even for the less experienced players, then they have fitted in a "pattern of the balanced hand openings" already in the first chapter, explaining later, in a the proper chapter, the reasons whether the opening must be 1? or whether must be 1NT.

It needs to highlight their intellectual honesty: they haven't hidden the difficulties of the system and they have had the humility to explain, or re-explain, even what might be implied. The chapters organization is rational: the first part of each chapter shows an opening, the responses and the developments; the second part deals with responses and development after the interference; the third part analyzes many examples. Of course not everything is clear and sunny; for example: the 1NT opening may include a fifth of diamonds; the semi-balanced hand by 16 + points with the diamonds is opened by the suit and it's regulated by the Gazzilli convention. It looks then – but I'm not sure – that a strong 1NT opening cannot have a fifth diamond but a very weak suit.

**GLOSSARY.** The **Gazzilli** is a convention that enables the opener to show whether his hand is strong or whether it's weak; and, if the hand is strong, enables him to explain the reasons of the strength, ie long and headed suits or spread high card points.

The convention has been invented by Leo Gazzilli of Milan, Italian champion in 1958. It not needs in strong club systems but it's important in those with only one forcing opening over twenty-two points. Abroad it's unknown, it's not mentioned either by the Official Encyclopedia, but is spreading through BBO (Bridge Base Online).

**The style of the two-level response** is predominantly Acol, namely that promises rebid. One exception is the 2? response, which is variant:

- on 1? it's game forcing;
- on 1? it's limited 5-10 HCP with the suit;
- on 1?/1? is game forcing but clubs rebidding.

**GLOSSARY.** **Acol** is the name of the English system, published in 1934. It has taken the name from Acol Road, the address of the club, in London, of it's inventors: M. Harrison Gray, I. McLeod, T. Reese, J.C.H. Marx, S. J. Simon. We must say that the modern use of the two level response is the one established in 1953 by the New Yorker Alvin Roth.

**"Walsh"** is, instead, the style of response 2o1 gf (Two over One game forcing). It has been introduced in 1970 by the Californians Richard and Rhoda Walsh, Paul Soloway, John Swanson, who named their system "Western Scientific", as opposed to the Roth-Stone, called Eastern Scientific. The 2o1gf has been popular by the books of Max Hardy and Michael Lawrence.

The jump shift response is in the range 8-11 points. The 2's opening is in the range 5-10, one suiter. The jump overall is weak but constructive.

**3NT is Gambling**, a long solid minor suit without side values. The treatment without side heads is advisable by Marty Bergen too; it's reasonable in the first or second position, but in third position it becomes a moot question: it's unlikely that the passed partner could have 2,5 defensive tricks that should stop three suits.

Sabine Zenkel-Auken and Ron Andersen, in their book "Preempts" (1996 Magnus Books), say that the side head needs. But – they say too – the hand so enriched can be opened easily at one level, then is better to use the 3NT for other kind of preempts.

Actually, the original Gambling is from Acol: it had two side stoppers and bet alone, without any help from the partner. We imagine the great Terence Reese: “Three no trump”, he said, then smiled toward the opponents, mocking:

“Would you double? Warning: my partner could redouble. Would you set me? Well, let’s see if you will catch my unguarded suit”.

**In the profiles of openings**, responses and overcalls, the nature of the system Bocchi-Duboin is of low or moderate aggressiveness, and they look even peaceful when compared with some pairs who grab bunches of auction cards with 0-1 point, for example Auken-von Arnim and Meckstroth-Rodwell. But we must point out: the low aggressiveness isn’t synonym of shyness; at high level it’s a choice that allows to inflict more often the punitive double. The “low aggressive” pair, then, is actually quite fierce.

**GLOSSARY. First double** – first of all, try the double – was a Culbertson’s principle. It means that if the opponents cross our walking toward the game, it’s better to double them than to go on: “The game is defined, the double is infinite”, so said Ely. To inflict the punitive double, however, we must rely upon the strength of the partner: if we are aggressive, that is if we open or enter the auction with few points, we must give it up. The Neapolitan Club, which opens and overcalls sound, and which bids NT with all the stoppers, is specially prepared to inflict the punitive double: it also does it at one level (not using the sputnik).

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