

Bidding A Minor Suit

We have said that SAYC is focused on achieving contracts in NT or a Major suit but that does not mean that we should ignore the Minor suits. We do however treat them differently – Might I suggest, like stepping stones. If we have an unbalanced 12+ HCP hand that doesn't have a 5-Card Major, we have a hand that fits none of the criteria we have set forth, so far. With minimum opening points we can't open in NT or a Major but we should show Partner that we have that many points, so we should bid. Our only choice then, to get the bidding started, is opening bid in a Minor suit. Do we need a 5-Card Minor? Absolutely not! Would you throw away a 14 HCP hand that looked like this: ♠AK84 ♥AK32 ♦T95 ♣T6?

There are a number of suggested ways to proceed with hands that 'must be opened' in a Minor suit. The first and probably most commonly used is called Convenient Minor. Under this scheme one opens up in the longer minor which, in the above hand, would be 1♦. If both Minors are of equal length then we suggest that if they are 3-3 Open 1♣ and if they are 4-4 or even 5-5 open 1♦¹. One might see a tremendous amount of ambiguity in the strategy. But most people shrug their shoulders and soldier on; because the focus is, after-all, getting to a Majors contract. Isn't it?

I say, if we are going to treat some suits with regard then all suits should get the best treatment; even if we don't pay much attention to some of them. An alternate scheme and one I recommend every one start with is called Inverted Minors. The strategy is not much different, the bidding sequence is, as the name suggests, Upside-Down or inverted. We will show you both and you can decide which you prefer. The standard Response to a Minor Suit Opening, because it follows the same pattern we have seen in the Major suit opening is less complicate, so we'll tackled that first.

Responding to an Opening in a Minor Suit

Unlike responses to Major openings, where the first thought is toward support of that Major, the response to a Minor Opening attempts to first redirect to a Major suit. The statement and question asked by a Minor Opening is: *Partner I have opening points, try to ignore my suit and tell me if you have any length in a Major suit.* Since the question is so different the response must be different. The Opener is really looking for a 4-Card or longer Major suit in responder's hand – not support for the Minor suit.

Thus, your first obligation as Responder is to disclose any 4+Card Major you might have. If you do, you bid them up-the-line bidding 4♥'s in a 4♠-4♥ holding. **The quality of the suit is irrelevant.** So long as you have the requisite 6+ HCP. If you hold 5♠-4♥ or 5♠-5♥, bid the ♠'s first. The Responder's bid is saying *'I have at least 4 of this suit; if you do too; let's talk some more'*. The narrative has the connotation "ah you opened in a Minor so were not going anywhere and if we don't quickly find the Magic-8 in a Major we will have to find a safe landing spot." If you don't follow the prescription just described, by the time the realization is grasped it can be too late to recover.

If the opener is holding ♠AK84 ♥AK32 ♦T95 ♣T6 any response in a Major is welcomed; but if opener is holding e.g. ♠84 ♥AK32 ♦T95 ♣AKT6 only a ♥ response 'fits the bill' and holding ♠AK32 ♥84 ♦T95 ♣AKT6 only a ♠ response 'fits the bill'. There are two cases (a) a fit is revealed and (b) is not revealed.

Once a fit in a Major is discovered then ascertaining the correct contract level can be challenging. It does proceed in a manner similar to that when the fit was found using a Major opening. The **difference** is Opener still has no knowledge of Responders points. With either ♠AT84 ♥K932 ♦T95 ♣T6 (7HCP) or ♠AK84 ♥AK32 ♦T95 ♣T6 (17HCP) the Responder's first bid, in response to Partner's 1♦ opening is 1♥.

If a fit is not found the information on holding in the Minor suit can be scant if one is using

¹ Consider this holding: ♠84 ♥32 ♦AK32 ♣AK864. Convenient minor suggests opening with 1♣. This creates a rebid problem. If partner responds with 1♠ or 1♥ you would prefer to rebid your ♦ as opposed to 1N; but bidding 2♦ is a reverse requiring 17+ HCP - points you don't have. Thus to solve your rebid problem we suggest you open hand like this with 1♦. It's the better lie because partner should assume you have 12-14 HCP 4♦ and 4♣

Convenient Minor

If the Responder doesn't have at least one 4-Card Major, support for the opened Minor suit proceeds similar to bidding in the Majors: 1♣ – P – 2♣, the 2♣ response shows 6-9 and at least 5♣'s. The Responder must have 5♣'s because the 1♣ opener could hold as few as 3♣'s.

Even a Medium response hand holds little hope for Game in the Minor if Opener has a medium hand. yet the response is the same as in a Major suit: 1♣ – P – 3♣, the 3♣ response shows 10+ and at least 5♣'s, a **limit raise**. However, nothing is gained by the jump, as it is in the Majors, because reaching Game in the Minor suit requires more HCP (27/28+), remember Game in a Minor is at the 5-level. So the DECLARER is stuck in a 3-level contract with, possibly, a very 'swishy' suit. And little outside support. So much bidding space has been used up that a Game contract, in NT, is very hard to find and reach. Remember a NoTrump contract is still possible with Minimum Open and Medium Response, but difficult at this point to find because you are already at the 3-level.

Same story if the suit had been ♦'s.

Short Club

Let me pose a real mind-bending question: if one partner has two 4-card Majors and the other doesn't what is the probability that they can find a 5-3 fit in a Minor. Given the limited bidding space the search for a 5-3 fit might be possible but finding Game is very difficult. We can somewhat simplify the task in the Minors bidding sequence if we introduce a *Short Club convention*. The relatively simple concept replaces Convenient Minor. In standard bidding a 1♦ opening can mean the opener holds 3², 4 or 5+ ♦'s; To show support Responder must have a 5-Card suit, just in case it's 3. If Opener holds 5♦'s, the chances that Responder also holds 5 is much reduced. Additionally, many experts recommend a rebid in a Minor requires holding 6-Cards in the suit. This is because practically any response except a limit raise has so many ambiguities in it that one quickly finds the partnership at the 3 level. The problem can be solved if one requires that to open one of the Minor suits, the opener holds a guaranteed 4-Cards in the suit. The short club Convention does this; it requires that to open 1♦ requires 4♦'s. If that requirement is combined with the 5-Card Major opening requirement then a player holding 4♠'s 4♥'s 3♦'s 2♣ and 12-14 HCP cannot open the bidding. The standard, Convenient Minor, dictates opening 1♦, but if we have the agreement that a 1♦ opening bid always shows at least 4 we can't open without violating our personal bidding rules. A partnership can always violate standard bidding rules so long as they inform the opponents what the violation means. Having the agreement that a 1♦ opening bid promises at least 4♦'s means that a 1♣ opening bid can be used to represent the troublesome 4♠'s 4♥'s 3♦'s 2♣ distribution and must be announced. The proper announcement is: "*Could be as short as 2*". The opponents are expecting the opener to have 3+♣'s. Using this convention means that a supporting response to a 1♦ opening only requires 4♦'s. Now only a ♣ opening requires 5-Cards to support; we can support a 1♦ opening bid with a 4-card holding. We however do not recommend using the short club convention. Hands that have 4-4-3-2 distribution and 12+ HCP come up less than 2% of the time. This means that 98% of the time that partner opens 1♦ she is actually holding at least 4♦'s. It's not worth your time to consider the 'short club' convention.

Inverted Minors

To continue beyond this point one has to be familiar with controls bidding. The student may skip ahead to the section on control bidding and return here, or postpone inverted minors until control bidding is added to one's bidding repertoire.

The major strength of the Inverted Minors convention is that it is structured to do exactly what the focus on Majors attempts to do. That is: Avoid, as much as possible, trying to find Game in a Minor suit. When the lack of a Major fit is revealed the shift is next toward finding Game in NT, This requires a compressed bidding space. How is this done? First we must not lose sight of a Major suit fit, so one only resorts to this convention if the responder lacks a 4-card Major and then the meanings of the 2- AND 3-level minor suit responses are interchanged or inverted:

2 When would 1 only show 3 's? In this one particular holding: 4♠ – 4♥ – 3♦ – 2♣

Case 1, Responder has no 4-Card Major (best scenario)

1♣ – P – 3♣ the 3♣ bid takes on the meaning of a normal 2-level bid i.e. 6-9 HCP and 5+♣'s

1♣ – P – 2♣ the 2♣ bid takes on the meaning of a normal 3-level bid i.e. 10-12 HCP and 5+♣'s.

Inverting the meanings of the 2 and 3 level responses leaves most of the 2-level and all the 3rd-level of the bidding ladder available to explore for game in NT. It's the same story with ♦'s except it can be done with 4-card support.

Case 2, Responder has a 4-Card Major; Opener doesn't or has the opposite Major:

1♣ – P – 1♥/1♠ – P;

1NT – P – 3♣ the 3♣ bid takes on the meaning of a normal 2-level bid: 6-9 HCP and 5+♣'s

1♣ – P – 1♥/1♠ – P;

1NT – P – 2♣ the 2♣ bid takes on the meaning of a normal 3-level bid: 10+ HCP and 5+♣'s.

Note how inverting the meanings of the 2 and 3 level responses leaves most of the 2-level and all the 3-level of the bidding ladder available to explore for game in NT. Meanwhile the jump to the 3-level by the weaker hand is preemptive. Why preempt here? The weaker bidding sequence up to the 1N bid 'advertises' two things 1. not-so-strong hands and 2. no Major suit fit; it opens the possibility for alert opponents to find their almost certain Major suit fit – at your expense.

We see that in both cases, when the Responder has an invitational hand (i.e. 10-12 HCP) and it comes time for opener to decide where the contract belongs, if the contract is going to be in the Minor suit the bidding is still at the 2-level. The opener may initiate a control bidding sequence to ascertain if the partnership could be better off in a Game contract in NT rather than a Game in a Minor which requires more and stronger assets.

Once the responder (in either case above) shows the limit raise in a Minor, control bids can be used to determine whether the partnership has stoppers in all four suits. With the 22+ HCP implied by the limit raise and a fit in one Minor and at least one stopper in the other three suits 3NT is often a better game level contract than trying to extend the contract to the 5-level.

If a responder doesn't have a 4-card Major control bidding to determine if a Game in NT is possible still might require more bidding space than is available so we have a special controls bidding convention. The convention, triggered by the inverted minor response showing 10+ HCP, is as follows:

The opener rebids: 2♥ → ♥ stopper but no ♠ stopper; i.e stopper promises either 1st or 2nd round control
2♠ → ♠ stopper but no ♥ stopper
2NT → stoppers in both majors

If Opener shows stoppers in both Majors, i.e. bids 2NT then only the other minor is of concern and responders rebid indicates control or no control of other/unbid minor. Without stopper in other minor rebids original minor at 3-level. With a stop in other minor Responder can bid 3NT showing stopper.

Responder's rebid: after openers 2♥ or 2♠:

2NT → shows stopper in other Major

3NT → shows all missing stoppers. (the other Minor and Major)

3 of original Minor → no stopper in un-shown suits

Responder's rebid: after openers 2NT:

3NT → shows stopper in the other Minor,

3 of original Minor → no stopper in other Minor.

If opener has stopper in un-shown suits bid 3NT or with 16+ HCP bid 5 of original minor.