

SMOLEN
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Smolen is a convention used by a responder to a notrump opening bid (or natural notrump overcall).

It is used when the responder is 5-4 in the majors (either way).

It is used only when the responder has enough strength for game.

Here is an example hand for responder to 1NT:

♠AJ542 ♥KJ87 ♦2 ♣J103.

After partner's 1NT, start with **Stayman**. (Transferring to spades and then bidding hearts should promise at least 5-5).

If the 1NT opener shows a 4-card major, this hand is easy (just raise to game in that major).

But, what if opener answers with 2♦, denying a major?

Now, the contract of 4♥ is out of the picture (no 4-4 fit), but 4♠ is still a possibility (there could be a 5-3 fit). So, responder has to indicate that he has 5 spades.

He is too strong to bid 2♠; he must force to game. So, in Standard bidding, he would jump to 3♠. This announces 5 spades and **GF** values. By inference it shows 4 hearts (otherwise, he would have started with a plain transfer to spades and not used **Stayman**). So, in Standard Bidding, 1NT-2♣-2♦-3-of-Major shows 5 in that major, 4 in the other major and enough for game. Opener will then choose between 3NT, or playing in responder's 5-card major.

The **Smolen** convention makes a slight improvement on this auction. Responder, instead of jumping from 2♦ into his five-card major, jumps into his four-card major! Why? Because now, if opener wants to play in the five-card major, it is played from his (the strong) side. As is usually the case after a notrump opening, you want the strong hand playing the contract (for opening lead purposes). So, using **Smolen**, 1NT-2♣-2♦-3-of-a-Major shows 5 cards in the other major, and by inference, four cards in the major jumped into.

Smolen after 2NT

Smolen is also used after 2NT-3♣-3♦. Responder bids the major in which he has 4 cards, thereby showing 5 in the other major and potentially right-siding the contract.

Of course, **Smolen** also applies after our side makes a natural strong notrump overcall (**systems on**).