

SHORT SUIT HOLDINGS OPPOSITE 1NT OPENER

N.R.Naidu's Question :

We had a bidding misunderstanding as that particular sequence was not explicitly discussed before hand. Over 1NT, we play all suit transfers including 2S for clubs and 2NT for Diamonds(opener to bid transfer suit with normal hand or bid below transfer suit with maximum & good fit). We go through 2C stayman bid with or without major(as 2NT is not available as invitational to 3NT when there s no major). I held a hand with 5-4 in minors,3 spades and a singleton heart with just game going hand either in minors or 3NT if opener has 4 card hearts or double stopper in hearts. So, I bid 2C and partner responded 2H. Then, I jumped to 3NT. Partner thought I had 4 spades and he bid 4S. we played in 4-3 fit and went down where as 3NT was cold. There are two ways of solving this situation. One is- responder can bid 3C for distribution asking and close the bid later accordingly either with 4 spades or without 4 spades. Other is- jumping to 3NT will always show 4 spades in this sequence. Please advice the better sequence, the merits and demerits if any.(of course, if responder wants to play in minor game or minor slam, then he can transfer in one minor first and then bid other minor which is forcing to atleast game.)

Sridhar's Views :

Firstly, there can be no doubt that the responder who applied stayman and jumped to 3N Guarantees a Major ; this is because the only situation he can have no major is when he has an invitational hand with which he should have bid 2N and not 3N ; it is not practical to expect Opener to guess that responder applied stayman to check for heart stopper ! Hence with 3-1 in majors stayman is not the solution .

For handling such hands with short suits , in deciding between 3N and minor game , I can suggest 2 methods :

1. Play 1N-3C/3D/3H/3S – all 4 bids to show singleton in bid suits , denies 5 card Major , assures 3 cards in each of the unbid suits. Over this Opener can assess easily ; bid 3N with double stopper in partner's short suit; if not bid suits naturally till a fit is found and game is reached. I play this system and find it works satisfactorily.
2. However, if your partnership is comfortable with some other conventional meaning of the above bids currently, you can show your suits via transfer and let partner assess / show his values in the unbid major at 3 level for partnership to jointly succeed in reaching the final, right contract . eg 1N-2S-3C-3D-? opener knows you have at least 9 minor cards and will bid 3N if he is loaded in Majors and if not bid his values at 3 level and help you to decide , based on where you are short .

Finally I am keen that you appreciate the key difference between what you practised and what I suggested – In your method, you tried to mastermind the auction , whereas in my suggestion , you will EXCHANGE INFORMATION WITH PARTNER IN REACHING THE FINAL CONTRACT – this is , in essence, the secret to winning Bridge .

With best wishes ,

Sridhar