

WASHINGTON BRIDGE LEAGUE

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Minor suit openings 6: Finding responder's Major suit

Last month we reviewed Opener's choices for a second bid in an auction that begins 1m - P - 1M. For clarity in this article, we will assume that the auction has gone 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT (opponents pass throughout.) This month we will look at Responder's second bid and explore how Responder can continue to look for a major suit fit even after Opener rebids 1NT.

Opener's 1NT rebid is fairly descriptive. The hand is balanced and contains 11-14 High Card Points (HCP.) Opener holds exactly two or three spades. With four spades, she would have supported spades, and with only one spade, she would not have rebid 1NT. Since Opener has little else to say, Responder is now in control of the auction and must decide to pass or continue to look for a suit contract.

Responder's strength generally falls into three ranges - weak, invitational, or game forcing. The weaker the hand, the sooner Responder will want to end the auction. As Responder's hand increases in strength, he will have to make bids that either invite partner to bid on or force partner to bid to game.

Weak Hands:

A weak hand contains about 6 to 10 HCP. Since game is highly unlikely, Responder has only to decide whether to pass IN, to rebid 2♠ or to support Opener's diamonds. The decision depends on how many spades Responder holds.

a. With a six card suit, Responder should rebid 2♠. The hand will usually take more tricks in spades and the partnership has at least an 8-card fit. Even with as few as 6 HCP, 2♠ should be a safe contract.

b. With a five card suit, Responder may sometimes be tempted to pass 1NT, but analysis has shown that the weaker the hand, the more likely it is that a suit contract is safer than No Trump. So, even though he may be in a

5-2 fit, Responder should rebid 2♠. His hand must have some shortness, and playing in a trump suit will stop the opponents from running Responder's short suit. Some players might question the wisdom of rebidding 2♠ with a trump suit such as ♠T9532, but don't forget that Opener may well have three spades or an honor doubleton combination that will help fill in the suit. Even if Opener has as little as ♠Jx, the points she must hold in the other suits will produce tricks to offset the three trump losers.

c. With a four card spade suit, Responder will usually pass 1NT. The exception occurs when Responder holds four or more cards in diamonds, in which case 2♦ may be the better contract. If responder holds ♠T853 ♥KJ3 ♦AT642♠8, the opponents could take a lot of club tricks, but in 2♦, the club losers would be limited.

Invitational values: With about 11 or a bad 12 HCP, Responder will want to invite game, knowing that Opener will sign off if she opened with a minimum. Since more and more players are opening a little lighter, Responder should not be driving to game with 11 opposite 11.

a. Holding a good six card spade suit, Responder shows that hand by jumping to 3♠. It is always a good idea to discuss with partner, but most intermediate players agree that this auction (1♦-1♠-1NT-3♠) is invitational, and shows about 11 points and a good six card suit.

b. If Responder has only four spades, he can rebid 2NT to invite game. Opener passes with a minimum and bids 3NT with a max.

c. With five spades, Responder can use a convention called *New Minor Forcing*. Using our 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT sequence, Responder's rebid of 2♣ (the New Minor) is an artificial bid (requiring an Alert) that promises at least invitational values, and asks Opener to describe her hand further. Here we will outline the basics of the convention. As you get more comfortable with the bids, you can add some of the "bells and whistles" that make the convention even more useful.

Using our 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT sequence, Responder's rebid of 2♣ (the New Minor) says nothing about clubs, but forces Opener to bid again. Opener's choices are:

- 2♠ with 3 card spade support and 11-13 HCP;
- 2♥, lacking 3 card spade support but holding four hearts and 11-13 HCP;
- 2NT, with neither major suit and 11-13 HCP; or,
- The corresponding bid on the 3 level with 14 HCP. Since responder promises an invitational hand, Opener holding a maximum, needs to jump to show his strength and accept the invite.

This system is valuable for finding 5-3 fits in responder's first bid major, as well as 4-4 fits in the other major. The system also allows the partnership to try for game, but stop short if they lack sufficient strength between the two hands.

d. In a., we discussed a good six card suit. So, how do you bid with a bad six card suit? We suggest that you go through New Minor Forcing, and then bid your spades again. Opener will know that you have six spades and will know that you have a broken suit. Holding ♠xxx, Opener will opt for a NoTrump contract; with ♠QT to fill in your suit, Opener will be happy to play in spades.

Game Forcing Values: If Responder holds 13+ HCP, he must force to game.

Holding six spades, Responder should jump to 4♠. With five spades, Responder should go through New Minor Forcing, and then bid the appropriate game depending on what Opener then bids. And with only four spades, Responder can jump to 3NT.

With these agreements in mind, let's try a few hands. As throughout this article, the bidding has gone 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT. You hold:

♠AT42 ♥K87 ♦JB ♣T742	Pass. 1NT rates to be a good place to play, and you don't have an 8 card major suit fit.
♠AQT953 ♥K5 ♦A4 ♣T87	4♠. Partner will have at least doubleton support for your spades, so your most likely game is 4♠.
♠AJT84 ♥KJT5 ♦KQ4 ♣8	2♣. You clearly want to be in game, or perhaps even slam, but WHAT game? The way to find out is to start with 2♣. If partner has three spades, she'll show them now. If not, perhaps she has four hearts. If partner holds ♠K8 ♥AQ97 ♦AJ86 ♣T43, 6♥ is a solid slam.
♠KQT86 ♥QT95 ♦93 ♣67	2♥. Since you would bid 2♣ with a game invitational or better hand, 2♥ shows a weak hand with 5 spades and 4(or 5) hearts. Partner will choose between the majors. If she has four hearts, she'll pass. If not, she will take a preference by bidding 2♠.

As always, make sure you and your partner both understand the ramifications of New Minor Forcing before using it, and remember that the bid of the new minor suit is alertable.