

When your partner opens One Heart or One Spade and you hold a minimum responding hand, you should always raise partner's suit if you can in preference to bidding a suit of your own or responding in no-trumps. Consider the following two responding hands after partner opens One Spade :

Qxxx	Qxx
Kxx	Kxx
xx	xx
Qxxx	Qxxxx

Everyone would raise One Spade to Two Spades with the first hand but a fair number of players would prefer to respond One No Trump with the second "because I don't have four-card spade support." More experienced players would respond Two Spades with the second hand. Although you would like to have a fourth card in spades and the Great Shuffler has given you only three, there are plenty of reasons for preferring Two Spades over One No Trump :

- 1) Partner is likely to Pass a response of One No Trump when he has a flattish hand containing five spades. If he has no high card in diamonds or hearts, you will probably wish that you were playing in a contract of Two Spades with your 8-card fit instead of struggling in One No Trump.
- 2) When you open One Spade you will have five or more cards considerably more often than you will have four.
- 3) If you respond One No Trump, the next hand will have no trouble in overcalling Two Clubs / Diamonds / Hearts. That won't be the case if you raise to Two Spades.
- 4) If the opponents start bidding, partner will be better placed to compete if he knows that you have support for his suit.

Things change when partner opens One Club or One Diamond. Even when you have four-card support for partner, you are expected to bid a major suit in preference to supporting partner's minor suit. If you don't have a four-card major suit, you should prefer to respond One No Trump if you have a balanced hand. Raising partner's minor suit comes further down the pecking order. Consider the following responding hands after partner opens One Diamond :

Axxx	Axx	Axx
Qxx	Qxx	xx
Jxxx	xxxx	Jxxx
Jx	Qxx	Qxxx

Respond One Spade, One No Trump and Two Diamonds respectively.

A hand at Steyning (4th January, board 11) introduced another factor into the equation : should you always bid a four-card major suit in response even if you have great support for partner's minor suit ? North opened One Diamond and South was looking at the following :

♠J952  
♥52  
♦Q107653  
♣K

Is One Spade still the correct response when you have six-card support for partner's suit ? A direct raise in diamonds might miss out on finding a fit in spades. On the other hand, it might prevent the opponents from overcalling in hearts or clubs and finding a fit of their own. What would be your choice ?

To get an expert opinion on this, jump into my time machine as we travel back to Miami Beach and the 1972 Olympiad match between USA and France. The USA was represented by two of their all-time 'greats', Bobby Goldman and Mike Lawrence. Goldman opened One Diamond and Lawrence had to respond with this hand :

♠J985  
♥-----  
♦J109752  
♣K62

Mike Lawrence bid One Spade. If you don't agree then you had better take the matter up with him. Personally, if Mike Lawrence thinks One Spade is the correct response then it's good enough for me ! (But I wonder what he'd bid with seven diamonds ... or eight !)

Sitting opposite, Bobby Goldman was looking at this hand :

♠Q2  
♥AKQ  
♦A643  
♣A987

After 1D-1S their auction continued : 2NT (18-19) – 3D (forcing) – 3NT – 5D – End.

A spade lead would have beaten the contract but the French West, Claude Delmouly, led a heart and Goldman was in with a chance. How would you have played Five Diamonds ?

Your first reaction might be to discard three of dummy's spades on your three top hearts but that is not good enough. You would still have to lose one spade, one club and one trump trick.

Goldman took a different line of play. He discarded a *club* from dummy at trick 1, then led a club to dummy's King, a second club back to his Ace and ruffed a club in dummy, finding the suit splitting 3-3. Only then did he play a trump, leading a diamond to his Ace (both opponents following). With the lead now back in his own hand, he cashed his two remaining top hearts followed by the thirteenth club, discarding three spades from dummy. He had to lose a spade and a trump, but that was all. Eleven tricks made and a beautiful piece of card play by the late Bobby Goldman. USA went on to win the match but lost to the famous Italian Blue Team in the final.

Enjoy your bridge !