

With a strong, balanced hand containing a 5-card major suit, many players are happy to open Two No Trump. Even if you don't like opening in No Trumps with a 5-card major suit, it is often the least bad option. Here's a recent hand from Shoreham where you are dealer :

♠AQ6
♥AJ852
♦Q82
♣AK

You are too light for a Two Club opening bid, intending to rebid a game-forcing Two Hearts after partner's Two Diamond response. A strong Two Hearts opening bid is possible but partner will expect a better quality heart suit for that bid. Another option is a simple One Heart but this is risky - partner could easily Pass with a hand that is good enough to give you a decent chance of making a game contract. Opening Two No Trump looks the best option with One Heart the second choice.

Recognising that opener might have such a hand, responder can bid Three Clubs to ask if opener has a 5-card major suit (often called 5-card Stayman). If opener does not have a 5-card major but does have at least one 4-card major he bids Three Diamonds. With no 4-card major opener bids Three No Trump.

Note that unlike 'normal' Stayman, responder is *not* guaranteeing that he holds at least one 4-card major suit. For example, responder might bid Three Clubs with this hand, looking for a 5-3 major suit fit :

♠J73
♥KQ6
♦9
♣1098542

Both Three No Trumps and Five Clubs have chances but both might be defeated. In contrast, Four Hearts would be pretty unlucky to fail and it's an easy game to bid if, in your system, Three Clubs asks for a 5-card major suit : 2NT-3C-3H-4H.

You can also use transfer bids after an opening bid of Two No Trump :

2NT – 3D = transfer to hearts
2NT – 3H = transfer to spades

Transfers can allow responder to show a 5-card major suit en route to 3NT, giving opener a choice of game contract :

♠A10853
♥J2
♦Q973
♣J8

The auction might be : 2NT – 3H (“I have length in spades ..”) - 3S – 3NT (“.. but I'm prepared to play in 3NT unless you'd prefer to play in 4S.”) Opener will usually opt to play in spades if he holds three or four of them but will Pass 3NT with a doubleton in spades.

What about the auction that begins : 2NT – 3S ? Some players like this to show five cards in spades and four cards in hearts. Perhaps a better idea is to use a Three Spade response as Minor Suit Stayman, showing at least 5-4 distribution in the minor suits. It is often the only way to get close to a minor suit slam after an opening bid of Two No Trumps :

♠105
♥7
♦KJ875
♣QJ962

♠AJ6
♥K1084
♦AQ93
♣AK

Without using Minor Suit Stayman, North will hope that South has a stopper in both major suits and will probably raise 2NT to 3NT. North might suspect there could be a minor suit slam available but how to investigate without going past 3NT ? Playing in 3NT, South will make 11 or 12 tricks. However, South would much prefer to be playing in Six Diamonds but it's a difficult contract to reach unless North is able to show length in both minor suits with a conventional response of Three Spades.

Enjoy your bridge.