Bidding to game after a transfer

After your partner opens 1NT they have limited their hand to a point range (often 15-17) and shown a balanced shape. A balanced shape should be no singletons, no voids and at most one doubleton. A 5 card suit is perfectly acceptable in a balanced hand. To help with rebidding problems we may occasionally open 1NT with a 6 card minor and/or two doubletons. In any case it is a limit bid (see previous mini lesson) and their partner (you) is now in control (captain) of the auction. Lets see how to drive the auction correctly.

We will assume openers 1NT range is 15-17 for all examples. We are responder with no interference. The first step is to count your points and add them to your partner's range. If you have a fit in a suit then you can add shortage points. Be cautious though a 5 card major is not enough to guarantee a fit because the 1NT opener has only guaranteed a doubleton!

With 0-8 points = Part score
WIth 8-10 points = Game Invitational (majors or NT)
With 10+ points = Game Forcing
With 16+ points = Consider Slam

Note there is a little bit of cross over you need to be able to evaluate a “good” 8 vs a “bad” 8 when deciding if your hand is worth an invite. See previous lessons on hand evaluation. Today we will mostly look at the invitational and game forcing hands. **With invitational or game forcing hands we should be trying to find our 8+ card major suit fits.** That may be a 5-3 fit or a 4-4 fit. So if you have 4 cards in a major and at least an invitational hand you should be checking for the major fit as your top priority.

Briefly.. with a part score hand you should almost always transfer to a 5 card major to play there. In a minor you need to add 2 extra tricks (at lower value) when transferring so you need a good reason to prefer to play 3C instead of 1NT. This is normally at least a 6 card suit and shortage in a side suit or a very weak hand. Advanced players should research “garbage stayman” which helps play in low level contracts when 1NT is not desirable.

1NT-2C! = Stayman convention - not alerted (self alerting) when opponents have not bid. We start with stayman with invitational and game forcing hands where we have a **4 card major** we might want to play in.

If we do not have a 4 card major but have a 5 card or longer suit we start with a transfer bid. The reason we use transfers is twofold. 1) We force our partner to bid something so we remain in control of the auction and can decide what level to play at. 2) Transfer means the opener will bid the trump suit first making them declarer which is desirable.

The main sequences to know (similar application if transferring to hearts).
1NT-2H-2S-2NT = Invitational hand with 5 card spades
1NT-2H-2S-3NT = Game force hand with 5 card spades
1NT-2H-2S-3S = Invitational hand with 6 card spades
1NT-2H-2S-4S = Game force hand with 6 card spades

So if you have a 6 card major you KNOW you have a major fit so you are allowed to set the suit and game in a major is (usually) preferable to playing in 3NT. If you have a 5 card major you "offer" that suit as trumps then "offer" NT as the second option. You are asking the 1NT opener to choose between playing in NT or the major. Opener should choose the major if they have 3 or more cards in that suit. If they have a doubleton they should choose NT. If the bid was invitational then the opener should accept with 16-17 and decline with 15-16.

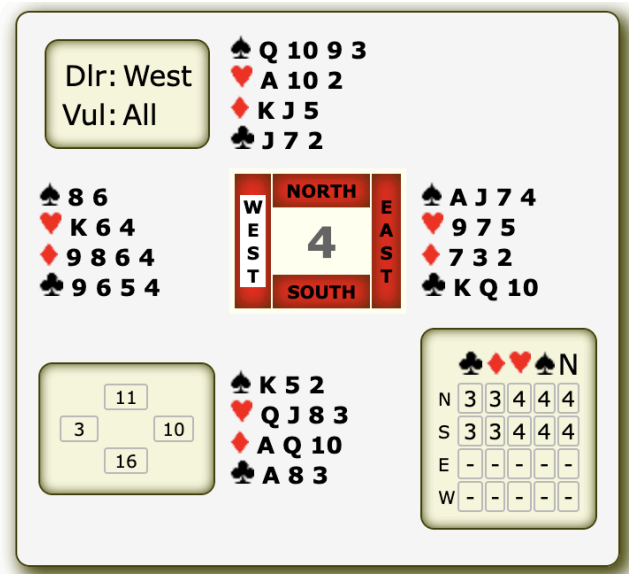
Openers continuations
1NT-2H-2S-2NT-3S = Decline invitation but prefer spades
1NT-2H-2S-2NT-Pass = Decline invitation and prefer NT (doubleton spade)
1NT-2H-2S-2NT-4S = Accept invitation but prefer spades
1NT-2H-2S-2NT-3NT = Accept invitation but prefer NT (doubleton spade)
1NT-2H-2S-3NT-Pass = Prefer NT (doubleton spade)
1NT-2H-2S-3NT-4S = Prefer spades
1NT-2H-2S-3S-Pass = Decline invitation
1NT-2H-2S-3S-4S = Accept invitation
1NT-2H-2S-4S-Pass = Only allowed to pass!

When you offer two suits it is **forcing to game** so you must have decent values. Advanced players can research popular convention "Smolen" to help bidding with 5-4 majors.
1NT-2H-2S-3H = 5 spades and 4+ hearts. Opener will choose a major fit if the partnership has one, otherwise bid 3NT. With 5 hearts you should have a major fit so bid 4H over 3NT.
1NT-2H-2S-3D = 5 spades and diamonds. Normally we don't offer the minor suit unless we have a distributional hand (5/5), are looking for slam, or just need a forcing bid.
1NT-2D-2H-2S = Exception to the rule. 5 hearts and 4 spades and <u>invitational</u>. With a game forcing hand you could bid 3S.

When transferring to a minor there needs to be a reason for it. 3NT is such a superior contract than 5 of a minor that you normally would just bid 3NT and not even mention the minor if you have game values. There are some variations on transferring to the minors. Recommended is to use 2S to transfer to clubs and 2NT to transfer to diamonds (that means 2NT natural bid goes through stayman). This also allows super accepts by bidding the suit in between. A super accept is normally a hand with good honour or length in the minor. This helps responder judge if their suit will "run" in 3NT. But use whatever you prefer.
1NT-2S!-2NT!-3C = Transfer to clubs, super accepted. Responder not interested in game.
1NT-2S!-2NT!-3NT = Transfer to clubs, super accepted. Responder goes to game.
1NT-2S!-3C-3NT = Distributional or slam interest otherwise go 1NT-3NT
1NT-2S!-3C-3H = We always look for the major first so this is a forcing bid but not offering hearts as a place to play. Rather it is just control of that suit and pressing to slam or wary of playing in NT.

Another very handy convention for advanced players to use is called “texas transfers”. This is very handy for investigating slam. With a hand not interested in slam but content with game in a major you transfer at the 4-level. It also clears up 4NT meaning whether it is quantitative or keycard ask.
1NT-4D!-4H = texas transfer to hearts (no slam interest unless keycarding)
1NT-4H!-4S = texas transfer to spades (no slam interest unless keycarding)
1NT-2D!-2H-4H = some slam interest in hearts (passable)
1NT-4H!-4S-4NT = key card ask in spades
1NT-2H!-2S-4NT = quantitative (slam invite with 5 spades)

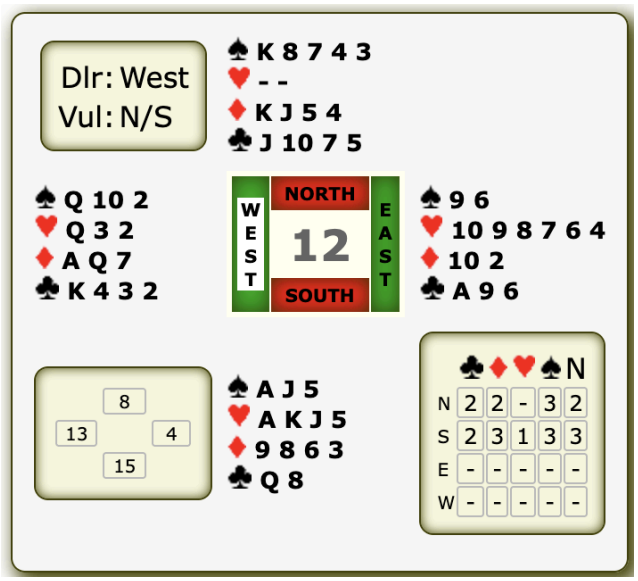
Examples



With 4 card majors use stayman. If a fit is not found return to NT.

Bidding should go P-1NT-2C-2H-3NT.

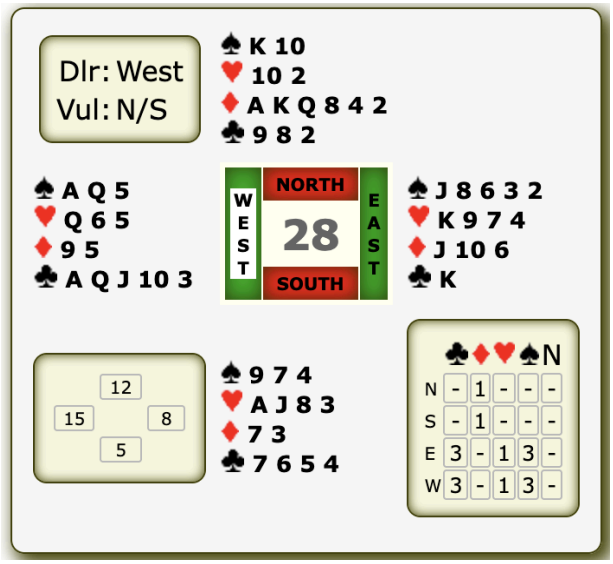
With 4-3-3-3 shape it is also acceptable to ignore looking for a major and just bid 3NT.



Imagine south is dealer and opens 1NT. North has 5 spades and should clearly start with a transfer. They have 8 points so probably want to invite.

1NT-2H!-2S-?

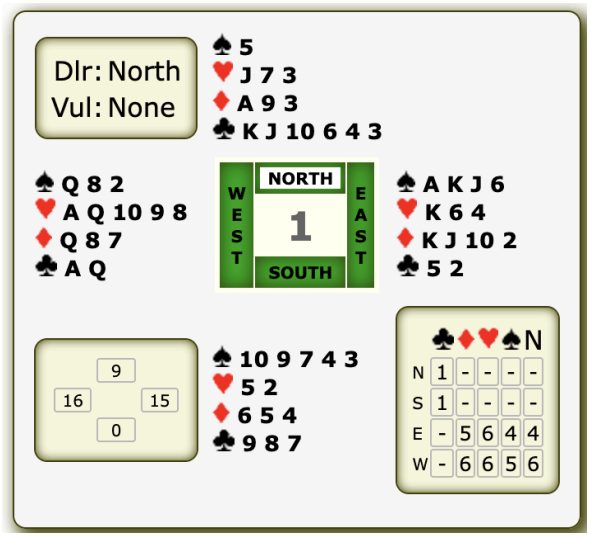
The standard bid here is 2NT showing 5 card spades and invitational. Bidding a minor would be game forcing. However with distributional hands it can be acceptable to bid 3S (even though it shows 6 card suit) because it will likely play better in a 5-2 fit rather than NT anyway.



West opens 1NT. Notice a 5 card suit is acceptable. East has a vaguely invitational hand with 5-4 in the majors. Unfortunately you cannot show both suits separately without forcing to game.

1NT-2H-2S. In normal methods this is a “bad” 8 count with singleton K and unsupported jacks. If you play super accepts you would accept otherwise pass.

1NT-2C-2D-2S. You could also start with stayman and see if you find partner with a 4 card major. After a 2D response you could bid 2S. A creative sequence.



East opens 1NT and west is looking at 16 points. Slam is pushy missing all the kings with no shortage and a maximum total of 33HCP.

1NT-2D-2H-3NT-4H is recommended asking partner to choose between hearts and NT.

If you are feeling frisky you can continue the auction when partner accepts hearts by keycarding or cue bidding. 5H = 2 no queen. 1NT-2D-2H-3NT-4H-4NT-5H-6H