

## What To Open With 4-5 In The Minors?

When you hold an opening hand with reverse shape<sup>1</sup>, but not reverse values<sup>2</sup>, you usually end up with a headache in the auction. When one or more of these suits is a major you can often get away with it, but what if they are both minors? We usually do not want to play in the minors but this time we have 9 cards there. What should we do?

Here's a classic hand: ♠8 ♥Q95 ♦A975 ♣AQT94

Clearly we want to open, but what if partner responds 1S to our opening bid? What should we rebid?

The basic strategies when you cannot raise partner's suit are:

Open 1C and plan on rebidding NT

Open 1C and plan on rebidding 2C

Open 1D and plan on rebidding 2C

Each of these has its plusses and minus so let's talk about them.

### **Open 1C and plan on rebidding NT**

This has the advantage of getting you to play NT which is a higher scoring contract than a minor. It also allows your partner to use the various followup bids you have after a NT rebid such as new minor forcing. The big disadvantage is of course that your partner will expect you to have 2 card support for their major and so might insist on that suit even when it's not a good contract.

Example 1345 opposite 5422 play in hearts

Example 1345 opposite 5341 play in spades

### **Open 1C and plan on rebidding 2C**

This has the advantage of making sure that you play in your longest suit when partner has to choose a minor. It has the disadvantage of having you play in your non fit whenever partner has 2 more diamonds than clubs and a weak hand.

Example 1345 opposite 5422 play in clubs

Example 1345 opposite 5341 play in clubs

### **Open 1D and plan on rebidding 2C**

This has the advantage of describing 9 of your cards to partner. It has the disadvantage of playing in your shorter fit whenever partner prefers to play in your first bid suit and possibly never mentioning your longest suit if the opponents get in the bidding.

Example 1345 opposite 5341 play in diamonds

Example 1345 opposite 5422 play in diamonds

<sup>1</sup> 4 cards in a higher ranking suit and 5 or more cards in a lower ranking suit

<sup>2</sup> 17+

Now that you've seen some of the pitfalls, let's discuss strategies based on opener's shape.

### **2-2-4-5**

This is essentially a balanced shape. Most modern players would open (15-16) or rebid 1N (12-14) with this shape. Please note that when you open 1 of a minor, you are enabling the opponents to overcall 1 of a major with a hand they would ordinarily pass. As such consider passing borderline hands like xx xx KQJx AJxxx (rule of 20) especially when vulnerable. Don't forget you can always bid later.

### **3-1-4-5/1-3-4-5**

If you opt for rebidding NT with these hands then make sure your partner is aware of this and doesn't rebid 2M with a 5 card suit and a minimum hand. This will of course cause you to miss 8 card major suit fits when you do have 3 of their suit, but it avoids the disasters when you have a singleton.

Similarly, consider rebidding 1N whenever your singleton is the Ace, King or Queen.

♠Q ♥Q95 ♦KJ75 ♣AJT94 when your partner bids 1S

♠K ♥532 ♦KJ75 ♣KQJT9 when your partner bids 1H

### **4-0-4-5/0-4-4-5**

4045 shape is rarely an issue because you can always rebid 1S over a 1H response. And if partner bids NT then you "know" that the opponents have at least a 10 card heart fit so if you can steal the auction you're much better off. The 0445 shape is much harder because you truly do not want to start rebidding NT with a void.

### **A suggested guideline for decisions**

Look at your hand and ask yourself: If I could describe my hand in English what would I say to partner?

"I have diamonds and clubs" - 1D then 2C - ♠3 ♥952 ♦AKJ5 ♣AJT94

"My hands about clubs" - 1C then 2C - ♠3 ♥K52 ♦J532 ♣AKJT9

"I'm balanced and have points everywhere" - 1C then 1N - ♠K ♥J52 ♦KQ53 ♣KJ943

Remember that an auction is an effort to describe your hand to your partner. The better you succeed at this the better your results. Make sure you and your partner are on the same page so that you will get some close decisions right. I am unaware of any agreements that will always get you to the "right place" with these shapes, so accept that you will have some misses and try to be philosophical about them. If everything seems to mislead, consider passing and bidding later.

**Special Case:** When open 1C with 12-14 and 4-5, what should you rebid after 1D response?:

1. Raise diamonds
2. Make your planned rebid

i.e. is 1C-1D-2D a reverse or a minimum?