

The minors.

So far, all my articles on bidding have been about how to make the most of the 1-level major suit bids. But, even though the minors are the poor relations of this game, we cannot neglect them completely. Those that play 4-card majors will claim that they can always open a 4-card suit and so they have no need to open with a short suit. That is true but that is not enough to compensate for the advantages of 5-card major systems, but we have to do the best we can when we have to open with a 1-level minor suit bid, particularly when it can be made on a short suit.

Of course, natural system users do have the inverted minor suit raise to help in the competitive auction, but in my own strong club system, I do not have this tool because there is only one opening bid, i.e. 1♦, to cover all minor suited hands. But I have worked on it to produce something quite special. The example below is a particular favourite of mine :-

North		South	
♠	AQJ	♠	K863
♥	742	♥	9
♦	KQ109	♦	872
♣	632	♣	J10975

When I was dealt the South hand above, the auction went :-

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	1♠	Double
1NT	Double	2♣	Double

We were not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents, and I was able to make 8 tricks losing just 3 clubs, a diamond and a heart. At many other tables, North had opened with 1NT and, at some of those tables, they played there doubled making just 3 spade tricks and a diamond trick. At other tables, after starting by doubling the 1NT opening bid, the opponents were able to find their heart game. At one table, the bidding went like this :-

North	East	South	West
1NT	Pass	Pass	Double
Pass	Pass	2♣	Double
2♦	Pass	2♠	Double

West's double of 2♣ was unwise but opener was not to know that, and he decided to take it out. 2♠ did not play nearly as well as 2♣. After 2 rounds of hearts, declarer would be playing with a 3-3 trump fit and so, every time the defenders got the lead, they led trumps and later cashed a couple of heart tricks and so the contract had to go down. I only heard about this later and so I do not know the exact score, but we ended up with a complete top.

So, how does this work? How can opener be sure that responder has a weak hand? Well, strong clubbers have an advantage because the opening bid is restricted to no more than 15 points, but something might be done with natural systems. Opener's 1NT rebid restricted the hand even more and showed 10-12 points and so responder knows that it is important not to get too carried away, but it is useful if something can be done to throw a spanner in the works. This would, perhaps, work best for those of you that play a strong 1NT opening bid. Then, the 12-14 hand can be shown by opening in a minor suit and rebidding 1NT but these ideas can be adapted to any strength 1NT opener.

However, South has to look at his hand and ask himself if there is anything that he can sensibly do, or should he just meekly pass? I have said in previous articles that the pass card is the most under used card in the box and I stand by that but, in this situation, it is the one bid that should be avoided if possible. The problem is to be able to enter the auction and then get out of it again at a low level so that the sacrifice will not be too expensive.

Basically, in my system, a response of 1 of a major to an opening bid of 1♦ is forcing for 1 round at least but, in certain circumstances, the rebid will be a sign off and, if that rebid is in a second suit, that new suit will often be longer than the original major suit. This treatment comes from the Blue Club system which uses several sequences such as these, known as Canape sequences. I never liked Blue Club because an opening bid of 1 of a major could be a 4-card suit (occasionally even shorter) and there is likely to be a longer suit. Although this does get the major suit into the auction, it makes subsequent sequences difficult to handle and the system of value or pre-emptive raises that I have described in previous articles is not so easy with Canape opening bids.

But Canape responses of 1 of a major can be really awkward for the opponents. We have to be able to bid constructively as well as just being

awkward, but a little thought can sort that out. The example above is a good one because it works no matter what opener's rebid is likely to be. In my system, opener's rebids after a 1♠ response are :-

- 1) 1NT shows 10-12 points with even distribution and less than 4 spades.
- 2) 2♣ shows 10-15 points with 5+ clubs, could be just 4 clubs with 4414, 4144 or 1444 distribution.
- 3) 2♦ shows 10-15 points with 5+ diamonds, could be just 4 diamonds with 4441 distribution.
- 4) 2♥ shows a maximum with 4-card spade support and a shortage.
- 5) 2♠ shows a minimum with 4-card spade support.
- 6) 2NT shows 5-5 in the minors.
- 7) 3 of a minor shows a solid 7+ card suit.
- 8) 3♠ shows a maximum with 4-card spade support but no shortage.

So, if you look closely, you can see that responder always has a way of getting out of the auction at the 2-level. After most of these rebids, responder can simply pass if he has a weak hand. He can convert the 2♥ response to 2♠ and he can select a minor over the 2NT rebid. Only the 1NT rebid appears to create a problem, but that is not the case.

Basically, responder will bid his longer second suit and that is a sign off. Similarly, a rebid of the major will show a weak hand with a 5+ card suit and is also a sign off. Anything else is stronger and is invitational or forcing for 1 round at least. There is just one exception to look out for. It makes sense, if you adopt something like this, that when you hold both majors, you should always bid 1♥ even if spades are the longer suit. That way a 4-4 major suit will not be missed and a rebid of 2♠ will be a sign off with at least a 5-card suit. But, in that case, if responder bids 1♠ initially and then rebids 2♥, he is showing 5 spades and 4 hearts and is forcing for 1 round.

As in some of the other articles, these ideas developed from strong club systems but there is no reason why some of these ideas should not be used with other systems. Natural system users will have to make allowance for stronger opening bids but that should not be too much of a problem.