

Why not open 1♥ when 4-4 in the majors!

By Neil H. Timm

Playing 2/1 or Standard American (SA) most agree that one must have a 5-card major to open 1M with at least 11/12+ HCP. And with at least one 4-card major, one opens a convenient minor suit with 3+ cards.

However, what is one to do when 4-4 in the majors? Again, most open a convenient minor.

Such an agreement defies logic since the probability of partner having a fit with one of your two 4-card major suits occurs about 60% of the time. By not opening 1♥ when 4-4 in the majors reduces the probability of finding your major suit fit.

When opening 1♥ when 4-4 in the majors a rebid on 2♠* is used to alert partner that opener's shape is 4-4 in the majors and does not have 5♥. Yes, a simple reverse is used to show 4-4 shape. An opening bid of 1♠ shows 5 spades and a rebid of 2♥ over 1♠ shows 5♠-4♥ distribution.

To show 5♥ and 4♠ requires a new strategy; one opens 2♥*, an alerted bid with 11-15HCP even though the actual probability of being 5-4 with an opening hand is small (< 1.0% of the time)! Yes, a Flannery-Type hand.

While we have given up the "weak" 2♥ bid, we have increased the probability of finding a major suit fit with partner.

Note that the probability of being dealt 6 hearts is 4.16% and the probability of having say 5-9 HCP is 38.02% so the probability of making a weak 2♥ bid is only 1.58% = (4.16 X 38.02); a very infrequent event indeed! Hence, the 2-level heart bid is rarely used.

We look at a few examples to reflect this new approach.

4-4 hands

Hand (1).

Opener	Partner
♠KQJ4	♠A76
♥A832	♥KJ104
♦KQ2	♦J103
♣J2	♣1043

Playing 2/1 the bidding may go:

Opener	Partner
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1NT

3NT for down 2.

Why hide both 4-card majors?

The bidding should go:

Opener	Responder
1♥	1NT* (forcing)
2♠* (4-4)	3♥
4♥	Pass

Clearly responder's weak minor suits favor the major suit fit over 3NT.

Hand (2).

Opener	Partner
♠A543	♠KQ6
♥AQ32	♥KJ104
♦A	♦QJ3
♣J762	♣A43

Playing 2/1 the bidding may go:

Opener	Partner
1♣	1♥
3♥	4♣ (control)
4♦ (control)	4NT (1430)
5♦ (3 keycards)	6♥
Pass	Pass

With the wasted honors in diamonds, we have reached a poor slam.

The bidding should go:

Opener	Partner
1♥	2♥
2♠* (4-4)	3♣ (control)
3♦ (control)	3♥ (no slam interest, wasted diamond values)
4♥	Pass

The 5-4 hand

Hand (3)

Opener	Partner
♠KQ543	♠7

♥A532
♦J4
♣Q2

♥104
♦KQ98765
♣J104

Playing 2/1 the bidding may go:

Opener	Partner
1♠	1NT
2♥	? insufficient points for a 3♦ rebid

Alternatively, the bidding would go using our new approach:

Opener	Partner
2♥* (5-4)	3♦
Pass	Pass

With a weak hand and say 3♥ or 3/4♠, responder would pass 2♥ or bid 2♠, respectively. The bid of 2NT* is asking for a further description of opener's shape.

Opener's responses are:

3♣* Singleton/Void in bid suit
3♦* Singleton/Void in bid suit
3♥* 2-2 in minors and 11-13
3♠* 2-2 in minors and 14-16

where upon responder may bid at the 3 or 4 level in the major suit with the additional information.

Why use 2♥* and not 2♦* to show the 5-4 hand you may ask? Because it allows responder to pass with a very weak hand so that the strong hand is playing the contract.

Another option is to use the bid of 2♥* to show 5-4 or 6/4 called the flexible Flannery convention.

Playing the Flexible Flannery convention, the responses after 2NT are as above except that 3NT* by the opener shows 6-4 with 14-15 HCP. Yes, the bid of 3NT* is a game forcing bid. With only 11-13HCP do not show the 6-4 distribution.