

New Minor Forcing

Here's a frequent bidding dilemma:

♠KQ854 ♥A82 ♦J5 ♣K72 -- Partner opens 1D, you respond 1S, and partner rebids 1NT. You know you want to bid game, but which game? If partner has three spades, a 4S contract rates to play better. If partner has only two spades, you'd rather play 3NT.

Many pairs solve this problem with a treatment called *New Minor Forcing*. This is a simple bidding agreement that specifies that after the first round of bidding, responder's rebid of 2 of the unbid ("new") minor is forcing for at least one round, and it may be artificial. It asks opener for more information about his hand, specifically his length in the suit responder has already bid.

New Minor Forcing is used only by responder, usually at his second turn to bid. You should have at least **invitational strength** (a good 10-11+ pts.) and some doubt about what the final contract should be. In most cases, you have a 5-card major and want to know whether or not partner has a fit.

With the example hand above, clubs is the new minor, so after 1D-1S-1NT, you would rebid 2C to force. Your bid doesn't promise club length or even a stopper -- it only asks opener to bid again and tell you more about his hand.

Some players call this Checkback Stayman because it gives you a way to check back with partner about his support for your major. Unlike the 2C Stayman convention you use after a 1NT opener, though, this bid doesn't ask for a 4-card major. Instead, it asks opener if he has **3 cards** in the major you've already bid.

Opener's Rebids

After partner bids the new minor, your first obligation as opener is to show support for his major. You do this by making a "delayed raise" to two of his suit. In the example above, your auction would go 1D by you - 1S by partner - 1NT - 2C - **2S**. Your 2S rebid shows exactly 3 spades (you already denied 4-card spade support when you rebid 1NT). This uncovers your 8-card fit, so your partner will jump directly to 4S with the example hand.

If you rebid anything else over partner's New Minor Forcing bid, you **deny** 3-card length in his major. Your second priority is to show an unbid 4-card major. In the example above, you would rebid 2H if you held 2 spades and 4 hearts.

If you don't have 3 spades **or** 4 hearts, you have to find another descriptive rebid. You can choose 2NT if you have stoppers in hearts **and** clubs, or 2D if you have a 5-card suit. In all of these cases, partner will now know that you have only a 7-card spade fit, so he can choose the 3NT game.

As opener, you can also show your point-count with your rebid. Since responder promises at least invitational strength, you can make a **jump rebid** if you have a maximum hand that will accept a game invitation. After partner bids 2C in the auction above, you would jump to 3S if you had strong 3-card support and a good 14 or 15 pts. If you had only a doubleton spade and a good 14-15 pts., you would jump to 3NT.

Responder's Third Bid

After you use New Minor Forcing, opener's rebid will tell you whether or not you have an 8-card fit in your suit. **Your** next bid should tell opener whether you have **forcing** or **invitational** strength.

With the example hand above, you have **forcing values** (12-13+ pts.), so your next bid will be at game level. If opener rebids 2S to show 3-card support, you'll bid 4S. If opener rebids anything else (2D, 2H, 2NT), you know you have only a 7-card spade fit, so you'll choose 3NT.

If you have only **invitational values** (10-11 pts.), you'll make your rebid at a lower level. Here's an example:

♠983 ♥QJ763 ♦A5 ♣KJ4 -- Partner opens 1D, you bid 1H, and he rebids 1S.

To start an invitational auction and check on partner's heart length, bid 2C (New Minor Forcing). Here are opener's possible rebids and the actions you should take at your next turn to bid.

If opener's second bid is:

2D (denying 3 hearts) -- Rebid **2NT** to invite game. There's no reason to bid hearts again.

2H (minimum opener with 3 hearts) -- Bid **3H** to invite game.

2S (extra length in spades, showing 5 spades and 6 diamonds) -- Bid **4S**.

2NT (minimum opener with 2 or fewer hearts) -- **Pass**.

3C (club length, probably a 4-1-4-4 hand and a good opener) -- Bid **3NT**.

3D (extra values with a strong 6-card diamond suit) -- Bid **3NT**.

3H (extra values with good 3-card heart support) -- Bid **4H**.

3NT (extra values with 2 or fewer hearts) -- **Pass**.

Other situations

You can (and should) use New Minor Forcing when you are 5-4 in the majors and have invitational-or-better strength.

♠AK1063 ♥K1065 ♦4 ♣964 -- Partner opens 1C, you respond 1S, and partner bids 1NT. In this auction (after opener rebids 1NT), a bid of 2H by you should show a **weak hand** (6-9 pts.) with no interest in game -- it promises 5 spades and 4+ hearts and asks opener to pass or bid 2S if he prefers that suit. To show an **invitational or better** hand, bid 2D (yes, even with a singleton!) to force. This will allow you to find an 8-card fit in *either* major. If partner has 3 spades, he'll bid 2S and you'll raise to 3S to invite. If he has 2 spades and 4 hearts, he'll bid 2H and you can invite a heart game with by raising to 3H.

In some auctions, there won't be a new minor available:

♠1043 ♥AQ986 ♦K7 ♣AJ8 -- Partner opens 1D, you bid 1H and he rebids 2C (showing at least 9 cards in the two minor suits). In this case, you'll have to improvise by bidding **2S** (the **new major**), which is the only unbid suit. Since this is the only forcing bid available, it doesn't promise length or even honor strength in spades. It's an artificial force that asks partner to tell you more about his hand. If partner rebids 3H (showing 3-card support), you'll bid 4H. If he rebids 2NT, he

promises a spade stopper and you can raise to 3NT.

Over your 2S, if partner rebids 3C or 3D, he's showing extra length in that suit, and your auction will be trickier. After 3C or 3D, a 3S bid by you should be a search for 3NT that *asks* for a spade stopper. If partner doesn't have one, he'll bid something other than 3NT, and you'll try the minor-suit game.