

LOCKDOWN SEMINAR – TUESDAY, 19 JANUARY 2021

RESPONDING TO 1NT

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This seminar will identify the sequences after an opening 1NT and deal with some of them in detail. We hope to cover remaining items in a future seminar.

We have chosen sequences that come up more commonly and those where we think there is the greatest advantages in having an agreed system. We have tried to keep the structure as simple as possible –the most effective conventions are ones you can remember fairly easily.

AREAS

We have grouped the areas into the following topics:

- Stayman and continuations
- Transfers and continuations
- 3 level responses
- 4 level responses

However it is important to understand that each topic is not stand alone. Whatever you decide to play needs to be part of a coherent and consistent structure.

Stayman and continuations

Brian Davison's seminar covered the standard uses of Stayman to look for a major suit fit. We now want to explore further bids in the auction after 1NT – 2C.

Reverse Smolen – this convention helps responder show a particular type of hand easily. When responder has nine cards in the majors (5/4 either way round) and the values for game, they start with 2C. If opener shows a major, great, you've found your fit. If opener bids 2D, responder now bids 3 of their 4 card major, over which opener can choose the best contract, or make a cue bid with 3 card support for the 5 card suit

Non-promissory Stayman – when playing 4 suit transfers (see below), responder with a raise to 2NT must start with 2C, which does not promise a major. After 1NT – 2C – 2H, responder must bid 2S to show 4S, which is forcing, or 2NT to show a raise without a 4 card major. Over 2S opener will raise or cue bid with spades. If opener does not have 4 spades they will bid either 2NT or 3NT depending on their strength (remember this sequence by responder promises invitational values at least.

New suit at the three level- for example 1NT-2C-2S-3D. Is this:

- Strong with 4H and 5/6D
- A cue bid agreeing spades
- Showing values in D and looking for 3NT

Whatever you decide it needs to fit with your transfer structure.

Transfers and continuations

This covers a massive range of sequences and it would fill several more seminars to cover each one, and how they fit with other non-transfer sequences. Today we will try to identify the main sequences and look at some in more detail.

Four suit transfers: transfers to a minor – in this system 2S is a transfer to 3C, and 2NT is a transfer to 3D. In every case responder will have a 6+ card suit.

They are used on three types of hand:

- Responder is weak and is just looking for the best spot
- Responder has a good suit (e.g. AQxxxx) which might allow 3NT to make with minimal values
- Responder has a very strong hand and wants to explore slam

If opener has a fit – defined as Kxx or better – they complete the transfer. If they have a weaker holding in the suit, they bid the next step up. So after a 2S bid they bid 2NT and after a 2NT bid they bid 3C. You must have either the ace or the king to show support. Although holdings such as QJx, Qxxx, and J10xx may be decent support for partner's six card suit, they do not offer the same possibility of six tricks

With a good suit headed by the ace – e.g. AJ10xxx – you initiate the transfer hoping that partner can show a fit, over which you can bid 3NT expecting to make six tricks in your suit, knowing partner has at least Kxx. When you have a fit you don't need 11/12 points to bid game – 8/9 is enough if they are 'good' points. So, bid 3NT with AJ10xxx and an outside king, but not with Qx/xx/AJ10xxx/Jxx.

What if responder has AKxxxx and 9/10 points? Then you have to decide whether to settle for the minor part score or have a shot at 3NT. Whatever you choose, do it consistently – don't bid 3NT some of the time, do it always or never.

If opener shows a fit, subsequent bids by responder are game forcing and show shortage. They will have either a strong hand with slam interest or a hand with game values unsure of 3NT, perhaps with a void.

If opener shows no fit, a bid of the suit shown is to play. Anything else is game forcing and is natural. So, with for example x/KQxx/AQJxxx/Ax, it will go 1NT-2NT-3C-3H. Some players prefer to start these hands with Stayman and we will look at this in a future seminar.

With a weak hand with 5/5 in the minors, bid 2NT. If partner has a fit in D you are happy to play there. If partner denies a fit by bidding 3C, you can pass in the expectation that clubs will be, at least, as good a spot to play in and may be much better.

With a strong hand interested in slam and a good six card minor, transfer to the suit and then:

4NT is RKCB

Bids at the four level are cue bids

Bidding a new suit at the three level – some people play that this is another suit held by responder, others that it shows high card values and others that it shows shortage. On the basis of likely frequency, shortage is probably most helpful but all are workable as long as you and your partner agree.

Raising the transfer suit e.g. 1NT – 2S – 3C – 4C shows the values for a raise to 4NT with a good club suit. Over this, partner either cue bids or signs off in 4NT. Over a cue bid, 4NT by responder would be RKCB.

Do not transfer to a minor to show game values alone – you are just giving away information.

Four suit transfers: transfers to a major –

They are used on four types of hand:

- Responder is weak and is just looking for the best spot
- Responder has an invitational hand which might make game in the major suit if opener has a fit
- Responder has game values and wants to offer a choice of games
- Responder has a very strong hand and wants to explore a slam

Weak hands

With a weak hand and a 5 card or longer major, always transfer and pass. Don't try to guess when 1NT might be a better contract.

Hands with game values

With a hand with game values and a 5 card major, transfer to the major and then bid 3NT with any balanced or semi-balanced hand. Opener will bid four of the major with 4 card support, and also with 3 card support and a shortage or weakness in a suit (e.g. three small cards or Jx or Qx).

With an unbalanced hand with a six card major and no slam interest, use a four level transfer (if you play them – see later) to play in game.

Hands with slam interest

Transfer to the major then:

- If partner has completed the transfer
 - A bid at the three level is a suit
 - A bid at the four level is a cue bid
- If partner has broken the transfer
 - All bids are cue bids

Invitational hands

This covers a fairly narrow range of hands. Usually, you decide if game might have a chance then you bid it, or if you need perfect cards from partner then just sign off – partner rarely has perfect cards.

Breaking the transfer

Transfer breaks are the ideal way of bidding games with a realistic chance of making when opener has a fit. There are a number of options, but we recommend:

With 4 card support:

- With a minimum bid 3 of the major
- With a maximum bid another suit to show values in that suit
 - Some people prefer to play that this shows a weak holding e.g. Jx

With 3 card support:

- Complete the transfer with a minimum
- Bid 2NT with a maximum

3 level responses

There are many options for 3 level responses. All of them try to cater for hands that are difficult to bid in other ways. What you choose to play will be driven by:

- How often you think they come up
- How you would bid this sort of hand if you don't play these bids
- Ease of remembering

The key point is that you agree what you play with your partner. The more you play any conventions, the easier they are to remember. We recommend that you aim to have agreements with your regular partner but play something simpler with casual partners.

3 clubs

We recommend that you play this as five card Stayman. The simplest version is to play that 3 clubs asks and opener bids a 5 card major or bids 3NT. However, you can also include an enquiry for 4 card majors and we suggest you adopt that. The purpose is to cater for hand shapes such as 1354 or 4315 where four of the major may be a much better contract than 3NT

3 diamonds

This is available to either ignore or to use to cater for hands that are difficult to show in standard systems. We recommend using it to show a game forcing hand with at least 5/5 in the minors.

3 H/S

Although they come up infrequently, hands with game values and 1/3 in the majors and 4/5 in the minors are difficult to handle: One answer is to play that a bid of three of a major shows a singleton in that suit, 3 cards in the other major and 4/5 or 5/4 in the minors.

The purpose of this is to avoid bad 3NT contracts and play instead in a major suit or minor suit game.

4 level responses

There are many different options here but these hands will not come up often and many players don't have any conventional agreements. However, if you feel able to cope with remembering then we recommend using a two-step transfer system.

For serious regular partnerships we recommend the version shown below but you can easily take on only some elements – some of the bids here will not come up.

4C transfer to 4H with no slam interest

4D transfer to 4S with no slam interest

4H transfer to 5C with possible slam interest

4S transfer to 5D with possible slam interest

Over a transfer to a minor, 4NT is a signoff and the next step shows interest. So:

1NT-4S-4NT is to play

1NT-4S-5C is interested in slam

If you decide against taking on this sort of structure, make sure you agree with your partner what bids mean.