

Keeping Up With Conventions

Other Conventional Calls

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This series of articles looks at how to fill out the standard convention card.

OTHER CONV. CALLS: New Minor Forcing: ___ 2-Way NMF ___
Weak Jump Shifts not in Comp. ___ 4th Suit Forcing: 1 Round Game

Diagram 1 - The Convention Card for Other Conventional Calls

The right-hand, or front, side of the convention card is mainly designed to cover constructive bidding ... opening bids and responses. Previous articles have covered the auction after opening bids at the one and two level. All that is left is the area for OTHER CONV(entional) CALLS. This is shown in Diagram 1.

If your partnership uses very standard methods, you can ignore this section. Everything is marked in red, indicating that anything you put in this section is alertable.

For some partnerships, however, this is the most crowded section of the card. It's where you put anything that doesn't seem to fit anywhere else. There's a myriad of possibilities, most of which are well outside the scope of this article. However, there are also some popular practices that you might want to consider. If so, read on.

Fourth Suit

Suppose you pick \spadesuit A Q 8 6 2 up this hand and \heartsuit A 5 partner opens the \diamondsuit 7 5 4 bidding 1 \heartsuit . Your \clubsuit K 6 3 first bid presents no problem. You respond 1 \spadesuit , looking for a fit in that suit. Partner rebids 2 \clubsuit . Now you are faced with a challenge.

With 13 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card suit, you want to go for a game bonus opposite partner's opening bid. But

what's the best game contract? You haven't yet found an eight-card major suit fit. Although you prefer clubs to hearts, you don't want to support that suit since partner's second suit may be only four cards in length.

It looks as though notrump may be the best spot. However, a jump to 3NT with three low diamonds is a little unilateral. Partner may be short in diamonds ... and the opponents are quite likely to lead that suit after this auction. If opener does have strength in diamonds, a notrump contract will likely play better from partner's side, with the opening lead coming up to partner's high cards.

A popular solution to this dilemma is for responder to bid the fourth suit in this situation, 2 \diamondsuit . Even partnerships playing standard methods would treat 2 \diamondsuit here as forcing ... a new suit by a responder who didn't pass initially. If you bid 2 \diamondsuit with this hand, however, it is conventional and must be alerted. The reason is that you are using it as a totally artificial call, saying nothing about your holding in diamonds. You might have three low cards, as on this hand, or you could have no diamonds at all. This useful convention is referred to as *fourth suit forcing*.

One Round or Game

Before marking this convention on the card, the partnership must decide whether a bid of the fourth suit commits the partnership to the

game level or whether it only forces opener to make one more bid. The most popular approach is to use fourth suit as forcing to game. If that's the agreement, you would check the appropriate box:

4th Suit Forcing: 1 Round Game

If you do agree to play fourth suit forcing to game, be careful when you hold a hand like this as South and the auction begins:

| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
|------|----------------|------|----------------|
| | 1 \heartsuit | Pass | 1 \spadesuit |
| Pass | 2 \clubsuit | Pass | ? |

Much as you'd like to, you can't bid 2 \diamondsuit as opener will keep bidding until game is reached. What should you bid? Tough call. 2NT would be an overbid, showing an invitational hand of about 11-12 points. If this hand were given to a panel, you'd get votes for pass, 2 \heartsuit , and 2 \spadesuit . You'll just have to guess ... perhaps while wishing you'd never agreed to play fourth suit forcing to game!

Exceptions

Suppose you have this hand as South and the auction begins:

| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
|------|----------------|------|------------------|
| | 1 \clubsuit | Pass | 1 \diamondsuit |
| Pass | 1 \heartsuit | Pass | ? |

Oops! 1 \spadesuit would be fourth suit but you don't want to commit the

partnership to game with only 10 high-card points plus 1 length point. On the other hand, you don't want to miss an eight-card major suit fit by bypassing the spades.

Even partnerships that play fourth suit forcing to game generally make an exception in this particular sequence. A fourth suit bid of 1♠ is only forcing for one round. (some partnerships use a jump to 2♠ here as the artificial game-forcing call.)

Another exception arises when responder has passed initially. With fewer than 13 points, it's unlikely responder will need fourth suit as an artificial game forcing bid. So, some partnerships treat fourth suit as a natural, non-forcing bid in this situation; others prefer to keep fourth suit as forcing, but only for one round.

New Minor Forcing

Fourth suit isn't always available to responder as a forcing bid. Let's return to an earlier hand and suppose the auction starts like this:

| | | | |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
| | 1♣ | Pass | 1♠ |
| Pass | 1NT | Pass | ? |

You want to be in game, but it's unclear what the best contract will be. Opener's balanced hand could easily include three-card spade support. Unfortunately, fourth suit isn't available as an artificial forcing call since only two suits have been bid.

In standard methods, a bid of 2♦ here would be non forcing. It is natural, asking opener to choose between spades and diamonds as trumps and opener can pass with a preference for diamonds.

The modern style, however, is to treat a new minor suit bid as forcing after opener's 1NT rebid. You would bid 2♦ with this hand. If partner now bids 2♠, showing three-card support, you can jump to 4♠. If opener rebids something else, you can bid game in notrump. This is referred to as *new minor forcing*. If you want to have this agreement, check the appropriate box on the card:

New Minor Forcing:

There are many variations of this convention. The line beside the box can be used to indicate whether the bid of a new minor suit is forcing to game (GF) or only invitational (INV). Some partnerships prefer to always treat 2♣ as the forcing bid after a 1NT rebid, whether or not the opening bid was 1♣. This is usually referred to as *checkback Stayman*. Others prefer to treat 2♦ as artificial and game forcing, and 2♣ as artificial but forcing for only one round. This is referred to as *two-way new minor forcing* ... or 2-Way NMF in the bridge jargon on the convention card.

Whatever the partnership agreement, you'll still face challenges. Suppose you agree to new minor forcing and are dealt one of our earlier hands. The auction begins:

| | | | |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
| | 1♣ | Pass | 1♠ |
| Pass | 1NT | Pass | ? |

You can no longer bid 2♦ since that would now be forcing. Instead, you'll have to decide between passing or rebidding 2♠, hoping to find a reasonable spot. Maybe it's time to go back to the drawing board!

After a 2NT Rebid

Whatever your agreement after a 1NT rebid, you should also discuss what to do after a 2NT rebid. For example, suppose you hold this hand and the auction begins:

| | | | |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
| | 1♦ | Pass | 1♥ |
| Pass | 2NT | Pass | ? |

Most partnerships would treat 3♣ here as checkback Stayman or new minor forcing, but you want to be sure. If opener thinks it shows clubs, you may be at the slam level before things get sorted out.

Jump Shift: Weak or Strong?

What would you respond with this hand if partner opens with 1♣?

| | |
|---|-------------|
| ♠ | A K Q J 9 3 |
| ♥ | A Q 3 |
| ♦ | 7 |
| ♣ | Q 9 4 |

If the answer is 2♠, you are playing strong jump shifts and don't need to mark anything on the card. It's standard practice.

If you would respond 1♠, you still don't need to mark anything. A new suit response is forcing and you are presumably planning to show the extra strength and slam interest later. However, you are obviously wasting the 2♠ response. You don't use it to show a very strong hand.

Since strong jump shifts by responder are a rarity anyway, some partnerships prefer to use them to show weak hands. You always seem to get lots of those! For example, after an opening bid of 1♣, they might respond 2♠ with a hand like this:

This is referred to as a *weak jump shift* and you would check the appropriate box on the card if this is your agreement:

Weak Jump Shifts not in Comp.

The "not in Comp." means not in competition ... that is, after a takeout double or an overcall of opener's bid. The meaning of responder's calls after a takeout double is covered in a different section of the card and most partnerships assign some other meaning to a jump shift following an opponent's overcall.

Again, be careful if you are going to use a convention like this. You don't want partner to think you have a very strong hand when you are trying to describe a very weak hand. Also, some partnerships only use weak jump shifts in some sequences ... perhaps only jumps to the two level or after a minor suit opening.

What Else Goes Here?

You can write other agreements on the lines available in this section, such as the defenses you use when the opponents make an artificial 1♣ opening or use the Michaels convention (which will be discussed later).

However, you can only use legal conventions. Check with your club or tournament director if you are not sure what is allowed. 