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This Week in Bridge

(80) Minor Suit Slams After 1NT Openings

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Level: 3

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

Minor suit slams are much harder to bid than Major suit slams. This is because our tools for describing our minors take up far more space than our Major suit tools. We shall look at how we overcome this bidding challenge to bid good minor suit slams.

Slam: Balanced Hands with a 5-card Minor (Responder)

As Responder, when we have a 5-card Major we generally show our suit and then further describe our hand – for part score, game, or slam. But when we have a 5-card minor we do not have an easy or good way to show these suits at a low or convenient level. Thus, with a balanced hand we generally do not show our minor suit – we usually just bid slam or make a quantitative bid.

If partner accepts our slam invite and wants to know more about our hand, then they can ask us to further describe our hand.

Examples

1NT 4NT (quantitative)

5NT (“choice of slams.”) Opener accepts our slam invite and asks if we have any 5-card minor

that we would like to suggest.

1NT 4NT

6m

own 5-card suit

Opener can also accept our slam invite and show their

(minor) to offer a 5-3 (or 5-4 minor suit fit.)

4-4 Minor Suit Slams

Just as we have better Major suit tools than minor suit tools for showing 5-card suits (Jacoby Transfers) we also have better Major suit tools than minor suit tools when it comes to 4-card suits (Stayman.) Though we do not have great minor suit tools for 4-4 fits we do have some helpful methods:

1NT – 4♠* This is a quantitative bid (invitational to slam) with exactly 4-4 in the minors. This auction is the same as 1NT – 4NT, but looks for a possible minor suit slam along the way. Opener can bid 4NT, 5m, 6m, or 6NT.

Another way we can find a 4-4 minor fit minor suit slam is by Opener asking Responder if they have a 4-card minor. 1NT – 4NT – 5♠ “Minor suit slam?” This accepts the slam invite and asks Responder to look for a 4-4 minor suit fit. This is not re-inviting slam! Responder and Opener then bid their 4-card suits up the line until they find a fit or end up in 6NT.

Example

1NT 4NT 4NT Quantitative.
5♠ 6♣ 5♠ looking for a 4-4 minor suit slam. 6♣ shows 4-card ♣ and offers to play.
6♦ 6♦ denies 4-card ♣, shows 4-card ♦ and offers to play in 6♦.

If no 4-4 fit can be found then we will end up in 6NT. But with this method we can explore for the 4-4 minor suit fit along the way (we may be able to score an extra trick from ruffs in the 4-4 fit.)

Slam with Both Minors: 5/5 or 5/4

If we use our 3-level gadgets to show hands that have both minors, then either player can further explore slam by bidding 4-minor as minorwood. This is true if we have shown a fit, implied a fit, or even if the fit is first shown at the 4-level.

Examples

1NT 3♦*
4m
3♦* is 5/5 minors, GF. 4-minor is minorwood (1430 Keycard in a minor.) If Responder is not interested in slam they can just raise to 5-minor instead of answering Keycard. They can do this since Opener is limited.

1NT 3♦*
3♠ 4m
3♠ is natural and shows a 5-card suit. 4-minor is minorwood. If we do not have interest in slam we bid 3NT, 4♠, or 5-minor.

1NT 3M*
4m
3M* is a mini-splinter. 3/1-5/4 and a GF hand. 4-minor is minorwood.

Slam with 6-card Minors: Minor Suit Transfers

Either player can use minorwood to investigate slam after a minor suit transfer as well. Responder can unilaterally do so by transferring and then bidding 4m. The Opener will frequently bid 4m (minorwood) after the Responder transfers and then bids a new suit, showing shortness. If Opener has no wasted values they can use 4m to explore a minor suit slam.

Example

1NT 2NT*
3♦ 3♠
4♦ minorwood

Other Minor Suit Slams

We also can find minor suit slams after we have looked for a Major suit fit.

Example

1NT 2♣
2♠ 3m

This shows 4-cards in the other Major (usually) and a long minor (5+ card.) It also shows a reason for showing this minor (not just bidding 3NT) - either extreme distribution or extra values for slam interest.

In this auction Opener can express slam interest by bidding 4-minor - intended as minorwood. Responder will answer Keycard if they have slam interest or just raise to 5-minor if they were very distributional (they had bid 3-minor with no slam interest.)

Example

1NT 2♥*
2♠ 3m

This shows a 5-card Major and a 4+card minor (usually 4-card minor). It also shows a reason for showing this minor (not just rebidding 3NT.) This is either extreme distribution or extra values for slam interest.

Opener can express minor suit slam interest by bidding 4-minor - intended as minorwood. Responder will answer if they have slam interest or just raise to 5-minor if they just had extreme distribution (no extra values for slam.)

Conclusion

As you can see, minor suit slams are more complex than Major suit slams because we have fewer useful tools for finding our fits and so we often end up at a higher level. It is important to be familiar with our options and tools because these auctions are delicate, often involve difficult high-level choices, and have very little room for error.