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This Week in Bridge

(227) New Minor Forcing Fundamentals

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Level: 2

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General

When partner opens the bidding with 1NT (or 2NT) Responder has excellent tools for exploring Major suit fits. Stayman can be used to find a 4-4 Major suit fit and a Jacoby Transfer can be used to find a 5-3 Major suit fit. But when Opener has a balanced hand with only 12-14 points (or 18-19 points), Responder does not have these useful tools available to them. Responder starts the auction by making a natural bid, and if this is not successful in finding a Major suit fit then Responder may need some tools to help find a Major suit fit later in the auction. Responder's tools in these types of auctions are *New Minor Forcing* or *4th Suit Forcing*. Here we focus on *New Minor Forcing*, which is Responder's tool for continuing the auction after Opener has shown a balanced hand by rebidding 1NT or 2NT.

New Minor Forcing

Level 2

When partner opens the bidding with 1♣ or 1♦, we begin the process of looking for a Major suit fit by bidding our 4-card Major. If Opener has a 4-card Major then we will find our 4-4 Major suit fit when partner raises our Major suit response. If Opener does not raise our Major suit, but instead rebids 1NT (showing a balanced hand with 12-14 points), then we know that our side does not have a 4-4 Major suit fit. But if we have a 5-card Major suit then we are not ready to give up on looking for a Major suit fit, because Opener could still have 3-card support for our Major suit.

If we have a hand with less than invitational values and a 5-card Major suit then we can simply rebid our suit at the 2-level, ending the auction there.

Example

1♣ 1♠
1NT 2♠

Partner's 1NT rebid promised a balanced hand with 2-3 card ♠. With a minimum hand, we should strive to play in our long suit. Thus, Responder rebids 2♠ and the auction ends there.

Note: This is like a Jacoby Transfer auction, where Responder corrects 1NT to a 5-card Major suit with a weak hand. When we have a weak hand, it is important for our long suit to be trump. Otherwise, our long suit is unlikely to be helpful to partner.

When we have a 5-card Major suit and invitational or better values (10+ points) then we want to explore for a Major suit fit and at least invite game. This is done by Responder using an artificial bid called *New Minor Forcing*. This bid is like Stayman in that it promises at least invitational values (10+ points after a 1NT rebid) and it asks Opener to further describe their hand.

Examples

1♣ 1♠
1NT 2♦*

Here 2♦ is an artificial bid that says nothing about ♦ (or any of the rest of Responder's shape), promises at least 10 points, and asks Opener to further describe their hand - both in terms of shape and strength.

1♦ 1♥
1NT 2♣*

Here 2♣ is an artificial bid that says nothing about ♣ (or any of the rest of Responder's shape), promises at least 10 points, and asks Opener to further describe their hand - both in terms of shape and strength.

As Responder, this is our primary tool for continuing the bidding when we are not sure about what strain to play in or what level to play at but we do have enough values to continue the auction. This bid by Responder does not promise a 5-card Major suit, though one of the most common reasons for using this tool is to look for a 5-3 Major suit fit. Instead, it just says that Responder has a good hand and wants to know more about Opener's hand.

Opener's Rebids after NMF - Shape and Strength

Level 2

After Responder uses NMF to ask Opener more about their hand, then Opener must describe both their shape and strength. When describing their shape Opener usually uses the following priority ordering:

1. 3-cards in Responder's Major suit.
2. 4-cards in the unbid Major suit.
3. 5-cards in a minor suit - Opener's primary suit.
4. NT to show none of the above!

Note: Some partnerships use a different priority ordering (for example switching 1 and 2,) or other options. But this priority list allows for efficient communication

because the most common reason for Respond to use NMF is to look for a 5-3 Major suit fit. By showing the 3-card support as partner's suit as the first priority, the auctions are simpler and reveal less to the opponents.

Example

1♦ 1♠
1NT 2♣*
2♠ 4♠

If Opener's shape is 3-4-4-2, then by showing the 3-card ♠ suit (instead of their 4-card ♥ suit) after Responder's NMF it becomes much easier for the partnership to find a 5-3 Major suit fit.

Opener must also describe the strength of their hand to partner with their rebid after NMF:

- If Opener rebids a suit at the 2-level or 2NT they tend to show a minimum hand (12 to a bad 13 points).
- If Opener jumps to the 3-level, they show maximum values (a good 13 or 14 points).

Detailed Example

1♦ 1♠
1NT 2♣*
—?

- 2♦ 5-card ♦, minimum values
- 2♥ 2-4-4-3 (maybe 2-4-5-2), minimum values (2nd Priority with min values)
- 2♠ 3-card ♠, minimum values (1st Priority with min values)
- 2NT 2-3-4-4 minimum values
- 3♣ 2-2-5/4 maximum values
- 3♦ 5-card ♦, usually 2-3-5-3, maximum values
- 3♥ 2-4-4-3 (maybe 2-4-5-2), maximum values (2nd Priority with max values)
- 3♠ 3-card ♠, maximum values (1st Priority with max values)
- 3NT 2-3-4-4 maximum (maybe 5-card ♦)

After NMF, Opener shows both their shape (starting by showing their Major suit length) and their strength (minimum or maximum values for having rebid 1NT).

NMF When Opener Rebids 2NT

Level 2

When Opener rebids 2NT showing a balanced hand with 18-19 points then Responder can use NMF to show find out more about Opener's hand (focusing on their Major suit holding) and create a game forcing auction. Since Opener has shown 18-19 points then Responder does not need 10 points to use NMF; instead,

7+ points (sometimes a good 6 points) is enough to create force to game and explore more about a potential Major suit fit.

Responder will frequently use NMF in these auctions with a 5-card Major and 7+ points.

Example

1♣ 1♠
2NT 3♦*
3♠ 4♠

This is a common auction for finding a 5-3 Major suit fit after Opener has shown a balanced 18-19 point hand with 2-3 card ♠ (2NT rebid).

NMF After a 1♥ Opening Bid

Level 2

When the auction begins 1♥ – 1♠ and Opener rebids 1NT (or even 2NT), Responder can still use NMF even though no minor suit has been bid. In this case both minor suits are “new minors” and either one can be used to force the auction and get more information about Opener’s hand. Responder tends to bid the one that they have a better holding in (almost like a natural bid) and without a good holding in either they tend to use the cheapest bid – bidding ♣. These auctions can be a bit confusing because no minor has been bid, but they tend to function in the same way, with a new minor being artificial and forcing for at least one round and trying to find out more about Opener’s hand.

Other Uses of NMF

Level 3

Responder can use NMF to search for a Major suit fit (either a 5-3 fit or a 4-4 fit) with invitational or better values. But Responder can also use NMF with other types of hands that want to get more information from the Opener about the shape and strength of their hand.

Responder’s NMF bid does not promise a 5-card Major. Thinking that it does is a common misconception because it is the most frequent use of NMF.

Example

Responder can use NMF to make a slam try when they lack any other forcing bid.

1♦ 1♠
1NT __?

In this auction, there is no immediate way for Responder to show a ♦ fit, force the auction, and keep it below 3NT; 2♦ shows 6-9 points (to play), and 3♦ shows 10-11 points (invitational). Responder can use NMF and then support ♦ to show a big hand with a ♦ fit.

1♦ 1♠
1NT 2♣*
2♠ 3♦!

This sequence shows ♦ support (at least 4-cards) and at least game forcing values and is usually a slam-try, since with only 12-15 points Responder will often just jump to 3NT.

Conclusion

New Minor Forcing is a valuable tool for Responder to use on the second round of the bidding after Opener has rebid either 1NT or 2NT. This tool allows Responder to force the auction and find out more information about the Opener's hand. Having a bid that is clearly forcing, shows values, and allows the partnership to explore game is extremely valuable. When partner opens the bidding with 1NT (or 2NT) then Responder has Stayman as a tool for finding out more about Opener's shape and to explore game. NMF is a similar tool for Responder in auctions where Opener rebids 1NT (or 2NT). Make it a part of your bidding toolbox!