

# The 2♠ response to a 1NT opening

Send your questions to the Editor, or e-mail David Bakhshi directly at DavidBakhshi@aol.com

**MICHAEL Gwilliam writes by e-mail:**  
*When responding to an opening bid of 1NT, it seems easy enough to locate major-suit fits, but often a 4-4 minor-suit fit can be missed. In your view, what are the most useful conventions that aid this process without losing the benefit of Stayman and Transfers?*

Dear Michael,

While most partnerships that agree to use transfers play that a 2♦ response shows at least five hearts, and a 2♥ response shows at least five spades, there are several meanings that one might attach to a 2♠ response. The meaning chosen tends to vary depending on whether the partnership prefers to focus on dealing with long minor suits, or the more balanced hand types where 4-4 minor fits may need to be located.

These are the most common treatments in this country at tournament level:

1. **2♠ = Weakness take-out to a minor.**  
Responder's 2♠ asks opener to bid 3♣. Responder plans to pass with a weak hand with clubs, or bid 3♦ with a weak hand with diamonds.  
This method has the advantage of simplicity, and also allows the partnership to retain a natural invitational raise to 2NT. The main disadvantage is the inability to invite game when holding a hand with a long minor, e.g. ♠ x ♥ K x x ♦ A Q J x x x ♣ x x x.

2. **2♠ = Invitational raise to 2NT or balanced hand with slam interest.**  
Opener is expected to bid 2NT with a minimum hand, or bid his cheapest four-card (or longer) suit with a maximum.

Over 2NT, responder passes with an invitational hand, and either raises to 3NT or bids his cheapest four-card (or longer) suit with a slam-interested hand. If opener shows a maximum hand, then responder bids 3NT with a hand that was originally invitational to game, or explores for slam with a stronger hand.

Since 2NT is no longer needed as an invitational raise, it is now used to show a weak hand with a long minor. Opener is expected to bid 3♣, which the responder either passes or converts to 3♦.

This method allows for exploration of minor-suit slams with relatively balanced hands, but also fails to enable responder to invite game with a long minor.

3. **2♠ = Transfer to clubs.**  
Perhaps the most popular treatment among experts involves the use of 'four-suit transfers'.  
A 2♠ response is used to show clubs, after which the partnership can agree that opener either bids 2NT or 3♣ to show a positive or negative



David Bakhshi

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hand for clubs. Responder either intends to play in 3♣ or bid beyond 3♣ with stronger hands (again it is a matter for partnership agreement which hands go via a transfer and when responder bids a suit directly at the three level). Using this method, a 2NT response is a transfer to diamonds. As with the 2♠ response, opener either bids 3♣ or 3♦ depending on his diamond holding. There is a slight advantage to bidding 3♣ with a negative diamond holding as responder can now pass when holding a weak hand with at least five cards in both clubs and diamonds.

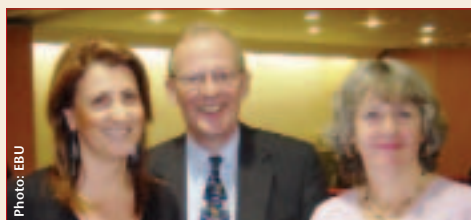
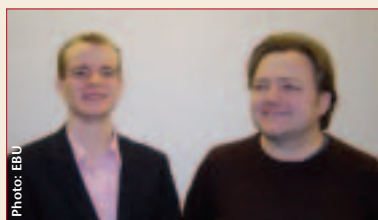
The advantage of playing transfers to each minor is that the responder can sign-off with a weak hand, invite game, or explore for slam when holding a long minor suit. The main disadvantage, however, is the loss of a natural raise to 2NT.

The corollary to this affects the use of Stayman, as invitational hands without a major still have to go via 2♣. This is what is meant by the expression 'non-promissory' Stayman.

Should your partnership wish to adopt four-suit transfers, then, for simplicity, I would recommend that you agree that responder uses a 2♠ or 2NT response with hands that wish to sign-off or invite game, and also with slam-interested hands containing a second suit, while a direct jump to 3♣ or 3♦ is retained for single-suited hands with slam interest.

Hands that are only interested in playing in the best game can go via Stayman and then follow up with a bid of 3♣ or 3♦ over opener's response. □

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