



Sandra Landy

VERY early in our bridge playing career, we learn that not all suits are equal. Why? Because majors need only ten tricks for game but minors need eleven. And because 3NT only needs nine tricks, we often play in 3NT even when we have a minor-suit fit – unless of course, slam is on the horizon. So it is vastly more important to locate our eight-card major-suit fit and it's usually a good thing at pairs if we miss playing at the five level in our eight-card minor suit fit.

Playing an opening 1NT as 12-14, how should we bid a balanced 15-19 points that is too good for opening 1NT? Of course, we have to open a suit and rebid in no-trumps, unless a major suit fit is found. So which suit should we open with two four-card suits? With both majors, we open 1♥ because partner will respond 1♠ holding four or more, making certain that neither major-suit contract is missed.

But here's the 100-dollar question: what do you open with one major and one minor suit? Call me simple minded, and many do, but I think it's a good idea to open the major, the suit where I actually want to play and where the strong hand will be declarer. I investigate the major first and if partner denies four-card support, I rebid in no-trumps. That makes sure that the stronger hand is declarer in either the major suit or the no-trump game, offering the best chance of success.

Recently I played against a pair who opened the minor. This was the deal:

♠ A 2		♠ Q J 9 7 5
♥ K Q 9 7		♥ A 10 8 5
♦ K 9 3		♦ 7 3
♣ A K 10 5		♣ 9 4

Don't bid 4-card suits up the line with a 4-4-3-2

Two top players debate a hot bridge topic. Tell us whose argument has won you over by e-mailing the Editor at elena@ebu.co.uk

Their bidding went 1♣ – 1♠ – 3NT, which failed on a diamond lead. Their inquest suggested that perhaps 1♣ – 1♠ – 2♥ showed 16-19 points and four hearts. True – but won't responder have every right to take partner for an unbalanced hand with more than four clubs?

Swap the spades and diamonds in responder's hand, so it is:

♠ 7 3
♥ A 10 8 5
♦ Q J 9 7 5
♣ 9 4

Now responder replies 1♦ to 1♣. If opener rebids 1♥, is it 100% forcing? Is opener really showing a balanced hand with only four-card suits? Could it not be a weaker hand with more clubs than hearts? A jump rebid of 2♥ isn't the answer, that shows the strength, but surely denies a balanced hand. It must be best to open 1♥ and unless responder can raise hearts, a 3NT rebid says it all.

Responder might raise 1♥ to 2♥ on an unbalanced hand, with only three hearts. But opener can jump to 3NT over 2♥, asking responder to convert to 4♥ with four cards in hearts and to pass with only three.

Furthermore, opponents are not bound to pass just because we open the bidding. If responder bids 1♦ over the opening 1♣, fourth player can overcall 1♠, or jump to 2♠ or even 3♠. Does opener double for take-out? Or try an optimistic no-trump rebid? Worse still, second in hand may bid spades before partner has even had the opportunity to respond. Would you make a take-out double on responder's hand, with just 7 points? But if second hand overcalls in spades, you would be able to bid 2♥ or 3♥ if partner had opened 1♥ – you might even stretch to 4♥ if you had to.

All these problems disappear when you open the major, which is where you want to play if you have a fit. You may miss a 4-4 minor fit, but when is the last time you played in five or six of a minor?

Maybe, if you open 1♣, you have to play a forcing 2NT rebid by opener, thereby making sure you describe both hands fully and will find the major suit game when you have a 4-4 fit. This might work but in the process you will describe both hands far too fully to your opponents, who will no doubt find it much easier to make the best lead to any game you bid.

If you already prefer minor to major, please keep playing that system against me! It's much easier to defend against and even easier to drive you into the wrong contract! But for those wishing to play my methods, here they are.

My recommended system of opening bids with 4-4-3-2 hands

- 1NT shows 12-14 points. With hands of 15+ points:
- With four hearts and four spades, open 1♥. Unless partner responds 1♠, rebid in no-trumps. If partner has a long minor and four spades, he can introduce spades on his second bid to emphasise the distributional nature of his hand.
- With one major and one minor, open the major. Even if partner responds in the minor suit where you have four cards, rebid in no-trumps. Exceptionally, you may raise the minor if opponents overcall and you don't have a stopper in their suit.
- With both minors, it matters less what you choose. I open 1♦ as only if the auction becomes competitive will we need to play in a minor and then I can rebid in clubs without distorting my shape. □

Bid four-card suits up the line with a 4-4-3-2



THE DEBATE

Ron Klinger

Or vote by post (Editor, English Bridge, 23 Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LR). Comments for publication (not more than 200 words, please) are welcome.

WITH a 4-4-3-2 and 15-19 points, playing a 12-14 1NT, we all open 1♥ with two four-card majors. This is to allow responder room to bid 1♠ which we can then support. With two four-card minors, it often does not matter, but opening 1♣ is least likely to cause a problem. If you have a stopper in every suit, you can rebid comfortably in no-trumps regardless of which suit partner bids. The same applies if you open 1♦, but then problems can arise if partner bids your second suit and you have an unguarded outside suit. Consider this situation:

Hand 1

♠ A 6 3
♥ 7 6
♦ A K J 6
♣ K Q 4 3

If you open 1♣ and partner bids 1♦, you can sensibly bid 3♦. If you open 1♦ and partner responds 2♣, what do you propose? You are much too strong for 3♣, but 4♣

will take you past 3NT, which might well be your best spot.

The same problem arises when your 4-4-3-2 has a four-card major and a four-card minor.

Imagine you pick up as dealer:

Hand 2

♠ A K 7 5
♥ K Q
♦ 9 5 2
♣ A K 9 8

If you open 1♠ and partner responds 2♦, you have an easy 3NT rebid to show exactly 19 points. What if partner's bid is 2♣? Do you jump to 3NT and hide the club support?

Or (if you can) rebid 2NT, forcing, to show 15+ points and pass partner's raise to 3NT? You might easily miss a slam:

Layout 1

♠ A K 7 5	♠ 4 3
♥ K Q	♥ A 6 2
♦ 9 5 2	♦ K Q J
♣ A K 9 8	♣ Q 7 6 5 4

Is responder going to rebid over 3NT or do more than raise 2NT to 3NT with such a poor suit?

On the other hand, 3NT might still be the best spot:

Layout 2

♠ A K 7 5	♠ Q 4 2
♥ K Q	♥ A J
♦ 9 5 2	♦ J 6 4 3
♣ A K 9 8	♣ Q J 4 3

If it goes 1♠ – 2♣ – 3NT you are in good shape, but if you opt for 1♠ – 2♣ – 4♣ you are almost certainly going to be over-board. If you do choose 3NT, not only might you miss a slam, but 3NT could be wrong, too:

Layout 3

♠ A K 7 5	♠ Q 9 2
♥ K Q	♥ A J 4 2
♦ 9 5 2	♦ 3
♣ A K 9 8	♣ Q J 6 4 3

You have an easy 6♣, but if the bidding starts 1♠ – 2♣ – 3NT is responder supposed to run for fear that you have an unguarded suit? For all responder knows, the hands could be like this after a 1♠ opening:

Layout 4

♠ A K 7 5	♠ Q J 2
♥ K Q	♥ A 8 4 2
♦ A K 9 8	♦ 3
♣ 9 5 2	♣ Q J 6 4 3

You have nine tricks on top in 3NT, while 5♣ might fail if you encounter a bad trump break.

Notice how comfortable these hands are if the opening is in the cheaper suit and responder bids opener's second suit. With Hand 2, if opener starts with 1♣ and responder bids 1♠, you have a comfortable raise to 4♠. With a couple of points less, you can jump to 3♠.

In layouts 1, 2 and 3, once opener starts with 1♣ responder knows that a club fit exists. You might still end up in 3NT on layout 1 rather than the excellent 6♣, but at least you have a chance to find the slam. In layout 2, you will certainly arrive in 3NT after a 1♣ – 3♣ start. In layout 3, you will definitely avoid 3NT after a 1♣ opening, whether East replies 1♥ or opts for a 3♦ splinter. Notice that West also has no problem if East replies in a red suit. After 1♣ – 1♦ or 1♣ – 1♥, West can show the spades and find the best spot thereafter.

Finally . . .

If you always open the cheaper suit with a 4-4-3-2, then when opener starts with the higher suit and bids a lower suit later, this will *guarantee* at least five cards in the suit opened.

Layout 5

♠ K J	♠ A Q 3
♥ A K 8 6 4	♥ 9 3 2
♦ K Q 7 3	♦ A J 6 5 2
♣ 7 6	♣ 4 3

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	2♦	Pass
?			

If West supports diamonds, East knows that West has five hearts and now the partnership should reach 4♥. □