

Improve your Bidding After Minor Suit Fits

How to find No-Trumps when your only fit is in a minor.

When to consider bidding to 5-of-a-minor instead of 3NT.

Which hands should look for slam in a minor. Declarer a variety of 3NT, 5C and 6C hands.



An Online Workshop run by Will Jenner-O'Shea



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Minor Suit Bidding Tips

In general, open $1 \clubsuit$ with $3 \clubsuit \& 3 \diamondsuit$.

If you have $4\clubsuit$ and $4\blacklozenge$, consider opening $1\blacklozenge$ instead of $1\clubsuit$, or if one suit is much stronger, open the stronger suit.

If you have 4♠, 4♥, 3♦ and 2♣, some people always open 1♣, some people always open 1♣. Discuss this with your partner.

It rarely matters, since you have both the Majors, and you are also balanced, so you are unlikely to end up playing in the minor suit anyway.

Don't add shortage points when you raising a minor, if 3NT is still in the picture.

Partner opens 1 + and this is your hand:

- ♠ K93
- ♥ 2
- AJ872
- 🗣 J765

If you bid 3, proudly showing 11-12 points, and then your partner bids 3NT, all of a sudden your singleton Heart is a liability!

Playing normal raises, simply bid 2 for now.

More Minor Suit Bidding Tips

When raising a minor suit, be careful bidding to $4\clubsuit$ or $4\diamondsuit$, even if that bid seems to match your points.

Once you go past 3NT, you can't go back.

You open 1♥and your partner responds 2♦, your call?

- 🔶 AJ
- **V** AKT64
- **•** Q854
- ♣ J2

Your hand is good, but if you jump to $4 \blacklozenge$, it will mean that partner can't offer 3NT as a choice of games. Simply bid $3 \diamondsuit$, and hope that partner can try for 3NT instead of $5 \blacklozenge$.

If you rule out 3NT as a possible game, then add all your shortage points. And decided how high to go.

If you have a singleton or void in the opponent's suit, then slam is possibly close.

If you have 2+ cards in the opponent's suit, with no Ace, then you are risk of losing 2 tricks quickly.

Asking for Aces when you are playing in a minor can be difficult, since the response sometimes take your too high!

"Asking for a Stopper" Game Forcing Cue Bid

When the opposition have already bid in your auction and you are considering going into No-Trumps, you need at least one winner (or stopper) in *their suit*. Note that you don't need a stopper in every suit.

After the second round of the bidding, if you decide that we probably want to be in No-Trumps, *but you don't have a stopper in the opponent's suit*, then you can **bid** *their* **suit**.

A Game Forcing 'Cue Bid'.

Bidding the opposition's suit forces our team to game, it says that we haven't found a fit, *and it asks partner for a stopper in their suit.*

If partner DOES HAVE a stopper in their suit (don't worry about the other suits) then she will bid No-Trumps.

If partner DOES NOT have a stopper in their suit, then she will bid anything else, other than No-Trumps, and we will continue looking for game elsewhere. Note that you cannot pass the Cue Bid.

You can only Ask for a stopper if you know that you have a game going hand.

"Showing Stoppers"

If we have agreed on a minor suit, and thinking about No-Trumps, but there is a weakness somewhere and you want to investigate, then you can't specifically ask for a stopper, but you can show a stopper in a different suit by bidding that suit – partner will offer another stopper or No-Trumps:



Note that when you bid 3♥, you already knew that there was no Heart fit. If partner had 4+ Hearts they would have bid them in preference to raising the minor.

The 3♥ bid shows a weakness somewhere else.

Similarly, when partner bids Spades, they aren't looking for a Spade fit, they are looking for No-Trumps.

The 3♠ bid suggests a weakness in Clubs.

Stoppers and No-Trumps Bidding

In most cases, don't worry about specific stoppers in specific suits. If the opponents have bid a suit then you need a stopper in their suit. If you don't have a stopper, then cue bid their suit to ask for a stopper.

If our team have bid three suits, and we are contemplating No-Trumps, then the opposition are likely to lead the fourth suit. You need a stopper in the 'fourth suit' to bid No-Trumps. If you don't have a stopper, then use Fourth-Suit Forcing to ask for a stopper.

If the opponents have bid a suit, don't worry about stoppers in the unbid suits.

Fourth Suit Game Forcing

After our team has bid three suits, then a bid of the fourth-suit is an Artificial bid, and is Fourth-Suit Forcing

It is unlikely that we will have a fit in the fourth-suit.

I recommend that you use **Fourth-Suit Forcing as Game Forcing** (some play Forcing for one round only).

An exception: The following auction is generally played as Natural, not Fourth-Suit Forcing:

1♣ : 1♦ : 1♥ : 1♠

Using Fourth-Suit Forcing.

Fourth-Suit Forcing doesn't show anything, except a game going hand. It can be used on hands with weakness in the fourth-suit, looking for a stopper. Or hands that are still looking for a fit somewhere. Or hands that are half interested in slam, but don't want to commit to bidding 4NT.

Responding to Fourth-Suit Forcing.

The partner of the Fourth-Suit Forcing bidder bids Naturally, and can't pass until game is reached.

Their priorities:

Three card support for Partner's 4+ card Major

A Stopper in the unbid suit (Bid No-Trumps)

Extra length in a suit.

Roman Keycard 14/30

A more sophisticated version of Ace asking is **Roman Keycard Blackwood** where in addition to the Aces, the King of our agreed trump suit is counted like a fifth Ace (a Key-card).

Which suit is Trumps:

If we have bid and raised a suit, then that suit is trumps, *even if there has been further bidding*.

If we haven't agreed on a suit, then the agreed suit is the last naturally bid suit.

The Keycards:

There are five Keycards. The four Aces, and the King of our trump suit.

4NT – Keycard (14/30):

At some stage, either player could be interested in slam, and they bid 4NT to ask for Keycards. The answers are:

4NT: 5♣ : 1 or 4 Keycards

5 : 3 or 0 Keycards

5♥: 2 Keycards

and I **don't** have the Queen of our agreed trump suit.

54 : 2 Keycards

and I do have the Queen of our agreed trump suit.

As with Blackwood, the 'asker' now bids on to slam, or signs off in 5-of-our-suit if there are too many keycards missing.

Note: some players swap the responses of 5 \clubsuit and 5 \blacklozenge (03/14)

**Once you play Keycard, you no longer use Regular Blackwood any more **

Further Bidding

If the 'asker' is interested in a grand slam, then they can ask for Kings using 5NT, but they don't show the King for trumps, which has already been accounted for with the Keycard bid. 5NT^{King Ask}- 6. : no 'side' Kings

- 6 + : 1 'side' King

- 6 ?: 2 'side' Kings
- 64 : 3 'side' Kings

Queen Asking:

After a 5♣ or 5♦ response, the 'asker' can ask for the Trump Queen (a vital card) by bidding the **lowest available non-trump suit.** Bidding our trump suit would be a sign-off.

If you **don't have the Queen**, then go back to our trump suit at the minimum level.

If you **do have the trump Queen**, then reply using King-Ask responses **starting at whatever the current bid is**.

| Eg:♠ KQJ874 ♥ 4 ● ^K6 | ▲ A52 ♥ AK3 ▲ O 1765 |
|-----------------------------|--|
| ▲ A76 | ◆ Q3703 ♣ K4 |
| 1♠ | 2 |
| 3♠ 5♦ (0 or 3) | 4NI (Keycard on ♠) 5♥* |

(Assuming 3 keycards, not 0 keycards. We have all the Keycards. **Queen ask**)

6♣* (Confirms the trump Queen. And shows one King outside of Spades. 5♠ would say No Q, 5NT would show the Queen, but no Kings) 7NT!!

Can count easily 13 tricks. 6♠, ♥AK, 5♠, ♣AK



North opens 1 ***** and South raises to 3 ***** which shows around 11 - 12 High Card points. **Bidding Tip:** When you are raising a minor, don't add shortage points - the final contract might hopefully be No-Trumps, and the shortages won't be useful.

North has a hand that wants to go to game, but should use the available bidding space to investigate No-Trumps. North knows that there is no Spade fit, since partner's 3 ♣ raise denies a four+ card Major. North bids their **Cheapest Stopper**, 3 ♥, which shows a Heart stopper, and denies a Diamond stopper. Since that is the only suit that South is lacking, South bids 3 NT.

On a Heart lead from West, Declarer should play the King (or Queen) immediately, which forces out the Ace. If East switches to the \blacklozenge Q, then Declarer should play the \blacklozenge K to force out the Ace and promote the \blacklozenge T as a stopper. Once Declarer gains the lead, she can win 5 \clubsuit and 4 \blacklozenge tricks, plus whatever other stoppers she has won.



South opens 1 \bigstar and then raises North's Diamonds. South has a great hand, but should be careful jumping. **Bidding Tip:** Don't go past 3 NT when you are raising a minor unless you are really sure that you want to play in the minor - once you bid 4 \clubsuit or 4 \blacklozenge you can't go back to 3 NT.

North bids 3 ♥ to show a Heart stopper, but deny a stopper elsewhere. Since only Clubs are unbid, North must be worried about Clubs. South bids 3 NT with their (dubious) Club stopper.

If West leads a Club then Declarer has one Club stopper, but then must take all their tricks without losing the lead. There are $6 \\ \bullet$, 2 \lor and the A (plus the Club).

If West chooses to lead a different suit, then Declarer can safely try the Spade finesse, since even if it loses, they still have a possible Club stopper.



North opens 1 and South raises to 3 (11-12 HCP) - South doesn't get too carried away with shortage points. North shows their Heart stopper (bidding a new suit after a minor is not necessarily a suit, just showing stoppers, looking for 3 NT).

Both players have a singleton, so getting to 3 NT is difficult.

If West leads a low Spade (it is fine to lead 'away' from an Ace against No-Trumps), then Declarer has one Spade stopper, but can't afford to lose the lead.

There are 5 tricks, and the K, and A, but Declarer can't afford to establish any Heart tricks. Declarer should try finessing the Clubs, since a successful finesse will make the contract. Lead the Q and if the finesse wins, lead the T next.



Lead: A K

South opens 1 ♥ and then raises North's 2 ♣ bid to 3 ♣. South shouldn't jump beyond 3 NT. North is worried about Spades, so bids 3 ♦ to show their Diamond stoppers, but lack of Spade stopper.

South has no Spade stopper so does NOT bid 3 NT, and goes back to Clubs. North-South avoid a terrible 3 NT contract here.

Declarer will probably lose the first two Spade tricks, and then can get the lead and draw trumps.

The Diamonds will mostly win, and the Hearts can be established by trumping one after playing the ♥ A and ♥ K. Don't finesse Hearts, since you can trump them instead which is much safer.



Lead: • 4

North opens 1 ♥ and then raises South's 2 ♣ bid to 3 ♣. South has Spades covered, but no stoppers in Diamonds, so bids 3 ♠. North has the Diamonds covered, so confidently bids 3 NT. North has a singleton, and South has two weak doubletons, but if they can work it out, they have all the suits covered between them.

East will probably lead a low Diamond against 3 NT by North - it is fine to lead 'away' from an Ace against a No-Trump contract. Declarer has 6 ♣ tricks, plus the ♠ AK and ♥ A, and the Diamond stopper they win early in the game. There aren't many more tricks to be established, and the remaining Diamonds are fragile, so Declarer should probably just take their tricks.



South opens 1 A and then raises the 2 A bid to 3 A. North has a stopper in Hearts, but no stopper in Diamonds. South has a really good hand, and once they commit to playing in Clubs (instead of No-Trumps), they have a very strong hand. Having no Diamond stopper, but having a singleton Diamond, means that they only have one Diamond loser if the play with Clubs as trumps. South might investigate a slam.

The Defenders will take the first Diamond trick, but once Declarer gets the lead, she can draw trumps and win all the remaining tricks easily.



North opens 1 ◆ and then jump rebids to 3 ◆ over South's 1 ▲ response. Repeating the Diamonds shows six+ cards there, and the jump shows 16+ points. South has stoppers everywhere, so 3 NT is an option. South also has Aces in the unbid suits (no losers there). The South hand is close to a slam, and might bid 4 NT instead of settling in 3 NT. With all of the Keycards, South might ask for Kings, which sometimes takes them too high (higher than 6 ◆) they can still bail out in 6 NT if they don't want to bid to 7 ◆. They have all the Aces, so they have a stopper in each suit.

Playing in 6 \blacklozenge , Declarer can draw trumps, and then win 6 \blacklozenge , 2 \clubsuit , the \checkmark A and at least two Spades (making at least 12 tricks). There are two options to find an additional trick with the \blacklozenge J. Either finessing the Spade, or attempting to trump Spades until the Queen comes out. Bidding and making a slam is always great, but possibly making a 13th trick is a small extra score.



South opens 1 ♦ and then jumps to 3 ♦ over the 1 ♥ response. North has stoppers in the other suits, and chooses to bid 3 NT. This hand is similar to the previous hand, but North has no Aces (critical for slam) and not very good Diamonds.

East probably leads a low Club against 3 NT. Declarer gets the lead, and can easily win six Diamond tricks and three Spades. If Declarer notices that they have a second Club stopper, they might lead Hearts early to establish a Heart or two to go with all the rest.



North opens 1 \blacklozenge and East overcalls 1 \blacklozenge . South has a great Diamond fit, but only 9 HCP. South should bid just 2 \blacklozenge . South shouldn't add their shortage points, since North might bid to 3 NT, and the singleton is worthless. If the auction gets competitive later, South might compete to 3 \blacklozenge with good Diamonds, and shape.

Note that bidding 2 • and then 3 • shows more shape, not more points.

If South had jumped to 3 • immediately, North might bid 3 NT which would be a disaster.

If North-South play in Diamonds, East will probably lead the ♠ K. Declarer can win and draw trumps. The best play in Clubs is to lead the ♣ J 'towards' the King, and similarly in Hearts (lead the ♥ 7 'towards' the King). Declarer will probably lose a trick in each side suit, and make around 9 or maybe 10 tricks.



South opens 1 * and West overcalls 1 *. North has a great fit and a great hand, but can't bid 2 * or 3 * which are passable. North could bid 4 * or 5 *, but that risks missing out on 3 NT. North can't bid No-Trumps (no Spade stopper), but can utilise the Cue Bid (2 *) to ask for a stopper. South has a stopper in Spades, so bids No-Trumps. South shouldn't worry about stoppers in any other suit, only the suit that the opponents have bid.

West will probably lead a Spade, and best in No-Trumps is to have 3 cards in a sequence. West might lead the Ace, or better, a low Spade.

Declarer gets the lead soon enough, and needs to establish the Clubs to make her game. Best is to get the lead to her hand, and then lead the & J for the finesse. If the finesse wins repeat it.

Declarer can win 5 \clubsuit , 3 \blacklozenge , the \checkmark A and perhaps a Spade. If the Club finesse has lost, the hand would have been harder, but probably still makeable.



North opens 1 \bullet and East jump overcalls with 2 \bigstar . South has a great Diamond fit, and enough points for game, so can't bid 3 \bullet (passable). South bids 3 \bigstar to suggest a Diamond fit, but also look for 3 NT (asking for a Spade stopper). North has no Spade stopper, so bids 4 \bullet . South revalues their hand, and with the singleton, is very close to a slam. South also knows that they can't lose two Spade tricks.

East will lead the \bigstar A against 6 \blacklozenge by North, and there is no good suit to switch to next. The play in 6 \blacklozenge will be a lot easier than the bidding. Declarer has all the tricks in all the suits, just losing one Spade trick and making 12.



South opens 1 • and West overcalls 2 •. North has a game going hand, so can't bid 3 •. North bids 3 • to ask for a Spade stopper. South has a possible Spade stopper, but also a very powerful hand that is very good for a slam in a minor. South has a fragile stopper, but also a very unbalanced hand. South might look for slam instead of offering 3 NT.

Playing in 3 NT, Declarer has all the tricks, provided that the • Q drops.

Playing in 6 ♦, Declarer has all the tricks, provided that the trumps get drawn.