

## New Bidding Conventions in Bridge Baron 17

### Allow 1NT Openings With a Singleton Ace or King

Hands that are 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-3-1 (without a five-card major) and contain the same number of high-card points that you use for your 1NT opening range, often present very difficult rebid problems. If you are playing 15-17 1NT Openings and you hold 16 points and open 1♣ with a singleton king of diamonds, five clubs, four hearts, and three spades and then partner bids 1♠, what are you going to rebid? If you rebid 1NT, you are greatly undervaluing your hand; if you reverse into 2♥, you are overvaluing your hand and misdescribing it, covering up your good spade support while also considering your stiff king to be worth full value; and if you raise in spades, you are doing so on only three-card support and still don't know whether to bid 2♠ or 3♠. In essence, you are stuck. Often the best way to get this hand off your chest is simply to open it 1NT. 4-4-4-1 hands can present even more difficulties.

To solve this problem, some partnerships play that 1NT can be opened, on occasion, with a singleton. However, you should not open 1NT with any singleton. If you have a singleton and are opening 1NT anyway, you must be fairly confident that you can stop the opponents from running that suit against you, or at least provide partner with some assistance in preventing them from running that suit. You must have either a singleton ace or a singleton king to make a 1NT opening with a singleton. The singleton king will usually suffice as a stopper, as the opponents are likely to be leading into your hand and will often underlead an ace against a notrump contract.

This convention, as you may have guessed, allows you to control whether your partnership with Bridge Baron will ever open 1NT on these off-shape hands with a singleton ace or king.

**♣Note: Opening 1NT with singletons is generally frowned upon by the ACBL in tournament bridge. The ACBL believes that doing so regularly with the same partner can alter your systemic understanding of the meaning of 1NT openings and present you with an unfair advantage over the opponents. This is something to be aware of, but not to worry too much about, as, in spite of the ACBL, most top partnerships will on occasion open 1NT with singleton aces or kings.**

**♠Tip: You should not open 1NT with a five-card major and a side singleton ace or king. You will too often belong in your major-suit and not reach it when bidding this way and, additionally, your rebid problems are also minimized with a four-card suit you will be able to rebid at the two level.**

**♠Tip: Opening 1NT with a singleton ace or king in a major suit is riskier than when the singleton is in diamonds or clubs. When opening with a singleton in a major suit, you run the risk of partner transferring you to that suit and playing in a 5-1 fit, or else partner insisting on that suit as trump with only six.**

### Allow 1NT Openings With a Six-Card Minor

Is a hand with 6-3-2-2 distribution balanced? Most people would tell you that it is not, but nonetheless it can be right to open some 6-3-2-2 hands 1NT. Hands that are suitable for a 1NT opening despite a six-card minor typically contain the majority of their

high-card strength in the short suits, making the hand unsuitable for a one-of-a-minor opening and a three-of-a-minor rebid.

Even playing this convention, you should not open 1NT on hands with this shape when at the top of your NT range. Such hands are simply too strong and must be upgraded. Playing 15-17 1NT Openings, if you hold 17 high-card points you should either open one of your minor and rebid three of your minor or you should open one of your minor and rebid 2NT.

This convention controls whether Bridge Baron will open 1NT with suitable 6-3-2-2 distributions.

**♣Note: Your six-card suit MUST be a minor. DO NOT open 1NT with a six-card major.**

### **Artificial 2♣ and 2♦ Responses After 1♥/1♠ Followed by a Double**

After your partner has opened one of a major and your RHO has doubled, using 2♣ and 2♦ as natural and constructive bids just doesn't come up frequently enough. Making these bids artificial raises of partner's suit and consequently increasing your ability to describe your hand accurately when you have support for partner will lead to much more successful auctions in the competition that is likely to ensue. Additionally, in the cases in which your side has game, partner will be able to better judge his or her values knowing significantly more about your hand texture. Playing Artificial 2♣ and 2♦ responses, bidding 2♣ on the auction 1♥/1♠-Double shows 7-9 total points (a bad 10 is okay) and *exactly* three-card support for partner's major. Bidding 2♦ shows 7-9 (a bad 10 is okay) total points and four-card support for partner's major. A raise to two of partner's suit becomes preemptive in nature and shows 3-6 total points and exactly three-card support.

It is highly recommended that this convention be played in conjunction with *Truscott 2NT* (often also called Jordan), which you can read more about below. After 1♥/1♠-Double, *Truscott 2NT* shows 10+ total points and four-card support for partner, while three of partner's major shows a preemptive hand (3 to a bad 7 total points) with four-card support for partner.

All continuations after an artificial 2♣ or 2♦ response are natural.

### **Lead Directing Doubles**

When the opponents bid a suit artificially, you often have strength in the suit they are bidding, but know the final contract will belong to them. In these instances, you can double to help your partner select the opening lead. Your double says, "I have concentrated strength in the suit that I just doubled, so partner please lead this suit against the opponents' final contract." Lead Directing Doubles are most important when the opponents are bidding for slam and using Blackwood and you can double their response to Blackwood, telling partner what suit to lead against their slam and defeating a slam contract that otherwise would have made. However, Blackwood responses are not the only instance in which Lead Directing Doubles should be made. Often you can double a Stayman 2♣ bid, asking partner for a club lead, while the opponents are looking for a major-suit fit. Another occasion for a Lead Directing Double is when the opponents bid a suit artificially searching for a stopper in the suit to play in notrump. Many situations

arise in which a Lead Directing Double is suitable, and whenever the opponents bid a suit artificially, doubling for the lead should be strongly considered.

There are risks to making a Lead Directing Double. There is a possibility that the opponents actually do have cards in the suit they have bid and will be able to make the contract that you are doubling. This can be particularly painful against good opponents with the skill to redouble the contract. The other significant risk is that partner has a natural and superior lead in another suit, which, after your double, he or she will no longer make.

To mitigate these risks you must meet certain suit-length and suit-quality requirements. These vary depending on the level at which you will be doubling. Bridge Baron's requirements are as follows:

- At the two level: you need at least five cards in the suit and at least six HCP and three honors in the suit
- At the three level: you need at least four cards in the suit and at least two of the top three honors
- At the four level or higher: you need to have either the ace or the KQ in the suit and your suit-length does not matter.

### **Namyats Bids**

How often do you pick up hands on which you think it is right to preempt the opponents by opening four of a minor? The answer is probably not very often. It is usually best to open these hands either at the three level, the five level, with a Gambling 3NT, or to just wait and get into the auction later. On the other hand, opening in four of a major comes up much more frequently, can be very effective, and can be done on a wide-range of hands. The Namyats convention recognizes these differences and employs the opening 4♣ and 4♦ bids as strong four-of-a-major openings, freeing up the 4♥ and 4♠ openings bids to be more preemptive in nature.

Playing Namyats, a 4♣ opening bid is a strong 4♥ opener and a 4♦ opening bid is a strong 4♠ opener. There is much debate about what the correct strength for these openers is and how it affects the strength of your actual 4♥ and 4♠ opening bids. Bridge Baron operates on the assumption that 4♣ and 4♦ should be about a playing trick stronger than 4♥ and 4♠, but not so strong as to overrule a 2♣ opener on most hands with 9+ playing tricks (unless really concentrated values and unfavorable vulnerability). The vulnerability obviously has a significant impact, as at favorable vulnerability you want to preempt aggressively and make life difficult for the opponents, but at unfavorable you must be more conservative. You must always have either a good seven-card suit or an eight-card suit for a four-level major-suit opening. You also must have a side singleton or void and should not open at the four-level with 7-2-2-2 distribution.

- To open 4♣ or 4♦ you need 9+ playing tricks at unfavorable vulnerability, 8+ playing tricks at equal vulnerability, and 7.5+ playing tricks at favorable vulnerability.
- To open 4♥ or 4♠ you need 8+ playing tricks at unfavorable, 7.5 playing tricks at both vulnerable, 7 playing tricks at both non-vulnerable, and at least 7 or a distributional 6.5 playing tricks at favorable.

After a 4♣ or 4♦ Namyats opening bid, responder's choices are pretty straightforward. With no slam interest, responder simply bids four of partner's major. With slam interest,

responder can jump to slam, bid 4NT as Blackwood, or bid the suit between the opening bid and game in the opening suit as a quantitative ask about opener's hand.

### **Puppet Stayman Responses to 1NT**

Puppet Stayman is a convention typically used in response to partner's 2NT opening bids, to double check if opener has a five-card major and avoid missing out on 5-3 major-suit fits. With the increasing popularity of opening 1NT with a five-card major, some players have also started to employ Puppet Stayman in response to partner's 1NT opening bids. You can read about Puppet Stayman responses to 2NT by checking the *Puppet Stayman* section above.

Playing Puppet Stayman Responses to 1NT, 2♣ asks opener for a five-card major. With a five-card heart suit opener responds 2♥; with a five-card spade suit opener responds 2♠; without a five-card major, but with at least one four-card major, opener responds 2♦; and without either a five-card or a four-card major opener responds 2NT. After a 2♥, 2♠, or 2NT response, bidding proceeds naturally. However after a 2♦ response, the mechanisms are a little bit more complicated in order to help make the 1NT opener the declarer.

After a 2♦ response if you are still interested in looking for a 4-4 major suit fit, you bid the suit that you do NOT have. 2♥ shows a four-card *spade* suit, while 2♠ shows a four-card *heart* suit. If you have both majors, you have additional options, as you know that you must have at least one major-suit fit. 2NT shows both majors and invitational values. 3♥ shows either 4-4 in the majors and game-forcing values or exactly four hearts and exactly five spades and game-forcing values. 3♠ shows exactly four spades and exactly five hearts and game-forcing values. 3♣ and 3♦ are natural bids, showing the bid suit and slam interest and not necessarily promising a four-card major. 3NT is to play and denies interest in finding a four-four major-suit fit, likely indicating that you were just checking for a 5-3 fit before signing off in game.

### **Wolff Relay Bids**

Wolff Relay Bids are an entirely new structure of responses after partner opens one of a minor, you respond one of a major, and partner makes a jump rebid of 2NT. Most partnerships play some form of New Minor Forcing or Checkback Stayman in this situation. You can read more about those conventions above and compare them to Wolff Relays. Both New Minor Forcing and Checkback Stayman are designed to work more efficiently when partner has rebid 1NT rather than 2NT. Wolff Relays Bids are specifically designed for partner's jump rebid of 2NT.

The general premise behind Wolff Relays is that you use a 3♣ bid with your weak hands and that you use a 3♦ bid with all of your strong hands to check back for a 5-3 or 4-4 major suit fit that might have been missed. 3♣ and 3♦ are *always* artificial, regardless of whether partner opened 1♣ or 1♦.

Here is how Wolff Relays work in detail. You bid 3♣ with either a weak hand with length in the suit you bid at the one level, a weak hand that wants to play in 3♦, or a strong hand with slam interest and a good club suit. Note that the definition of a weak hand is very limited, partner has shown around 18 to 19 high-card points, so your hand must have been very minimal for a one-level response to begin with. A weak hand is typically seven or fewer total points. The 3♣ bid is artificial and asks opener if he or she

has three-card support for your major suit. With three-card support for your major, opener will bid three of your suit; without three-card support, opener will always rebid 3♦. After opener bids three of your major, you can pass or decide to upgrade your hand, knowing partner has support for you, and bid four. After opener rebids 3♦, you can pass if you want to play in 3♦ or correct to three of your major with a weak hand and a six-card or longer suit. Partner will know your major-suit rebid is weak and shows length and will pass dutifully. If you rebid 3NT over either of partner's responses, you show the strong hand with clubs and slam interest.

If you are strong enough to force game and have either a fifth card in the major you bid at the one level or an unbid four-card spade suit when you are 4-4 in the majors, you should make an artificial 3♦ inquiry to check back for a major-suit fit. With three-card support for the suit you bid at the one level, partner will respond in three of your suit and with an unbid four-card major partner will respond in that major. Partner will always prefer hearts, so on the auction 1♣-1♠-2NT-3♦-3♥, partner may still have three-card spade support, and on the auction 1♣-1♥-2NT-3♦-3♥, partner may still have a four-card spade suit. If partner does not have support for either of the majors, he or she will respond 3NT. If after partner's response you have found a fit, you can either sign off in game or explore slam; otherwise, you should bid 3NT. If you sign off in 3NT and partner happens to have the other major as well, he or she can correct to four of that major, because your 3♦ bid guarantees interest in playing in at least one of the majors.

There are also some other implications from playing Wolff Relay Bids that affect your 3♥ and 3♠ responses on these auctions. Rebidding three of the major you bid at the one level definitively shows a game-forcing hand and a six-card suit. In fact, it tends to show at least mild slam interest, because with a minimum game force you could just bid four of the major. And, rebidding 3♥ after an initial bid of 1♠ shows 5-5 or better distribution and a game force. With a hand with five spades and four hearts, you would bid 3♦, so your 3♥ bid guarantees 5-5 distribution. With exactly five hearts and four spades, having bid 1♥ on your first bid, you should now bid 3♠ to show game-forcing values.

**♣Note:** Playing Wolff generally assumes that on the auction 1♣/1♦-1♥-2NT, the 2NT rebidder may very well have concealed a four-card spade suit. It is generally a good practice with strong hands suitable for a 2NT rebid to bypass your four-card spade suit on this auction.

**♠Tip:** Wolff Relay Bids is an advanced convention with many subtle implications. Occasions to use it are also infrequent. It is recommended that you play a simpler convention such as New Minor Forcing or Checkback Stayman unless you are an advanced player and are able to think through and fully understand Wolff Relay Bids.