

Directional Inverted Minor Raises

I believe in inverted minor suit raises; I really do. The notion that a jump raise of a minor-suit opening is weak and pre-emptive seems so natural that it is not worth discussing. And the theory of keeping the bidding low (simple raise over a minor-suit opening) with a strong hand in order to properly explore a notrump game is totally consistent with the principles of 2/1. So what's my problem?

Unless my partner prefers to employ a weak notrump opening, our minor suit openings may consist of anything from a topless three-card suit and a minimum opener to a 20-point monster with a solid 6-card (or more) suit. If our minor suit openings are going to be that varied, it seems to be that our forcing responses need to be a little more well-defined.

For various reasons, I have rejected the popular (but flawed) "criss-cross" treatment, where a jump-shift in the other minor suit shows a limit raise (of the opener's suit). It makes notrump exploration more difficult, and it does so on hands where the honor strength is marginal. And to make matters worse, the awkward sequence that begins 1♦-3♣ (to show a limit raise in diamonds) is especially distasteful, since it obliterates two levels of bidding and offers very little benefit in return.

But there is one aspect of the single raise that continues to be a problem. There are two distinctly different kinds of hands that warrant a single raise. That, by itself, is not a problem. But the sequences that follow would benefit from a better understanding of which type of hand prompted the forcing raise. Clearly, the search for a notrump game is best conducted differently than the exploration of minor-suit contracts. And the traditional methods to later distinguish between the two kinds of raises frequently occur too late in the auction.

To address this concern, enter the Directional Inverted Minor Raise...

There are two "cornerstone" bids in this treatment: A (conventional) 2♣ response to a minor-suit opening, and a (conventional) 2♦ response to a minor-suit opening. These raises are no longer natural raises.

Since either natural single raise (1♣-2♣ or 1♦-2♦) is forcing, **BOTH THE 2♣ AND 2♦ (FORCING) BIDS COULD BE USED OVER EITHER MINOR OPENING TO DENOTE DIFFERENT KINDS OF RAISES.** Specifically, a 2♣ response to EITHER a 1♣ or 1♦ opener is now used to show a forcing raise (no 4-card major, 11+ HCP, 4+ card support) which has interest in exploring 3NT. Conversely, a 2♦ response to EITHER a 1♣ or 1♦ opener is used to show a forcing raise where there is little interest in 3NT, but strong interest in game or slam in the minor suit.

Thus, when partner bids 2♣ (Alertable!) over your minor suit opening, he is initiating a search for stoppers for the purpose of playing 3NT. These sequences can be handled in whatever manner you usually search for notrump games. My personal preference is to bid 2♥ with a heart stopper (but no spade stopper), 2♠ with a spade stopper (but no heart stopper), and 2NT with stoppers in both majors.

However, when partner bids 2♦ (Alertable!) over your minor-suit opening, he is suggesting a hand that is less interested in notrump than in game or slam in your minor suit. This is a hand that has opening count, no four-card major, at least 5 cards of trump support, and (possibly) a singleton or void elsewhere. (Picture a hand similar to: ♠ KQx ♥ x ♦ Axxx ♣ KJxxx after partner opens 1♣.) Splinter bids over minor-suit openings can be used over some percentage of these hands, but they chew up levels of bidding and when 3NT is right, it is frequently lost. So while a notrump game cannot be dismissed, primary interest is elsewhere.

When opener rebids 2NT over the 2♦ response, the indication is that opener holds a balanced hand with either a 3-card suit or a 4-3-3-3 hand with four trumps. ANY NEW SUIT BY OPENER WOULD PROMISE A 4-CARD TRUMP SUIT AND SHOWS A FIRST-ROUND CONTROL. A rebid of opener's suit shows a 4-card suit, but denies an outside first-round control. This followup sequence is far better suited to an investigation of game or slam in the minor suit. By eliminating time spent showing slow stoppers for notrump, lower levels of bidding can be used to focus on controls without ambiguity.

What happens when your partner opens a minor and you have 11+ HCP, no support, and length in the other minor? If partner opens 1♣, that's easy. Your normal bid of 1♦ is unchanged in meaning. If partner opens 1♦ and you hold a good club suit, simply bid 2♣. Partner should show major suit stoppers (as above), and you simply rebid 3♣ to describe your holding.

And what about the hand that has 11-12 HCP, no major suit, minimal support for partner, but does not have a rebiddable (other) minor? That remains your 2NT response to the minor suit opening. In fact, that 2NT response is very defined now, as there are few other hands that suggest that response.

Note that a by-product of this treatment is that the Game-Forcing question surrounding 1♦-2♣ sequence is clarified.

ALERTABLE BIDS:

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| 1♣ - 2♣ | Strong club raise; balanced, seeking stoppers |
| 1♣ - 2♦ | Strong club raise; unbalanced, seeking controls |
| 1♦ - 2♣ | EITHER a strong diamond raise; balanced, seeking stoppers OR a natural club suit, if rebid |
| 1♦ - 2♦ | Strong diamond raise; unbalanced, seeking controls |