



Andrew Kambites

# Inverted Minor Raises Are a Good Convention

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](mailto:elena@ebu.co.uk)

THINK back to traditional Acol: Strong Twos and Weak Threes. It is important to understand the logic behind this. If you have a strong hand, you cannot open it at the one level in case it gets passed out, but you do want to conserve bidding space as much as possible. If you have a weak hand, you want to take up as much space as possible in order to deprive your opponents of bidding space.

This principle has spread into many other areas. In a sequence like (1♥) – 1♠ – (Pass) – 2♥, the last bid is an Unassuming cue-bid, agreeing spades and making a game try. Whereas in (1♥) – 1♠ – (Pass) – 3♠, the last bid is pre-emptive. Traditionally, 1♥ – (Double) – 3♥ was pre-emptive, showing a good raise to 2♥. Nowadays many pairs want to play 1♥ – (Pass) – 3♥ or 1♥ – (1♠) – 3♥ as pre-emptive, genuine raises to the three level being shown by a Jacoby 2NT bid after a pass, or a cue-bid of the opponent's suit after an overcall. So the question is this: 'If the principle of conserving space with a good hand, but destroying space with a fit and a weaker hand is so good in so many areas, why should it not be good if your side opens a minor suit?' I cannot see any logical answer to that, and that in turn leads on to Inverted Minor Raises.

Suppose partner opens 1♣, playing a weak 1NT. You hold Hand A below:

Hand A: ♠97 ♥854 ♦KQ76 ♣QJ32

A passing fairy tells you your partner has a minimum 1♣ opener but offers you the chance to buy the contract in 3♣. Of course you would accept. How would you feel if you knew that 3♣ might go one off? You should still accept. If 3♣ goes one off you can be virtually certain that opponents can make 2♥ or 2♠. It is pure fantasy to imagine that if you raise to 2♣ three passes will follow. Why should competent opponents allow you to buy the contract

at the two level when they know you have a fit? If you have a fit, they will also have a fit. If you bid just 2♣ then this sort of auction is likely to develop:

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	2♣	Pass
Pass	2♠	3♣	3♣

Your 2♣ invited opponents into the auction: now they have found their fit and outbid you at the three level. Serves you right! Of course, if you believe that it is right to bid 3♣ over their protective major, wouldn't it be better to try to stop them entering the auction in the first place with a jump to 3♣?

Playing Inverted Minor Raises 1♣ – (Pass) – 3♣ shows a normal raise to 2♣. Of course you don't want to raise to 3♣ with Hand B which has less playing strength but far more defensive strength than Hand A. In that case respond 1NT which must now show 6-9 points, not 8-10 as was the case with traditional Acol.

Hand B: ♠Q76 ♥A16 ♦Q74 ♣8543  
So, how about if you are stronger?

Hand C: ♠K109 ♥85 ♦A176 ♣K632

If partner opens 1♣, respond 2♣ with Hand C. This shows at least the values for a jump-raise to 3♣ and is forcing to 3♣. If either partner bids beyond 3♣ the auction becomes game forcing. Opener often rebids suits where he has values rather than length, for example:

Opener	Responder
♠ 8 5	♠ K 10 9
♥ A Q 2	♥ 8 5
♦ 10 9	♦ A J 7 6
♣ A Q J 7 5 4	♣ K 6 3 2

Opener	Responder
1♣	2♣
2♥	2NT
3NT	

2♥ cannot reasonably be taken as a desire to play in hearts: responder's 2♣ bid denies a four-card heart suit. 2♥ shows heart values, allowing responder to show stoppers in the other two suits with 2NT.

Opener	Responder
♠ A 5	♠ K 10 9
♥ Q J 2	♥ 8 5
♦ Q 10 8	♦ A J 7 6
♣ A Q J 7 5	♣ K 6 3 2

Opener	Responder
1♣	2♣
2NT	3NT

2NT is below 3♣ but logically it must be game forcing. Opener is clearly balanced, and with a balanced 12-14 points he would have opened 1NT. Therefore opener has 15+ points, plenty for game opposite a raise to 3♣.

Finally, imagine the problems you face if you are not playing inverted minors when partner opens 1♣ and you hold Hand D:

Hand D: ♠A62 ♥AQ6 ♦75 ♣AQ732

You don't seem to have much alternative to either hacking 3NT or some number of clubs, or responding in a short suit and hoping to avoid disaster in the horrible auction that will follow. Playing inverted minors it is easy: start with 2♣ – plenty of time later to show your powerhouse.

So let me weigh up the pros and cons of inverted minor raises.

**Pros:** Inverted minors are a concept based on logic rather than a convention. There are no significant memory demands, making them easy to play. The raise to the three level deals with weak hands, making it harder for opponents to enter the auction. The constructive raise to 2♣ gives you extra bidding space with stronger hands.

**Cons:** Um... Over to you, Paul.

# Inverted Minor Raises Are Not a Good Convention

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



Paul Bowyer

THE DEBATE

THERE are a number of reasons why I dislike Inverted Minors as a convention. When you add gadgets to your system they should be there for a purpose, essentially to solve problems that your normal bidding system throws up fairly regularly – they should not be there as ‘bolt-on’ extras just so that you can fill in some unwanted space on the convention card EBU 20B. When players add Inverted Minors to their armoury, they often do so because it is trendy, or because other players are playing this method, not for any meaningful reason. It is akin to hanging furry dice on your car mirror and the convention improves your bidding in much the same way as the aforementioned addition of dice helps your driving...

Let’s have a look at why I am so much against it. There are two aspects to any convention. Does it improve your bidding where it is used? And, secondly, does the conventional cost of the convention have an adverse affect elsewhere? This latter aspect may need a word of explanation. To take a simple example: a Stayman bid of 2♣ over 1NT prevents you being able to remove 1NT into 2♣, so the conventional cost of Stayman is that you cannot play in 2♣ after a 1NT opening bid. Most players would (rightly) say ‘Big deal’ and move on. Here (with Stayman) the conventional cost is minimal. With Inverted Minors you can no longer make a natural raise of 1♣ to 2♣ or 1♦ to 2♦. Is that so much of a ‘Big deal’? I think so, yes – as later examples will show.

Firstly, let’s look at the efficiency of the convention itself. I am not going to dwell too much on the 1♣ – 2♣ (or 1♦ – 2♦) part of the system. Most players have put some work into this although some players have put too little into their methods and have too few understandings (How far is it forcing, for example?). Anyway, doubtless Andrew Kambites on the other page has

done his best here to convince you of the merits of this aspect.

Where disasters occur is with the 1♣ – 3♣, or 1♦ – 3♦, part of the system. What precisely, does that mean? ‘Oh,’ say proponents of these methods, brightly, ‘It’s pre-emptive’. Yes, thank you, but which of the hands below is/are suitable for a raise of partner’s opening 1♦ bid to 3♦ playing Perverted, er, Inverted minors?

<b>Hand 1</b> ♠ 173 ♥ 7 ♦ A Q 8 7 ♣ 9 8 5 3 2	<b>Hand 2</b> ♠ 5 4 ♥ 8 5 ♦ 10 9 6 5 3 ♣ Q 4 2
<b>Hand 3</b> ♠ 3 2 ♥ 7 4 3 ♦ K Q J 9 ♣ Q 8 6 4	<b>Hand 4</b> ♠ 18 4 2 ♥ 6 3 ♦ 19 3 ♣ A J 9 2

All of them, perchance? Lovely bidding!! And what, pray tell, is opener supposed to do with, say, a balanced hand of around 18 points? Pass? Bid 5♦? Try 3NT? Toss a coin? I have seen a number of examples of this nonsense where responder makes a ‘pre-emptive’ raise to three of a minor and succeeds in pre-empting only partner. And, if indignant users of these methods claim that they are disciplined and have precise limits on what constitutes a pre-emptive raise, then what do you do on the other hands above? Good bidding obliges the opponents to guess, not partner.

Now, on Hand 4, I can hear a vast chorus shouting, ‘I would respond 1♣!’ But is that wise? I dislike responding in a bad suit on a bad hand when I have a sensible alternative. For me, a raise to 2♣ stands out. If partner has spades he can bid them – he is a grown-up and can bid his own hand. The full deal shows the folly of always bidding a four-

card major even when you have primary support for partner (my files are full of deals similar to this one):

♠ 10 7 6 5	♠ 18 4 2	♠ A K
♥ 8 7 5	♥ 6 3	♥ A Q J 9 4
♦ K 10 8 7 4	♦ 19 3	♦ Q 6 5 2
♣ Q	♣ A J 9 2	♣ 7 5

♠ Q 9 3	♠ A K
♥ K 10 2	♥ A Q J 9 4
♦ A	♦ Q 6 5 2
♣ K 10 8 6 4 3	♣ 7 5

After South opens 1♣ and North responds 1♣ (horrible in my view), East will bid something (probably 2♥) and South will surely raise to 2♣ (now there’s a contract!). East-West can either defend that, down plenty, or bid to 3♥ or 3♦ making. A shame, really, as North-South can make 4♣. However, that’s hard to reach as North can’t bid again (it risks South thinking North is making a game try in spades) and South is unaware of the club fit. Lovely bidding. After a normal, natural raise to 2♣ on the North cards, though, South can compete in clubs as high as he likes – the fit has been identified at once. And if North-South had a spade fit? Well, South would have been able to bid spades at his second turn. This auction is impossible, of course, if your methods are obstructed by Inverted Minor raises.

Now, finally, I accept that Inverted Minors may be the only way out of the morass that playing short minors may create (another reason for not playing this style, in my view). However, if 1♣ or 1♦ shows at least four cards in your methods, I can see little upside to this convention and plenty of downside. □

