

Bidding Lab

Ideas and innovations
from ACBL members



Wolff signoff

By Marshall Miles

The system described in the following write-up is not my original idea. Bobby Wolff introduced the basic concept, and various players have made suggestions for modifications. The purpose is to have a way to sign off in three of responder's major after a 2NT rebid since, for example, 1♣ – Pass – 1♠ – Pass; 2NT – Pass – 3♠ is (and should be) forcing, perhaps with an interest in slam. Suppose the bidding starts 1♣/♦ – Pass – 1♥/♠ – Pass; 2NT – Pass – ?

Now suppose responder holds a hand such as:

♠QJ7643 ♥86 ♦J6 ♣876

or:

♠74 ♥K109543 ♦J654 ♣8.

Opposite the first hand, there is almost no chance of making game, and dummy's hand may not take a single trick in a notrump contract. Even 3♠ is unlikely to make, but 3♠ looks like the best contract available at this point. Unless opener has a very good 2NT bid, with trump support and mostly aces and kings rather than queens and jacks, the second hand is not likely to make game either. While the 2NT rebid is not forcing, if responder bids again, it is forcing

to game—or it was until Wolff introduced the Wolff signoff.

This is the way it works: If responder bids 3♣ (no matter whether the opening bid was 1♣, 1♦ or 1♥), opener is supposed to bid 3♦. Responder can pass the 3♦ bid if he holds something like:

♠KJ543 ♥92 ♦109854 ♣6,

and if responder rebids his major, opener is supposed to pass. Before I give you the details, the basic concept is that 3♣ is the beginning of a signoff or a slam try!

Suppose responder had a hand such as:

♠AQ765 ♥43 ♦Q543 ♣95

or:

♠AJ763 ♥Q652 ♦J86 ♣7

in which case 4♠ may be a better contract than 3NT opposite three-card support, or 4♥ may be the best contract opposite four-card support. A 3♦ rebid over 2NT is the check-back for major distribution. My priority is to show the unbid four-card major first with something like 3=4=3=3 or 3=4=2=4 distribution. For one reason, if game is reached in the unbid major, the strong hand

will be declarer, and if responder bids 3NT, opener will know he was looking for three-card support for responder's five-card major, so opener can bid four of responder's major.

As for the slam try after Wolff signoff 3♣, 1 minor – Pass – 1 major – Pass; 2NT – Pass – 3♣ – Pass; 3♦ – Pass – 3NT shows a mild slam try in opener's minor. If the opening bid was 1♣, responder might hold:

♠AK54 ♥87 ♦KJ4 ♣J1054

or:

♠AJ743 ♥K98 ♦A7 ♣J105.

Responder usually needs a five-card club suit or excellent controls with a good four-card club suit to accept the invitation. If responder is too strong to risk a pass of 3NT, he can bid four of opener's minor with four-card support or 4NT (natural, of course) with three-card support.

Using Wolff signoff, bidding the other major over the forced 3♦ response would show a slam try with the first major and the other minor, something like:

♠KJ943 ♥7 ♦AQ1054 ♣Q6

after an opening of 1♣ or:

♠87 ♥AK987 ♦6 ♣AJ964

after an opening of 1♦.

Opener can bid game over an attempted signoff with the right values, such as:

♠A85 ♥A7 ♣AK6 ♣A9865

when responder tries to sign off in 3♠. □