

NEW MINOR FORCE vs CHECKBACK STAYMAN

Responder often has a rebid problem in this auction:

Opener	Responder
1 Any	1 Any
1NT	?

--How to sign-off, invite game, or force to game with support for opener's suit. A minimum raise is weak, a jump invitational, so how to force? If a jump is forcing, how to invite?

--How to sign off, invite game, or force to game with a long suit of his own. A minimum suit rebid is weak, a jump invitational, so how to force? If a jump is forcing, how to invite?

--How to sign off, invite game, or force to game with a two-suited hand. A non-reverse bid in a new suit is weak, a jump is forcing, so how to invite? If a jump is invitational, how to force?

--How to find out if opener has three-card support for responder's major or four cards in an unbid major?

Two conventions that address these problems are New Minor Forcing (NMF) and Checkback Stayman (CS). Let's look at each:

New Minor Forcing (NMF)

NMF is responder's bid of an unbid minor after opener rebids 1NT. It requires at least game-invitational strength, and a five-card or longer major. In answer, opener describes his hand further, both as to strength and major suit length, as described in the three-part series on NMF by Bart Yohn, in the March, April, and May 1998 issues of *The Bridge Bulletin*. There are other versions of NMF out there, but let's assume that Bart's version is our NMF baseline. Bart didn't say so, but let's also assume that NMF may be used when responder has only a four-card major if she has game-going strength. A rigid five-card requirement isn't necessary, and doesn't work well for some hands.

Over 1NT, a jump rebid in the same suit is invitational, as is a jump raise of opener's suit or a jump in a new suit. The invitational jump raise denies a five-card major, leading to notrump raises with unbalanced suit-oriented hands. After responding 1♥ to 1♣ with ♠4 ♥K7432 ♦Q65 ♣AQ32 and getting a disappointing answer to NMF, how can responder invite with a club raise? He can't, because 3♣ is forcing, so he must forego clubs in favor of notrump. Play 3♣ as invitational? And if the clubs were AKJ3? There's a problem either way.

To force, responder must use NMF and then rebid his suit, raise, or bid a new suit. In the case of a forcing raise, responder's major might not be five long. But what if there is no "new minor"?

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♦
1NT	?

A jump rebid of 3♦ or 3♣ is only invitational, so responder must bid 3NT with many strong unbalanced hands that belong in five or six of a minor. If the jumps are played as forcing, then there is no way to show a hand of invitational strength.

Another NMF drawback is the strength requirement, because many weak hands need conventional help. NMF bidders cannot describe a weak 5-5 hand, except for two majors. They must just rebid their five-card major and hope for the best. A weak hand with good support for opener's minor is also a problem, whether or not responder's suit is five long. When responder supports the minor, should opener show three-card support for responder? It's a complete guess.

Yet another is the necessity to bid four-card majors strictly up-the-line, hearts first. It is somewhat strange to respond 1♥ with AKJ9 of spades and 6432 of hearts, but NMF requires that approach.

The main drawback of NMF, however, is the bidding space wasted by an NMF 2♦ bid. Imagine the difficulties if 2♦ had to be used as Stayman opposite a 1NT opening, with 2♣ a natural sign-off.

Checkback Stayman (CS)

With one version of CS (there are several), a 2♣ rebid by responder asks opener to show three-card support for responder's major, or an unbid four-card major, or extra-good hearts (if he opened with 1♥), giving priority to the first. Lacking any of these, opener bids 2♦. Other two-level rebids by responder (except reverses) are signoffs. All jumps are forcing. To invite game in a suit, responder bids 2♣, then makes his invitation. To sign off in clubs, responder bids 2♣, then 3♣. To invite game with a club bid, responder bids 2♣, then 2NT (artificially). To invite game in notrump, he bids 2NT over 1NT, even with a five-card major if his distribution is 5-3-3-2. A third-round 2NT bid is natural.

CS has no strength or length requirements. If she is prepared for what might ensue, responder can bid 2♣ with any strength whatsoever. This is possible because opener (like a notrump opener) does not show strength; he must bid 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠. After responding 1♠ to 1♦ with ♠K6543 ♥A52 ♦10876 ♣6 and hearing a 1NT rebid, responder can use CS and pass any response.

After CS, responder's new suit bid at the two level is forcing for one round only. He can show a second suit and follow with an invitational 2NT or raise of opener's suit. A two-level suit rebid shows a five-card suit and a weak hand, with trump support for opener's minor or a minor suit on the side, or both. Opener can pass with a very strong doubleton. Otherwise he bids minimally to let responder continue his hand description.

CS has the drawback that responder can't stop in two of a major with an invitational hand, possibly resulting in a risky three-level contract.

NMF and CS both have the drawback that you can't stop at the two level in the minor that is bid artificially. With NMF, responder can't show a weak major-diamond 5-5 opposite a 1♣ opener's 1NT rebid, but can sign off in 2♣. With CS, responder can show that weak 5-5, but can't sign off in 2♣. If you think the two drawbacks cancel, tell me the last time you had a weak responding hand and the opponents let you play in 2♣ after a 1♣ opening and 1NT rebid. It never happens.

So which is superior, NMF or CS? My own opinion is reflected in the title, which is not a typo.