

INVERTED MINOR SUIT RAISES

In most bridge lessons and basic Standard American, the point-count for the raises of opener's minor suit would be the same as for the majors. The single raise would be 6-10 points and the jump raise 11-12, with responder denying a four-card or longer major suit. One slight difference is that points for short suits, or dummy points, are only counted when supporting a major suit, not when partner has opened 1C or 1D. It's strictly high-card points, as your side may easily wind up in 3NT rather than five of a minor, unlike the fits in a major where the contract will always be played in that suit.

Some 25-30 years ago, the idea of essentially switching the two raises was proposed, and has gained a significant following. In fact, even amongst club players, nowadays more partnerships have gone with inverted minor-suit raises than use the old-fashioned raise structure.

The table below will illustrate the difference between SAYC and inverted minor-suit raises. Let's say the opening bid is 1C:

SAYC

2C—6-10 HCP, no major suit length

3C—11-12 HCP, no major-suit length

Inverted minor suit raises

2C—10+ HCP, no major-suit length,
forcing for at least one round

3C—9 or fewer HCP, usually 5-8. Denies
holding major.

Why play inverted minors?

There are two reasons why some people feel that inverted minor-suit raises are a superior method.

The primary advantage is that if responder has the better supporting hand of 10+ HCP, the single raise gives the partnership a whole extra level of bidding space in which to operate. That can be very useful in determining if we should subside in a part-score, bid 3NT, or head towards a minor-suit game. If opener happens to be in possession of a stronger hand, he now has room in which to explore slam possibilities.

An added benefit is that because the single raise is a one-round force, that can also be made when responder has wonderful support along with enough values for game. If he has that type of hand, he can raise and then keep on bidding, rejecting any signoff attempts by opener. In SAYC, responder has forcing bids available, but none that immediately confirm support for opener's minor suit.

Advocates of inverted minor-suit raises would also contend that the jump raise on lesser hands has some pre-emptive value as it doesn't allow the opponents to discover a major-suit fit at a convenient level and may keep them out of the auction entirely. That has some element of

truth to it, but there is some divergence of opinion on the HCP of the weak jump. But more on that later.

Opener's continuations after the single raise

After the single raise, opener tries to describe his hand accurately so that the partnership can make the part-score vs game or better decision. The first two rebids are not that frequent, but it's important to know what they are in case either of them comes up. Most often, opener will be in the 12-15 range, and that will comprise the bulk of our discussion.

- 1) A jump to 3NT promises a balanced hand of 18-19 HCP.
- 2) A jump in a new suit (e.g. 1D-2D-3H) would be 16+ HCP and shortness in the bid suit. If responder has the game-forcing hand with no wasted high cards opposite partner's shortness, there may be a slam out way. The main advantage, though, is that it enables the partnership to gauge whether the final contract should be played in notrump or the minor-suit fit.
- 3) A new suit bid is 14+ HCP with a high card in the bid suit. Opener will most often have a balanced 14-count **or** 14+ points with unbalanced distribution. The message he's sending here is that we're very close to having sufficient values for game. Responder will usually co-operate by bidding notrump or showing a high-card value of his own. If he has a rock-bottom minimum of 10 HCP, he can attempt to sign off in a part-score.
- 4) With a minimum hand of 12-13 HCP, opener has two ways of showing it. They are:
 - a) **2NT**, which suggests a balanced hand, and does **not** require a stopper in all unbid suits.
 - b) **3 of the agreed minor**, if he has an unbalanced hand with a singleton or void somewhere.

Over either of these bids, responder can sign off in a part-score if he is also minimum. With opening values, he'll soldier on, and the main objective is to determine if 3NT is a playable spot.

If opener has rebid 2NT, if you have 13+, bid the notrump game unless your hand contains shortness. In that case, bid a high-card stopper without going past 3NT.

If opener has shown an unbalanced minimum with three of his minor, if you have extras and shortness of your own, the minor-suit game now becomes a definite

option. If instead you have a strong balanced hand, bid 3NT with all suits guarded, but if there is an open suit, you can once again show a high-card value without going past 3NT. In that way, you'd still get there if that was opener's concern.

The weak jump raise

In the Kaplan-Sheinwold methods, which first employed inverted raises, the jump to three of opener's minor was 6-8 HCP.

Some players argue that the jump raise can be weaker still, but that would create too wide a range and make accurate bidding difficult.

If the opponents are vulnerable and your side isn't, you might take advantage of the favorable colors and go with the pre-emptive raise on 5 HCP, but **only** if you have outside shortness. You'd need that feature in case opener has a very strong hand and either bids or tries for game.

The 'Tweener' hands of 9 HCP

When responder has exactly nine points and good support for opener's minor, he is in no-man's land as to how best to describe his values. It's a bit much for a pre-emptive action, but also lacks the necessary 10 HCP for a single raise.

With a balanced hand, a decent compromise is a 1NT response. Although you might be left there, the contract should make with your side having more than half the deck in combined points. There is also the chance of getting in the support later if partner bids again or the opponents compete.

With an unbalanced hand, you'll have to raise and use your judgment in deciding whether to upgrade or downgrade. Here are a few examples to illustrate, with partner having opened 1D:

| | | | |
|-------|-------|---------|--------|
| S—x | H—Axx | D—J9xxx | C—Axxx |
| S—Jxx | H—Q | D—KQxxx | C—Jxxx |

Treat the first hand as a limit raise and bid 2D. It has five-card support, two outside winners and a singleton to boot.

The second hand is a different matter entirely. Other than the good five-card support and singleton heart, there are no sure tricks. Since the Queens and Jacks may not be all that useful, I'd downgrade this collection and make the weak jump raise to 3D.

Minor suit raises in competition

Although some players stick with inverted minor-suit raises when the opponents interfere, most don't. The reason is that you know have an additional option that can be used to

show the supporting hands of 10+ HCP, If they overcall, you can cuebid the enemy suit to show a limit raise or better in opener's minor. IF RHO has made a takeout double, a good hand can be shown with a redouble followed by a bid of opener's suit at your next turn.

Consequently, after a double or overcall, the simple raise is 6-9 points, and responder could be balanced or unbalanced. Although he'll normally have five-card or longer support, he might only have four if the hand looks suit-oriented. For example, after 1C-(1S), what can you logically do with:

S—xx H—Jxx D—Kxxx C—AJ9x

except raise to 2C? The hand is way too strong to pass, and without four hearts or a high card in their suit, you can't make a negative double or bid 1NT.

The jump raise is weaker, normally about 4-7 HCP, but a hand with unbalanced distribution. Responder is taking a notrump contract out of the equation and sending the message that if our side buys the hand, it ought to be played in the minor suit. With the same 1C-(1S) auction, responder would leap to 3C with something like:

S—x H—xxx D—Qxxx C—K10xxx

Unless opener has significant extras, the hand may belong to the opponents and the weak jump serves a dual purpose. It makes it tougher for them to reach their optimum contract **and** also gives opener a pretty fair idea of who can make what.

To make a long story short, in a competitive auction the jump raise in a minor is still weak (very much so) but the single raise is no longer invitational or better, and reverts to being a hand of 6 to a bad 10 HCP.

Quiz

Before we move on to the example hands, let's familiarize ourselves more with both the inverted raise and how opener proceeds when one is made.

1) Partner opens 1C. How do you respond?

- | | | | | |
|----|---------|-------|---------|----------|
| a) | S—A104 | H—86 | D—K95 | C—QJ843 |
| b) | S—J7 | H—AK8 | D—A63 | C—K10765 |
| c) | S—J1074 | H—75 | D—92 | C—AK1073 |
| d) | S—652 | H—6 | D—J976 | C—KQ843 |
| e) | S—QJ8 | H—K5 | D—10964 | C—AJ53 |

- | | | | | |
|----|--------|-------|---------|----------|
| f) | S—54 | H—K92 | D—1086 | C—A9643 |
| g) | S—Q104 | H—74 | D—K85 | C—KJ965 |
| h) | S—83 | H—75 | D—AQ108 | C—K10962 |

Answers:

- a) 2C. With 10 HCP and five-card support, you have just enough for the inverted raise. That's about all the encouragement you'll offer, though.
 - b) 2C. But with 15 HCP, you'll keep showing your stoppers until 3NT or 5C is reached.
 - c) 1S. Remember, locating a 4-4 major-suit fit is the chief priority. Since the new-suit response is forcing, you can get back to clubs on the next bid if opener doesn't raise.
 - d) 3C. An ideal hand for the weak jump raise, good trumps and outside shortness.
 - e) 2NT. While you have enough points, you lack the five-card support that an inverted raise needs. However, you can jump in notrump to show 11-12 HCP and no four-card major.
 - f) 3C. The hand is within the 6-8 HCP range for the pre-emptive 3C, and it's a superior alternative to the 1NT response.
 - g) 1NT. With 9 HCP and five-card support, there is always a tough decision to be made within the inverted minor framework. This hand should play reasonably well in a notrump contract, even with the small doubleton in hearts.
 - h) 2C. Another 9-count, a bit more shapely this time. A 3C raise is out because you have too many points, so that leave 1NT or the upgrade to a 2C response. Because the hand is more suit-oriented than the previous one, go with the latter choice.
- 2) You've opened 1D and partner raises to 2D, showing 10+ HCP and good support. What's your next move with these hands?
- | | | | | |
|----|--------|------|---------|--------|
| a) | S—A763 | H—9 | D—AJ84 | C—K965 |
| b) | S—AK72 | H—4 | D—KQ986 | C—KJ7 |
| c) | S—AQ7 | H—AJ | D—Q7652 | C—KQ4 |

| | | | | |
|----|-------|--------|---------|--------|
| d) | S—Q9 | H—K87 | D—K8653 | C—A62 |
| e) | S—5 | H—AQ94 | D—AK865 | C—Q93 |
| f) | S—AJ5 | H—75 | D—KQ103 | C—A965 |
| g) | S—K74 | H—A3 | C—AQJ87 | C—652 |

Answers:

- a) 3D, to show a minimum unbalanced hand. If responder has opening values, he'll now bid his cheapest stopper. But if he is also on the low end, you'll settle in the diamond part-score.
- b) 3H. Because stoppers are shown at the cheapest level after an inverted raise, the **jump** in a new suit promises shortness along with 16 or more HCP.
- c) 3NT. Same as after a one-level response, the jump shows a balanced 18-19 HCP.
- d) 2NT. After the inverted raise, the cheapest notrump rebid shows a minimum balanced hand of 12-13.
- e) 2H. With the new-suit bid, opener guarantees 14 or more points. If responder can co-operate with 2S or 2NT to show the other major adequately stopped, we'll carry on to the notrump game. Otherwise, we'll head towards a 5D contract.
- f) 2S. The hand is balanced, but again opener bids the new suit to show 14+ HCP and a hand that is very close to game. This also denies a heart stopper, as we'd have otherwise bid 2H.
- g) 2H. Case in point. Although the spades are longer, we **do** have a heart stopper. The beauty of inverted minor raises is that if partner bids 2NT or 3C, we'll place the contract in 3NT. If he bids 2S, we know the clubs might be a problem because of his failure to bid 2NT.

Board 1

North dealer
None vulnerable

| | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| | North | |
| | S—107 | |
| | H—A1053 | |
| | D—KQ85 | |
| West | C—KQ6 | East |
| S—9542 | | S—A863 |
| H—K87 | | H—Q942 |
| D—J | | D—A73 |
| C—108753 | South | S—94 |
| | S—KQJ | |
| | H—J6 | |
| | D—109642 | |
| | C—AJ2 | |

Auction:

| North | East | South | West |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1D | pass | 2D | pass |
| 2H | pass | 3NT | pass |
| pass | pass | | |

With 14 HCP, North has enough to look for 3NT after the inverted raise, but a spade lead could be worrisome from his point of view, so he bids 2H to show his high card there. Now it's an easy road for South, who has stoppers in both black suits.

The Play:

East has a choice between his longest suit and the unbid major, but declarer will prevail on either lead. When he plays on diamonds, he will be happy to see the Jack appear on the first round. He'll take four diamonds, three clubs, the Ace of hearts and at least one spade.

Board 2

East dealer

North

S—K74
 H—AQ82
 D—1043
 C—932

West

S—Q9
 H—976
 D—QJ652
 C—AK7

East

S—A1053
 H—4
 D—AK98
 C—QJ84

South

S—J862
 H—KJ1053
 D—7
 C—1065

Auction:

| North | East | South | West |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| | 1D | pass | 2D |
| pass | 2S | pass | 3C |
| pass | 5D | pass | pass |
| pass | | | |

When opener bids 2S, West can't suggest notrump as he doesn't have a heart value. But he **can** show his stuff in clubs with 3C. That is good news for opener,, as he can take a rosy view of his QJxx of clubs and bid 5D.

The Play:

South should lead hearts, as there has to be a reason why the opponents are in a minor-suit game instead of 3NT. Declarer can ruff the second heart and with accurate play can make all the rest of the tricks. How? He plays Ace of diamonds and another one to the Queen. Now comes another heart ruff and a club to one of dummy's honors to draw the final trump. The club winners are now played, as West's second spade goes away on the fourth round of the suit.

Board 3

South dealer
E-W vulnerable

North

S—54
H—Q7
D—KJ842
C—A952

West

S—Q97
H—KJ96
D—105
C—Q863

East

S—K1032
H—A10543
D—96
C—J7

South

S—AJ86
H—82
D—AQ73
C—K104

Auction:

| North | East | South | West |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| | | 1D | pass |
| 2D | pass | 2S | pass |
| 3D | pass | pass | pass |

South with his 14 HCP shows his spade values with 2S, hoping that partner has the tickets to suggest notrump.

Responder knows in the absence of a 2H bid from partner that opener will not have a full heart stopper. With a bare minimum for his inverted raise, he puts the brakes on with 3D and South will duly subside in the partial.

The Play:

West will lead a heart. The defense gets two immediate heart tricks along with an eventual spade and club, but that's all they can manage and 3D will scrape home with nine tricks.

Board 4

West dealer
both vulnerable

North

S—1043
H—Q754
D—J8543
C—5

West

S—762
H—AK106
D—9
C—KQ1063

East

S—KJ8
H—932
D—AQ
C—AJ872

South

S—AQ95
H—J8
D—K10762
C—94

Auction:

| North | East | South | West |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| | | | 1C |
| pass | 2C | pass | 3C |
| pass | 3D | pass | 3H |
| pass | 3NT | pass | pass |
| pass | | | |

With 3C after partner's inverted raise, opener shows an unbalanced minimum. With a balanced 15-count, East is not going to let the bidding stop below game, but he needs to make sure that partner's shortness is not opposite his three rags in hearts. He therefore bids 3D, and opener shows his stopper in the other red suit with 3H. That is what responder was hoping for, and he can now settle in 3NT with confidence.

The Play:

South will probably lead a diamond or a spade, after which declarer has his ninth trick. Even a heart lead won't do it, as East can now set up his game-going trick in that suit.

5C will probably go down on a diamond or even a heart lead from the North hand.

Board 5

North dealer
N-S vulnerable

| | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| | North | |
| | S—A7 | |
| | H—AQ6 | |
| | D—KQJ4 | |
| | C—QJ76 | |
| West | | East |
| S—KQ95 | | S—J108642 |
| H—954 | | H—10732 |
| D—63 | | D—85 |
| C—K1083 | South | C—9 |
| | S—3 | |
| | H—KJ8 | |
| | D—A10972 | |
| | C—A542 | |

Auction:

| North | East | South | West |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| 1D | pass | 2D | pass |
| 3NT | pass | 6D | pass |
| pass | pass | | |

By jumping to 3NT after the inverted raise, East shows 18-19 balanced. With every suit controlled and a ruffing value to boot, responder jumps to the diamond slam.

The Play:

The lead from East may well be his singleton club. It's not the time to be letting it run to the QJ as it's unlikely that South would be leading from a King against a slam. Declarer should guard against the opening leader having a singleton and rise with the Ace, draw trumps and then lead a small club towards the honors in his hand.

If East leads the Jack of spades instead, take the Ace, pull trumps again, and play a club to the Ace. Even if the King is onside, you can't avoid losing a trick in the suit, as the spot cards aren't good enough. If the clubs divide 3-2, all you lose is the one trick, so the only difficulty is with a 4-1 split. The Ace succeeds against the singleton King in either hand, or K10xx in the West seat, as you can now lead up to the QJ twice.

Board 6

East dealer

E-W vulnerable

| | | | | |
|-------------|--|--------------|-------------|--|
| | | North | | |
| | | S—KJ87 | | |
| | | H—Q953 | | |
| | | D—K854 | | |
| | | C—6 | | |
| West | | | East | |
| S—3 | | | S—965 | |
| H—K74 | | | H—A1062 | |
| D—AQ63 | | | D—7 | |
| C—Q10974 | | | C—AKJ82 | |
| | | South | | |
| | | S—AQ1042 | | |
| | | H—J8 | | |
| | | D—J1092 | | |
| | | C—53 | | |

Auction:

| North | East | South | West |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| | 1C | pass | 2C |
| pass | 3C | pass | 3D |
| pass | 3H | pass | 5C |
| pass | pass | pass | |

Opener's minimum hand is unbalanced, which he shows with 3C. West now realizes that game in a minor could be a viable contract, but tries for 3NT by showing his diamond stopper. Once partner continues with 3H rather than 3NT, responder knows there is a spade problem and bids 5C.

The Play:

South will probably lead the Jack of diamonds from his perfect sequence even though the opponents may be staying out of notrump because of weakness in the spade suit. The Ace of spades would not be unreasonable given the auction.

5C can make in one of two ways. Declarer can just give up a spade, play off three rounds of hearts and then take the rest on a high cross-ruff. Even if he draws trump first, he'll still make as the two top hearts will fell the Jack in the South hand and he can then lead a third heart up to his 10, setting up that card as a trick.

Epilogue: “Criss-Cross”

Around a decade ago, an extension of inverted minor-suit raises came into fashion. Known as “criss-cross”, the single raise guarantees 12+ HCP and is intended as an absolute game force. The invitational hands of 10-11 points are shown by jumping in the other minor. So we have:

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1C | 2C | 1D | 2D | 1C | 2D | 1D | 3C |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|

The two auctions on the left, with the direct raise of the minor suit, promise opening values or better. The sequences on the right describe the hands that are worth a limit raise of opener’s suit.

Criss-cross may be a slight improvement on basic inverted minor raises, but it’s a matter of choice and it’s another set of bids that you’ll have to remember.

Whichever version you decide to go with, however, not much changes as opener is going to bid the same way as we’ve described on pages 2 and 3.