

## The Smolen Convention

Well that was a surprise! I wrote an article entitled 'Stayman or Transfer' and 3 people (Avi Rosenthal, George Leibowitz and Lea Cesarco) individually commented about Smolen. I did not realize that I had such a large number of readers of my articles ☺. Funnily enough, Ron Pachtman gave us a lecture in the 'Atlas Course' and he mentioned Smolen as well. I was very surprised that I had not heard of Smolen before and wondered if he had heard of me.

Anyway after some research, it turns out that Michael Smolen died at the age of just 52 in 1992. Here is a brief outline of his convention.

As I stated in my article when we have 5:4 or even 6:4 in the majors and **game going values**, we will respond with a transfer to the 1NT opener and then bid our second major which is forcing. But according to the Smolen Convention, we do **not** bid an immediate transfer but Stayman with a **delayed** transfer in these situations. If partner responds to our 2C Stayman with 2H or 2S, we will happily jump to game with a 4:4 or 5:4 or even 6:4 fit in that major.

However, if the response by the No Trump bidder is 2 Diamonds, denying a 4-card Major suit, then, as I stated in my previous article the responder must now bid the longer Major suit to show at least a 5-card Major suit. The problem with this system is that when this occurs, then the **transfer advantage** has been lost and the weaker of the two holdings usually becomes the declarer. Instead of concealing strength like as King-Jack or Ace-Queen, these holdings are revealed to the defenders, providing them with additional defensive advantages.

When the partnership includes and employs the Smolen Transfer bids, designed specifically for this situation, then the responder will jump to the three level in his **shorter** Major suit. This initiates the Smolen convention and the No Trump bidder now has the information that partner holds game values. It is this jump which shows a 4-card suit in the suit bid and either a 5-card or a 6-card suit in the other Major suit. In this way, the No Trump bidder becomes the declarer, which is the basic intention of this conventional method.

### Example:

Opener	Responder	Meaning
A42	K7654	
A73	K964	
Q763	K8	
AK3	QJ	
1 NT		15-17
	2	Stayman
2		Denial of a 4-card Major suit.

The No Trump denies a 4 or 5 card major by bidding 2 Diamonds. According to the Smolen conventional method the responder no longer bids the 5- or 6-card suit directly, but ***jump bids in the 4-card Major suit (the shorter of his 2 majors)***. This action initiates the delayed Smolen Transfer bid and shows exactly a 4-card Major suit in the Major suit bid and at least a 5-card suit plus in the unbid Major suit, plus game values, as shown in the continuing example:

Opener	Responder	Meaning
A74	K9865	
A76	K984	
Q843	K7	
AK8	QJ	
1 NT		15-17
	2	Stayman
2		Denial of a 4-card Major suit.
	3	Smolen convention.

The No Trump opener will now have all the information at his disposal to make the right decision. Holding 3 cards of the longer Major suit, the No Trump bidder will bid this suit.

Opener	Responder	Meaning
A74	K9865	
A76	K984	
Q843	K7	
AK8	QJ	
1 NT	2	Stayman convention
2		Denial of a 4-card Major suit.
	3	Smolen convention.
3		Completes the transfer.

In this particular bidding sequence, the No Trump bidder completes the **transfer**, and becomes the declarer. The responder, depending on his values, will either bid game or attempt slam.

Holding only two cards in the longer Major suit, the No Trump bidder rebids 3 No Trump:

Opener	Responder	Meaning
A7	K9865	
A76	K984	
Q843	K7	
AK85	QJ	
1 NT		15-17
	2	Stayman
2		Denial of a 4-card Major suit.
	3	Smolen convention.
3 NT		Denies a 3-card Spade suit.

If the distributional pattern of the responder is as shown above, then the responder will pass game in 3 No Trump holding only a 5-card Major suit. However, with slam values the responder will continue the auction.

**When holding a 6-card Major** the action of the responder changes. The illustration below should clarify this continuation:

Opener	Responder	Meaning
A76	K984	
A7	KJ9865	
Q843	K7	
AK85	Q	
1 NT		15-17
	2	Stayman convention
2		Denial of a 4-card Major suit.
	3	This jump shows a 4-card Spade suit and a longer Heart suit, plus game values.
3 NT		Denies a 3-card Heart suit.
	4	Shows a 6-card Heart suit. This is a Smolen delayed transfer bid. The opener is required to complete the transfer to 4 Hearts.

It is also important to remember that the Smolen transfer bid may be used in other bidding sequences such as the following two bidding sequences. The continuations, as described above, are the same following the No Trump bid.

<b>Opener</b>	<b>Responder</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
2 NT		20-22
	3	Stayman.
3		Denial of a 4-card Major suit.
	3	Showing 5+ Hearts and 4 Spades

The Smolen conventional method can also be applied following a strong, artificial 2 Clubs opening followed by a rebid of No Trump.

2		Strong, artificial 2 Clubs opening bid. Forcing for one round.
	2	Generally a waiting bid. However, the partnership agreement can employ other versions of responses.
2 NT		(23-24 HCP)
	3	Stayman
3		Denying a 4 card major
	3	Showing 5+ Spades and 4 Hearts

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