

Texas Transfers, Delayed Texas Transfers, and the Principle of Captaincy (Mark Oettinger)

Before we leave the topic of transfers, we should mention Texas Transfers. In their simplest form, these are the following sequences:

(A) 1N P 4♦*...showing game-going strength and 6 or more ♥...

and...

(B) 1N P 4♥*...showing game-going (or greater) strength and 6 or more ♠.

Opener is required to accept the transfer by bidding 4 of responder's implied suit. Note that responder is the "captain" of the auction, and makes the decision as to whether to explore slam or to pass and leave opener in the major suit game. Why is responder the "captain," and what is this concept of "captaincy?" The concept of captaincy, which applies in many sequences, is as follows: The partner of the first member of the partnership to limit his or her hand, is the "captain." **Once captaincy is established, the captain decides the final contract, because he is the first to know the narrow limits of partner's hand, and is therefore in the best position to judge where the partnership should play.**

One of the many sequences in which one partner limits his hand is a sequence in which he opens 1N. By doing so, opener shows 15-17 high card points (some systems use a different range, but the range is always narrow...3 high card points). Opening 1N also shows "balanced" distribution. Typical distributions are 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, and 5-3-3-2. Partnerships differ on whether a 1N opener can include a 5-card major, and on whether (and if so, under what circumstances) opener's distribution can be 5-4-2-2. Yes, there is a fair degree of variation among 1N openers, and "limiting one's hand" is a relative concept, as are so many things in bridge...and life. All of that being said, consider following sequences:

(C) 1♣ P 1♥...

Opener has 12-21 high card points, a 10-point range...not (very) limited. Responder should have a minimum of 5 high card points, but could have far more than that. He could have a slam-going hand...and again, is functionally “unlimited.” At this stage of this auction, no captain has been established. Distinguish the following hands:

(D) 1♣ P 1♥ P
2♣...

Opener is first to limit his hand when he rebids 2C. Most would agree that he has 6+ Clubs and 12-16 HCP. On this auction, responder is therefore the captain.

(E) 1♣ P 1♥ P
1N...

Again, opener is first to limit his hand, this time by rebidding 1N. Most would agree that he does not have 4♠, and that he has 12-14 HCP. On this auction, therefore, responder is again the captain.

(F) 1♣ P 1♥ P
1♠ P 1N...

This time, it is *responder* who is the first to limit his hand, by rebidding 1N, and by thereby denying 4♠ and showing 6-9 (maybe a bad 10) HCPs. Opener is therefore captain in this sequence.

Discuss this principle with all of your regular partners. As a general proposition, once captaincy has been established, the captain is free to set the contract, and partner should respect that decision. On the other hand, if the captain keeps the bidding open, his partner should endeavor to further describe his hand within the context of what he has shown thus far. A retreat to an agreed or previously-mentioned trump suit tends to be weak, while the mention of a new suit tends to show extra values in the context of what has been shown thus far.

Getting back to Texas Transfers, it should now be clear what is meant when we say that responder is captain in hands (A) and (B) above. Opening 1N immediately limits one's hand, thereby making responder the captain. Responder is well-positioned to either put opener in 4 of his major (which should be passed), or to explore slam either by means of cue bidding or Blackwood, as best suits the responder/captain's need for information in order to accurately judge whether to subsist at the 5-level, or to drive to slam, and if so, in what strain (6 of the major, or 6N).

Before we leave the topic of Texas Transfers, it is worth mentioning Delayed Texas. This is a handy way to show 6-4 in the majors, as follows:

(G) 1N P 2♣ P
 2♦ P 4♦*...

This sequence shows game-going values with 6♥ and 4♠...

and...

(H) 1N P 2♣ P
 2♦ P 4♥*...

Which shows game-going values with 6♠ and 4♥.

Why should responder look for the 4-4 fit in his shorter major when he knows that the partnership has at least an 8-card fit in his 6-card major? Because playing in the 4-4 fit will potentially give declarer *multiple* discards on the 6-card major after the trumps have been drawn, whereas the opposite is not true.

Smolen (Suggested for Intermediate Players) (Mark Oettinger)

This is a convention of limited utility, but when it comes up, it is very handy. It is a normal extension of Stayman, and is part of most modern partnerships' toolbox

for describing the various major-suit-oriented hands opposite a 1N opener. The two basic sequences are:

1N P 2♣ P
2♦ P 3♥*...

and...

1N P 2♣ P
2♦ P 3♠*...

Responder (who is 5=4 or 4=5 in the majors, and has a game-going hand...10+ HCPs) starts with Stayman, and if opener rebids 2♦ (denying a 4-card major), responder jumps to either 3♥ to show 5♠ and 4♥, or to 3♠ to show 5♥ and 4♠. It may seem counterintuitive to bid the major suit of which you have fewer, but since opener denied a 4-card major when he rebid 2♦, you know that he does not have 4-card support for your 4-card major, so what you are doing is determining whether partner has 3-card support for your 5-card major, failing which, you will play in 3N. And if opener *does* have 3-card support, he will be the one to first bid the trump suit, having the effect of a transfer, “right-siding” the contract more often than not, keeping the stronger hand hidden, having the opening lead “come up to” the strong hand, and often gaining tempo.

A related issue to discuss with partner is how “extensions” or “continuations” of the basic Smolen sequence are to be understood. For example in the following auction:

1N P 2♣ P
2♦ P 3♥* P
?...

What does 3♠ mean? Maximum 1N opener with 3+♠ (under the principle of slow arrival)?

What about 3N? Only 2♠?

What about 4♣, 4♦ or 4♥? 3-card trump support for responder's 5-card major? Ace of the indicated suit, denying a lower Ace? Italian-style cuebid?

What does 4♠ mean? Minimum 1N opener with 3+♠ (under the principle of fast arrival)?

I have posed a few possible interpretations, but different treatments are equally supportable. What is important is that you and your partner have clear understandings wherever you can, and general "rules of construction" for when the inevitable "undiscussed" sequences arise. Two useful "rules of construction" are:

Rule of Construction # 1: If it's undiscussed, it should be assumed to be natural;

and

Rule of Construction # 2: If you think that partner might misconstrue your bid, assume that he will...and bid something else.