

Bridge Bidding Systems after Opener Rebids 2NT

[Pete Matthews](#) – © October 31, 2012

After a response at the one level, opener's rebid of two notrump usually shows a balanced hand of about 19 high card points: a hand between a strong 1NT and a strong 2NT opening. Using standard methods, responder's only weak action over opener's strong 2NT rebid is to pass, and everything else is forcing. You can do better.

Why Bother?

In the *Walsh style*, responder always bypasses a diamond suit when holding a four card major, unless strong enough to force to game. Playing this way, you would respond 1♠ to partner's 1♣ opening with:

♠K873 ♥7 ♦Q97532 ♣82

If opener rebids 2NT, you would like to sign off in 3♦, likely a much better contract. Similarly, if you do not have a weak jump shift available, you might respond 1♠ to partner's 1♣ opening bid on

♠KT8743 ♥72 ♦953 ♣82

The chance of making 2NT is slim, and you would like to offer 3♠ as a better final contract.

Pairs who respond "up the line" to 1♣ and who play weak jump shifts may still want to sign off in a suit, but it won't happen as often. On the same auction, you would want opener to choose between playing 3♥ and 3♠:

♠KT874 ♥Q972 ♦53 ♣82

Finally, standard bidding does not distinguish between responder's 4=4 and 4=5 forcing major hands. New Minor Forcing or Checkback Stayman can help with that (but not with signoffs).

Issues for Responses to Opener's Strong 2NT Rebids

Playability: The partnership must be able to remember and employ the system, without undue effort. This must be the most important criterion, as you will have many sessions of bridge without a strong 2NT rebid.

Artificial bids: If you can remember them, artificial bids can help to describe more hands.

Variation: Under what conditions, if any, may opener do otherwise than instructed by responder?

Strength: Can responder handle signoff, game-forcing and slam auctions?

Distributions: Can responder handle these distributions?

- Majors: 4=4, 4=5, 5=4, 5=5, one-suiter
- Minors: 5=5, one-suiter
- 5-4-3-1 shapes

Suit quality: For game or slam purposes, is the quality of a suit or support good or bad?

Related bidding methods: Point range? Does responder bypass diamonds? Can opener hold a 4-card major?

Auctions: To what auctions does the system apply? These are the ten possibilities:

Minor Suit Response (1)	Major Suit Response (5)	1NT Response (4)
1♣ – 1♦; 2NT	1♣/1♦/1♥ – 1♥/1♠; 2NT	1♣/1♦/1♥/1♠ – 1NT; 2NT

Systems

With the issues in mind, let's look at some systems of responses to opener's strong 2NT rebid.

Standard: In "standard" methods, jumps to game are natural signoffs, 4♣ is Gerber, and all other 3-level bids are natural and forcing. These meanings apply, if you have not agreed something else.

New Minor Forcing: Responder's bid of three of an unbid minor is artificial and forcing, usually a major suit checkback. Without further agreement, all other bids are standard.

Checkback Stayman: Responder's bid of 3♣ is a major suit checkback. Without further agreement, all other bids are standard. This leaves the 3♦ response available to be natural or artificial.

Flint: Named after Jeremy Flint, this may be the original non-standard approach permitting signoff. Responder's 3♦ is a puppet to 3♥ for signoff in a major suit.

Flint 3♣: This modification of Flint is now the essence of "Wolff Signoff with Checkback". Responder's 3♣ is a puppet to 3♦ for signoff. 3♦ is a major suit checkback.

Stoplight: In the late 70s, Marvin French published this method of signing off. Similar to Flint 3♣, this bid says "stop, I'm light." In addition to a 3♦ major suit checkback, 3♥ and 3♠ are artificial, showing forward-going club and diamond hands, respectively. Jumps to game show slam interest – go through 3♣ to deny slam interest. This is a complex but powerful system that also works over opener's 1NT rebid.

Kaplan-Sheinwold Updated: 3♣ forces 3♦ for signoff, but if responder does not sign off, 3♣ becomes natural.

Transfers (Bowles, Chen): "3♣/3♦/3♥ are transfers, showing 4 cards if it's a new suit, 5 cards if it's responder's suit, 3 cards if it's opener's suit. 3♠ shows a good hand with clubs. Four level bids in new suits or opener's suit are auto-splinters. Transfers to a new, lower suit, to responder's first suit, or to opener's suit might be weak. ... Any further move by responder after a transfer is game forcing." Andy Bowles describes this system in detail, especially conditions for opener to break the transfer. Mark Chen's system is similar.

Wolff Signoff (original): The original version created by Bobby Wolff is described in *Aces Scientific* (1978). 3♣ requests opener to show 3-card support for responder's major, or otherwise bid 3♦ to permit a signoff. If responder does not sign off, clubs becomes natural. In order to show a 4=4 major suit hand, you need to remember a bidding trick: after 1♣ – 1♥ – 2NT, an immediate 3♠ shows 4=5; bidding 3♣ first shows 4=4. Other than the 3♣ bid, all the other responses are standard. Lex DeGroot updates this system.

Wolff Signoff with 3♦ Raise: This recommended variant of Wolff is easily described as "3♣ is a puppet to 3♦ for signoff, 4-4 forcing, or slam try. 3♦ is an artificial raise of opener's minor." This system was attributed to George Rosenkranz on the web. In order to distinguish 4=4 from 4=5 in the majors, you need the trick described for "Wolff Signoff (original)" – often omitted from the simple description – for 4-4 forcing. See page 4.

Wolff Signoff with 3♦ Checkback: This variant is a rediscovery and expansion of Flint 3♣. The systems described by Max Hardy and Marshall Miles differ, and lots more ideas are online. Remembering this system proved difficult. On page 5, I offer a version that we tried. After 1m - 1M; 2NT - 3♣; 3♦, options for 3OM include: [1] natural, 3♥=weak, 3♠=4-4; [2] natural, exactly 4 cards, [3] natural, 5-5; [4] artificial slam try in other minor.

Note on Wolff methods: If you play Walsh style, as I prefer, definitely require opener to bid 3♦ over a Wolff 3♣, in case responder wants to pass. When responding "up the line" to 1♣, you may choose to permit (or require) opener to show 3-card support for responder's major. However, never permit opener to answer an unbid major over 3♣, except possibly with 3=4 majors, to assure reaching a desirable contract at the 3-level.

Comparison of Systems

Responder's hands (●=full, ○=partial)	Standard	New Minor Forcing	Checkback Stayman	Flint	Spotlight	Kaplan-Sheinwold	Transfers	Wolff (original)	Wolff with 3♦ Raise	Wolff with 3♦ Checkback
weak long suit other than clubs				○	●	○	●	○	●	●
weak 5=4 or 5=5 majors					●	○	●	○	●	●
strong 4=4 majors		●	●		●	●		●	●	●
strong 5=4 majors	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
strong 4=5 majors	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
strong 5=5 majors	○	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	●	●
strong 6=4 majors	○	●	●	○	●	○	●	○	○	●
strong 4=6 majors	○	●	●	○	●	○	●	○	○	●
3-level slam try in opener's minor	●	●	○	○	●	○	●	○	●	○
strong 5-4-3-1 hands							●			
ways to 4 of responder's major	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	4

Weak long suit other than clubs: This measures the ability of responder to force a signoff in the suit of his choice at the 3-level. This is a key feature for those playing Walsh style, where a weak response in a major suit could conceal a 6-card diamond suit.

Strong 4=4 majors: Only a checkback bid (or a bidding trick that you have to memorize) will distinguish between 4=4 and 4=5 (four spades and five hearts) in the majors.

Strong 5=5 majors: Only a checkback bid (with natural/transfer majors) will distinguish between 5=4 and 5=5 in the majors *at the 3-level*. This could be important: opener might not have three cards in either major. The direct bid of 3♥ (after a 1♠ response) should promise five or more hearts – otherwise use the checkback bid.

3-level slam try in opener's minor: Only a few systems offer a forcing slam try in either opener's club or diamond suit at the 3-level. Some systems offer a non-forcing slam try at 3NT, after some artificial bid.

Strong 5-4-3-1 hands: A transfer to a second suit can be followed by a bid in the 3-card fragment, as a slam try. However, transfers do not appear as good for some other distributions.

Ways to 4 of responder's major: In all these systems, responder may jump to game in the major, usually a signoff. The only other way to get there in standard bidding is to make a natural, forcing bid at the 3-level, and the equivalent again exists in all systems except Spotlight. A 3♣ signoff, followed by a leap to game, can be used to make a slam try, possibly with a broken suit, helping to clarify the direct 3-level force. A checkback bid adds another way, and further clarifies the direct 3-level force. More ways are better, but more complicated.

Recommended: Wolff Signoff with 3♦ Raise

The initial response was one of a suit, and opener rebids 2NT:

- 3♣ requires opener to bid 3♦, so responder may:
 - **Sign off:** Responder may pass 3♦, sign off in his major, or offer a choice of major suit part scores at 3♥ (having previously bid spades). Opener may elect to convert any signoff to game with a big fit.
 - **Force, 4-4:** Responder's reverse to 3♥ or 3♠ shows a forcing 4-4 hand – *a key bidding trick*: 1m – 1♥; 2NT – 3♣; 3♦ – 3♠ is forcing with 4-4 majors. 1♣ – 1♦; 2NT – 3♣; 3♦ – 3♥/3♠ shows a strong hand with four cards in diamonds and the bid suit, possibly 4-4-4-1.
 - **Invite slam, 6+:** 4♦, 4♥ or 4♠ promises 6+ cards, if responder's first suit. Opener may pass, bid 4NT to ask for key cards, or cue bid.

Optional Basic Rebids after 3♣; 3♦	Optional Advanced Rebids after 3♣; 3♦
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Invite slam in clubs:</i> Responder's 3NT is a mild slam try in clubs.	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Sign off in clubs:</i> Responder's 3NT shows a bad hand with a long, bad club suit. Opener may pass to convert to game, perhaps with ♣AKx. (Can you remember this?)
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Sign off in clubs:</i> Responder's 4♣ shows a bad hand with a long, bad suit.	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Four-level force:</i> 4♣, 4♦, 4♥ or 4♠, if not responder's first suit, shows shape and is forcing to 4NT. (4♣ should be most likely.)
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Four-level force:</i> 4♦, 4♥ or 4♠, if not responder's first suit, shows shape and is forcing to 4NT.	
<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Responses to the four-level force:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Opener's 4NT is natural, discouraging slam. ▪ Opener's bid of responder's first suit is a true preference, sets trump, and is forcing to 5. ▪ Opener's bid of 5♣ [or 4♦] asks for keycards in responder's second suit. ▪ Opener's other bids are natural, with some defect for slam or notrump purposes. 	

- *Slam try in opener's suit:* 3♦ is an artificial slam try. After a minor suit opening, any subsequent bid of four of the other minor (not opener's) is Crosswood, asking for keycards.
- *Gerber:* 4♣ asks for aces *Roman Keycard Gerber:* 4♣ asks for keycards in responder's suit

Everything else is based on standard. Over opener's 2NT:

- *Force in a major:* 3♥ or 3♠ is natural and forcing, 5+ cards if the original suit, and at least 5-4 if bidding a new suit. Bidding both majors and then removing 3NT to the second major is a non-forcing slam try with at least 5-5 (jump to 4♥ over 2NT with a weaker hand). If 3♥ or 3♠ is a reverse after a 1♦ response, 4♣ would be Crosswood by either partner, since diamonds have been provisionally raised.
- *Slam in notrump:* 4NT is natural and invitational. A direct 5NT is natural and forcing, inviting a grand slam.
- *Jump to game:* 3NT/4♥/4♠/5♣/5♦ are to play, but may be converted to responder's first suit.

The initial response was 1NT: Play **standard** on this auction (all bids forcing), with one exception:

- Responder's bid of opener's major suit is weak, suggesting that opener pass. This handles the case where responder has bid 1NT with a bad supporting hand.

Interference: With interference before the 2NT bid, Wolff Signoff should remain in effect when opener's 2NT rebid is natural and still shows about 19 HCP in a balanced hand.

With interference at 2NT or higher, Wolff is *off*:

- If 2NT is doubled, redouble is strong (likely balanced) and doubles are penalty. All responder's non-reverse 3-level bids are to play, including 3♣. Responder's reverse promises at least 4=5 and is forcing.
- If the opponents bid a suit over 2NT, bad hands pass, and bids are forcing. Responder's 3NT does not promise a stopper. Responder's double shows a stopper and may be converted for penalty or to 3NT.

Convention Card Description: The Lee Edwards "ACBL Editor" will fit this on one line, on the bottom of the card:

1x-1y-2NT: 4♣ =RKG y; 3♦=raise of x (slam); 3♣ ->3♦ for signoff/4-4 force/slam; other std.

	Wolff Signoff with 3♦ Checkback: 1m – 1M; 2NT (<i>one of many competing, hard to remember schemes</i>)
3♣	Puppet to 3♦ for signoff or slam try. After 3♦: 3♥ or 3♠ is to play (may correct 3♥ to 3♠); 3NT is a mild slam try in opener's minor; 4♣/4♦ is a natural slam try with a broken 5-card or longer suit; 4♥/4♠ is a natural slam try with a broken suit or weak support.
3♦	Major suit checkback, promises either 5 cards in original major or 4 in the other, or both, possibly 6=4. Opener bids 4-card major with both. Responder's next bid: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3NT & 4NT natural, with the other major • 4♣ & 4♦ are cue bids confirming a major suit fit
3♥	Natural, forcing: a strong 6-card suit with slam interest if hearts is original major; otherwise 5=5 majors, at least game forcing.
3♠	Natural, forcing: a strong 6-card suit with slam interest if spades is the original major; otherwise 4=6 majors, at least game forcing.
3NT	Natural, to play
4♣	Natural slam try, good suit or support.
4♦	Natural slam try, good suit or support.
4♥	Natural, to play in responder's suit. Otherwise, a splinter in support of responder's suit.
4♠	Natural, to play in responder's suit. Otherwise, a splinter in support of responder's suit.
4NT	Natural, quantitative.
5♣	Gerber for Aces
	The minimum for a "strong" suit or support is defined as two of the top three honors.
	If an 8-card or longer fit (major or minor) is known to both partners, 4NT is RKC; otherwise quantitative.
	If 4NT is RKC, the unbid suit below 4NT may be an attempt to sign off in 4NT. Otherwise, unbid suits at the 4-level are cue bids.

References

1. *Advanced Bridge Bidding for the 21st Century*, Max Hardy, pp. 89-93, "The Wolff Signoff" and "Major Suit Checkbacks".
 2. *The Bridge Bulletin*, March 2009, p. 30, "Bidding Lab: Wolff signoff", Marshall Miles.
 3. *Bridgehands*, "Wolff Signoff", bridgehands.com/W/Wolff_Signoff.htm.
 4. *Aces Scientific*, Bobby Goldman, pp. 75-76, "The Wolff Signoff".
 5. *IMP*, Apr/May 1997, "Ballast or Baggage: The Wolff Relay – what if he bids 2NT?", Lex De Groot, homepage.mac.com/bridgeguys/pdf/WolffRelayIMP.pdf.
 6. *The QBA Bulletin*, Jan/Feb 2005, p. 4, "Cuppaidge's Column: Wolff Sign-off", George Cuppaidge, www.qldbridge.com/bulletin/qba/QBAJan05.pdf.
 7. "STOPLIGHT", Marvin French, <http://www.marvinfrench.com/p1/biddinghandbook/04-12.pdf>.
 8. *Kaplan-Sheinwold Updated*, Edgar Kaplan, http://www.bridgeworld.com/default.asp?d=editorial_dept&f=edgarkaplan/ksupdated.html.
 9. *The Bridge Bulletin*, October, 2008, p. 28, "Bidding Lab: Transfer responses to opener's notrump rebids", Mark Chen.
 10. *The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*, Fifth Edition, Francis, Truscott & Francis, Ed., © 1994.
 11. *rec.games.bridge* newsgroup, especially: Response by Andy Bowles (1997/01/11) to "Transfer responses to notrump rebid?"
 12. "Roman Keycard Blackwood and Crosswood", Pete Matthews, web.mit.edu/mitdlbc/.
 13. *Competitive Bidding in the 21st Century*, Marshall Miles, © 2000.
 14. Discussions with Gary Schwartz – this is our plan.
- Selected, more recent references on Wolff – many conflicting opinions:
15. "Modified Wolff over 2nt rebid in competition", <http://www.scribd.com/doc/7654347739/Modified-Wolff-over-2nt-rebid-in-competition#page=30>.
 16. "Wolff Signoffs: A Basic Version presented by Mike Savage", <http://www.sfvbridgeacademy.com/Web%20Conventions/Wolff%20Sign.htm>.
 17. "Wolfe Relay (3♣) and Checkback Stayman (3♦)", <http://eastontario.com/conventions/wolfe.htm>.
 18. *Bridgewinners*, "Modified Wolff", Naveed A., <http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/modified-wolff/>. See comment by Henry Bethe.
 19. *Pitbulls*, "Wolff Relay - Clubs", http://www.edmontonbridge.ca/Crosby_files/Coaches%20Corner/Wolff%20Relay%20-%20Clubs.htm.
 20. *BridgeBase*, <http://www.bridgebase.com/forums/topic/24561-wolff-over-1x-1y-2nt/>.
 21. "Wolfe Signoff (slight variation)", <http://members.shaw.ca/conventions/wolff.htm>.
 22. *Becker's Bridge Blog*, "Wolff Signoff After 2NT Rebid", <http://dblbridge.blogspot.com/2010/01/wolff-signoff-after-2nt-rebid.html>.