

The Flannery Convention with Extensions

By Neil H. Timm

This Flannery convention is used whenever one has five hearts and four spades with 11-15 HCP. William L. Flannery from McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, devised it. With 11 HCP you need 2 ½ defensive tricks. The convention uses the bid of 2♦* (*=alert) to describe the hand (since this is a standard convention, the ACBL does not allow that it be used with 10HCP – call the Director if this occurs). The major plus for the bid is that after a one heart opening bid, responder knows that opener cannot have four spades unless opener is strong enough to reverse (17+ HCP).

Playing Flannery, if partner opens 1♥, a bid of 1♠* by responder ensures five spades (*=alert) unless you play the Kaplan interchange/inversion convention. With the Kaplan interchange convention 1NT*=5♠ and 1♠*=0-4 spades, the 1♠ and 1NT bids were “interchanged”.

Responses to 2♦*

2♥* is signoff, to play and alerted

2♠* is signoff, to play and alerted.

3♥/3♠ is a limit raise, inviting opener to bid game with a maximum.

3♣/3♦ shows a long six card minor with 11-13 HCP and no major fit. Opener may pass or bid 3NT.

3NT balanced hand with 16-18 HCP; slam invitational

4♣ 1430 for hearts (some play this as Gerber or Expert Gerber)

4♦ 1430 for spades

4♥ to play

4♠ to play

2NT is a one-round force with a good hand (11-15), asking opener to describe his distribution. Responder may have support. Opener’s rebids after 2NT are:

3♣* shows 4=5=1=3 distribution (shape bid)

3♦* shows 4=5=3=1 (shape bid)

3♥* shows 4=5=2=2 and 11-13 HCP (shape bid)

3♠* shows 4=5=2=2 and 14-15 HCP (shape bid)

3NT shows 4=5=2=2, 14-15 HCP, and concentrated minor strength (shape bid)-- some use the bid to show 6 hearts playing the Flexible Flannery 6-4 or 5-4

4♣* shows 4=5=0=4 (shape bid)

4♦* shows 4=5=4=0 (shape bid)

If responder next bids 3♥/3♠ over a minor suit 3-level bid, it asks if the opener has 13+ to 15 dummy points. Depending on opener's dummy points, opener may pass or bid game in the major. Minor suit 3-level bids by responder are invitational to 3NT or game in a minor.

Consider the following hands:

Hand	Opener bids	Responder
KQxx	2♦*	2NT
AQxxx	3♦ (shape)	etc.
Jxx		
x		

Hamd	Opener bids	Responder
KJxx	2♦*	2NT
AKQx	3NT	4♣ (Gerber/Expert Gerber)
Qx	etc.	
Xxx		

A popular Flannery "variation" of the 2NT* bid is to use it only when you have a good hand (14-15 points). Then the bid must be alerted and announced as a game-forcing auction. Without a major fit, responder bids 3NT. The bids of 3♥/3♠ by responder show a fit in the major and are now invitational with 10-13 points and 2-level bids are to play.

In team games, it is important to hamper the opponents and to enter the auction as soon as possible with weak distributions. Therefore, some players use two different bids to show a major two-suitor and do not play Flannery. Giving up Mini Roman, 2♦* shows exactly 4=5 in spades and hearts and 2♥* shows exactly 5=4 in hearts and spades; the point count is 8-10 HCP.

Alternatively, many now use 2♥* as Flannery (5-4 in hearts and spades), while others employ flexible Flannery with the 2♥* bid shows 6/6-4 in hearts and spades and 2♦*bid as Mini-Roman with 4 spades (4-4-4-1). After the bid of 2NT, 3NT* shows 6 hearts with 14-15 points with Flexible Flannery.

Others use the Ekren two-diamond convention, originated by the Norwegian expert Bjorn Olav Ekren. It allows you to open when you are exactly 4=4 in the majors and have only 3-10 HCP. Others use the Mexican 2♦* convention or Carousel 2♦* conventions; among others.

Many partnerships do not play Flannery since it discloses your exact distribution if game or slam is not reached.

To avoid this problem, some play the Modified Flannery Convention. There are also Extended Flannery (shows 4=5, 4=6, or 5=6 distributions) and Extra-Shape Flannery Conventions.

Many partnerships do not play the Mini Roman 2♦* bid to show 4=4=4=1 or the Flannery (2♦*) convention to show four spades and five hearts (4=5-x-x) since they feel too much information is conveyed to the opponents. Those who like both conventions do not like to substitute the weak 2♥* bid for Flannery in order to play both. If you fit into either of these categories, you may like the Extra-Shape Flannery convention, which uses the bid of 2♦* to describe either a two-suiter with four spades and five hearts (4=5-x-x) or an exact three suited hands (4=4=4=1). Again, the opener has 11-15 HCP.

With this convention, the artificial 2NT bid, is forcing or the start of slam investigation, is used to ask the opener about his distribution. The opener's bids after a 2NT call follow.

3♣* shows 4=5 in spades and hearts and 3-1 in the minors; now a relay 3♦ bid by responder asks the opener to identify his singleton. Opener uses step responses:

3♥* = singleton CLUB and 3♠* = singleton DIAMOND

3♦* shows 4=4=4=1 3♥* shows 4=5-2-2 with minimum 11-12 HCP strength

3♠ shows 4=5-2-2 with a maximum 14-15 HCP strength

3NT* shows 4=5=4=0, void in clubs

4♣* shows 4=5=0=4, void in diamonds

If the responder is not interested in finding out about the opener's distribution, the following non-forcing bids are used.

2♥*/2♠*	signoff
3♣	non-forcing 3=2=4=4 distribution, opener may pass with a minimum hand and three/four clubs or he may correct to 3♦
3♥/3♠	game invitational in bid suit either 4 spades or 4 hearts
4♣	establishes hearts as trump and is Key Card Blackwood
4♦	establishes spades a trump and is Key Card Blackwood
4♥/4♠	signoff

The Key Card Blackwood convention depends on your partnership agreement, either 1430 or 3014. The Extra-Shape Flannery Convention is a popular alternative convention for the wasted weak 2♦ bid which can be used to show hands difficult to describe. The bid is especially popular in team games when you want to get into the bidding early and describe your hand.