

Constructive Auctions After a Minor Suit Opening

This is the fifth tutorial of a 5 lesson series on the Fundamentals of Constructive Bidding. Constructive bidding is defined as auctions with no interference by the opponents.

The purpose of these lessons is for students to learn the concepts behind constructive bidding. I have found that, although many students understand the (often complicated) rules about bidding, they do not understand the reasoning behind these rules. By learning the fundamentals rather than just the rules, a student will be able to more intuitively and comfortably bid, without being confused by the many (sometimes conflicting) rules that may or may not apply. Note that these lessons will not teach any particular system. It will simply teach the fundamentals upon which most bidding systems are built. A student should therefore be able to more comfortably play any of the popular systems.

The series consists of 5 lessons;

- Introduction to Constructive Bidding
- No Trump Auctions
- Major Suit Auctions Part 1
- Major Suit Auctions Part 2
- Minor Suit Auctions (this lesson)

This lesson will discuss constructive auctions when the opener has started with 1♣ or 1♦.

In all of these lessons, I will assume the reader uses basic hand evaluation techniques. That is, he or she uses the standard 4-3-2-1 method for counting HCP and makes small adjustments for either shortness or length. I now teach, and prefer, the more accurate Bergen methodology, but, because it is not familiar to everyone, I will not use it in these lessons.

Introduction

Constructive auctions when opener starts with 1♣ or 1♦ are the most difficult because opener has a wider range of hand types than with other opening bids. Responder still has the same responsibilities -- determine whether or not to bid game, and determine what strain is best.

Determining whether or not to bid game is the same as before -- I will repeat the table which summarizes when to bid game:

	Opener		
Responder	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
<i>Minimum</i>	No	No	Yes
<i>Medium</i>	No	Yes	Yes
<i>Maximum</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes

The strain is a bit more complicated. Responder's most important objective is to determine whether or not the partnership has a major suit fit. If you always keep this objective in mind, the appropriate bids are much easier to remember.

Let's summarize what you know about opener's hand:

1. Opener does not have a 5-card major. In many cases, opener has a 4-card major. (In rare cases, with highly distributional hands, opener might have a 5-card major, but you, as responder can assume that opener does not have a 5-card major.)
2. Opener does not have a 1NT opener.

3. In a large majority of cases, opener has at least 4 cards in the minor suit. The only time opener doesn't have at least a 4-card minor is with 4-4-3-2, 4-4-2-3, 4-3-3-3, and 3-4-3-3 distribution and not 15-17 points. In terms of probabilities, opener has 4+ cards in the minor over 80% of the time.

Finding a 4-4 major fit

As mentioned above, responder's most important objective is to find the major suit fit. Therefore, if responder has a 4-card major, it should be bid. With both 4 hearts and 4 spades, responder should bid hearts. When partner opens 1♣, some players will bid 1♦ with 4+ diamonds and a 4-card major; however, the modern tendency is to bypass the diamond suit and bid 1 of the major.

Once responder bids a 4-card major, opener must raise with 4-card support:

- with a minimum hand, opener bids 2 of the major
- with a medium hand, opener bids 3 of the major
- with a maximum hand, opener bids 4 of the major

If responder is fortunate enough to hear a raise, the strain is set, and it is easy for responder to figure out whether or not to bid game.

Note that if responder bids 1♥ and opener has 4 spades and not 4 hearts, opener often bids spades. With a minimum or medium hand, opener would bid 1♠. With an unbalanced maximum hand, opener would jump shift to 2♠. With a balanced 18-19, opener would still bid 2N, even with 4 spades, since even if responder has a 4-card spade suit, there is still room to find the 4-4 spade fit.

Responding with a 5+ card major suit

With 5+ spades, responder should always bid 1♠ (even with 4 hearts). With 5+ hearts and not 5 spades, responder should bid 1♥.

Since responder only guarantees 4 of the major, opener often only raises with 4-card support. Opener can raise with 3 to an honor with appropriate distribution -- a void, singleton, or small doubleton, but responder should assume opener is showing 4-card support, keeping in mind that occasionally opener will raise with 3-card support.

Note that if opener makes a minimum rebid that is not a raise, and responder has a minimum hand, responder should pass with a 5-card suit. You will occasionally miss a 5-3 fit, but the rewards for staying at a lower level far outweigh the risk of getting too high.

NT Responses

With no 4+ card major, responder should usually make a NT response:

- bid 1NT with a minimum hand (6-9 points)
- bid 2NT with a medium hand (10-11 points)
- bid 3NT with a maximum hand (12+ points)

If opener opens 1♣ and you have 4+ diamonds and a minimum hand, you should bid 1♦.

With an unbalanced hand, 5+ cards in the other minor, and a medium or maximum hand, responder should bid the long minor. However, with a medium or maximum hand balanced hand (5-3-3-2), it is often better to make the appropriate NT response.

Raising Opener's Suit

Rarely should you immediately raise opener's suit. This is usually done with 5-card support (since opener can have only 3), and no other alternatives (e.g., bidding a major suit or NT).

The classic responses are as follows:

- with a minimum hand, raise to 2
- with a medium hand, raise to 3
- With a maximum hand, you must find another forcing bid.

However, many people now play what are known as "inverted minor suit raises". That means the meaning of raises to 2 and 3 are reversed. Briefly, inverted raises work as follows:

- with a minimum hand and 5+ card support, raise to 3
- with a medium or maximum hand and 4+ card support, raise to 2. A raise to 2 is forcing, as responder might have a game-forcing hand.

The raise to 3 is an application of the Law of Total Tricks, which we learned about in prior lessons. The raise to 3 is preemptive. Since most of the time your side will be playing in a 9-card fit, it is safe to bid to the 3-level based on the Law.

The bidding sequences after a strong inverted raise to 2 is beyond the scope of this lesson.

Quiz

Your partner opens 1♣. What do you bid with each of the following hands?

1. ♠ xxxx
♥ Kxx
♦ x
♣ Kxxxx

1♠. Your first obligation is to show a 4 card major, even with only 4 small.

2. ♠ KQxx
♥ xxxx
♦ xx
♣ Qxx

1♥. With both 4 hearts and 4 spades, you must bid hearts first. A 1♠ bid denies 4 hearts (unless you have 5+ spades and 4+ hearts).

3. ♠ Kxxxx
♥ KQxx
♦ xx
♣ xx

1♠. With 5 spades, you bid the spades first. However, if partner makes a minimum rebid (1NT or ♣), you must pass, as you are not strong enough to make another bid. You will occasionally miss a 4-4 heart fit; unfortunately, this is a flaw with 5-card major systems.

4. ♠ xxxxx
♥ KQxx
♦ Kx
♣ xx

Either 1♠ or 1♥ is acceptable. Technically, as above, you should bid 1♠. However, because your hearts are so good, and spades are so weak, you could treat your spade suit as a 4 card suit and bid 1♥. The only downside is partner will never play you for 5 spades.

5. ♠ xxxx
♥ xx
♦ KQxxx
♣ Kx

The modern tendency is to bypass diamonds and bid 1♠. However, I think 1♦ is a better bid. If partner has 4 spades, he will bid them himself.

6. ♠ Kxx
♥ Qxx
♦ xx
♣ Kxxxx

Either 1NT or 2♣ is acceptable (if playing classic, not inverted, raises). I have a slight preference for 1N, because you have values in the major suits. If playing inverted raises, 1NT is preferable to 3♣

7. ♠ xx
♥ xxx
♦ Qxx
♣ KQxxx

If playing classic raises, 2♣ is best. Most of your values are in clubs. 1NT is possible, but not as good a bid.

If playing inverted raises, you can make a case for either 3♣ or 1NT. Your distribution is a bit too balanced for a solid 3♣ bid, but there is a good chance you will make it difficult for the opponents to find their major suit fit. However, you may end up going down in 3♣ and be able to make 1NT.

8. ♠ KQxx
♥ x
♦ Qxx
♣ K10xxx

1♠. Again, you must always show a 4 card major if you have it. Raising clubs immediately would deny a 4-card major.

9. ♠ KQxx
♥ xx
♦ xxx
♣ KQxx

1♠. Same reasoning as the last hand.

10. ♠ xxxx
♥ xx
♦ KQx
♣ KQxx

Still 1♠. Bidding 1N or raising clubs would deny a 4 card major.

11. ♠ Kxx
♥ Kxx
♦ xx
♣ KQxxx

Playing classic raises, either 2N or 3♣, showing a medium (invitational) hand is acceptable. I have a slight preference for 2N, since you are balanced with major suit high cards.

Similarly, playing inverted raises, either 2N or 2♣. I still have a slight preference for 2N.

12. ♠ Kxx
♥ Kxx
♦ x
♣ KQxxxx

Playing classic raises, here, I think 3♣ is best, because of your singleton. However 2N is reasonable.

Similarly, playing inverted raises I think 2♣ is best, but 2N is reasonable.

13. ♠ xx
♥ Kxx
♦ KQxxx
♣ QJx

Bid 1♦. You could bid 2N, but keeping the bidding lower is usually better.

14. ♠ KQxx
♥ Kxxx
♦ Kx
♣ Qxx

Bid 1♥. Remember a new suit by responder is forcing. It is your obligation to make sure you get to game, since you have an opening hand, but since partner must bid again, the auction will not die after 1♥.

15. ♠ KQx
♥ xx
♦ Kxx
♣ KQxxx

Playing classic raises, I would bid Bid 3NT, showing 12+ balanced and no 4-card major.

Playing inverted minors, I think 2♣ is somewhat preferable to 3NT, although either is acceptable.