

Inverted Minor Raises

Superseded by EZ-Expert Bidding Tools

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In expert standard bidding, the opening bid in a major suit promises at least five cards. As a result, the opening bid in a minor suit could be made on three cards: fairly often at 1 ♣, but usually only with 4-4 majors at 1 ♦.

Expert standard includes inverted minor raises, which conserve bidding space when needed to explore for the correct contract, destroy bidding space for the opponents on weak hands, and use higher bids effectively. All these responses deny holding a 4-card major suit:

1. The single raise of a minor suit opening bid by an unpassed hand is forcing. It shows values to at least invite game, described as limit raise or better (LR+). The 2 ♣ raise usually provides at least 5-card support, because we can respond 1 ♦, with only four clubs. The raise to 2 ♦ is sometimes made on four cards, but opener is likely to also have four.
2. The jump raise of a minor suit promises at least 5-card support and insufficient values for a single raise. Because opener will bid 3 NT on a balanced hand with 18-19 HCP, responder should have sufficient values for declarer to be safe in either that contract or four of the minor.
3. The double-jump raise to four of a minor shows more shape and length, but insufficient values to support a contract of 3 NT.
4. A double jump shift response (3 ♦, 3 ♥, 3 ♠ or 4 ♣) is a splinter: a singleton or void in the bid suit, 5+ card support, and 15+ HCP.
5. A jump into a suit above four of the minor is Exclusion Keycard Blackwood (EKB), assuming you play it.

Two main styles of continuations are played after the forcing single raise:

- A. *Forcing to 2 NT or three of the minor.* In a poll on Bridge Winners in 2014, 48% responded that they prefer this option, which has a long history. This option may be better at matchpoints, where 2 NT will often score higher than three of the minor.
- B. *Forcing to three of the minor.* In the poll, 31% preferred this apparently more modern option. Overall bidding accuracy is improved by having 2 NT be forcing. This method is better at IMP scoring, where having to play three of the minor instead of 2 NT may cost little or nothing.

6% preferred (A) at matchpoints & (B) at IMPs; others preferred something else.

A. Single Raise Forcing to 2 NT or Three of the Minor

The system presented here is based on the writing of Max Hardy, originating in 1989 or earlier. It works and is easy to describe. The author plays this way.

After the Single Raise of a Minor Suit Opening (LR+), Forcing to 2 NT or 3 m	
2♦/2♥/2♠	Cheapest stopper. Could be a hand with game values otherwise suitable for 2 NT.
2 NT	Shows a balanced hand with stoppers for notrump in both majors, but at most 13 HCP, non-forcing.
3 ♣	[other minor] Natural, forcing, could be 5-4 either way.
3♣/3♦	[re-raise] No major suit stopper, non-forcing.
3♦/3♥/3♠	[jump shift] Singleton or void in bid suit, with 15+ HCP.
3 NT	Balanced hand with about 18-19 HCP.
4♣/4♦	[over 2 ♦] crosswood/♣splinter [or ♣splinter/minorwood].

Opener's rebid of 2 NT or three of the minor is not forcing, so with 14+ HCP or a good 13, opener must not make one of those bids. Even with both majors stopped, opener may need to bid a major suit with enough values for game.

With a singleton or void in a minimum opening hand, opener's plan should be to bid the other three suits, thereby implying shortness in the fourth.

Here is an example, with the opponents silent:

Opener	Responder
♠ Q 10 7	♠ K 9 3
♥ A Q 4 2	♥ J 9
♦ A 9 8 7	♦ Q 10 6 4
♣ Q 5	♣ A J 10 2
1 ♦	2 ♦ ¹
2 ♥ ²	2 NT ³
3 NT ⁴	Pass

1. Responder would prefer to have a fifth diamond for the LR+ raise; but 1 NT denies this strength, 2 ♣ usually requires more strength, and 2 NT is unappealing without a heart stopper.
2. Opener has game values and thus must not bid a non-forcing 2 NT. Opener marks time at 2 ♥, which does not deny a spade stopper.
3. Responder shows a minimum (LR) balanced hand with black stoppers.
4. Having catered to the possibility of responder's hand being unbalanced (possibly with slam interest), opener bids the obvious game.

Weaken opener's hand by removing the ♥ Q or ♣ Q, and opener would rebid 2 NT (non-forcing) instead of 2 ♥. Because responder has denied a major suit,

and is likely to have club length, stopping both majors is more important to describe than the presence or lack of a club stopper.

Strengthen responder's hand by turning the ♡ J in to the ♡ K, and the initial response would be 3 NT, avoiding the 4-card raise with stoppers all around. In modern standard bidding, this is an obnoxious but common bid with a balanced game-only hand, all suits stopped, and lacking a major suit.

Similarly, immediately respond 2 NT (invitational) to 1 ♦ on any of these hands:

♠ K 9 3

♡ K 9

♦ Q 10 6 4

♣ Q J 10 2

♠ K 9 3

♡ K 9

♦ Q 10 6 4 2

♣ Q J 10

♠ K 9 3

♡ K 9

♦ Q 10 6

♣ Q J 10 4 2

B. Single Raise Forcing to Three of the Minor

The system presented here is based on a chapter by Eric Rodwell and an article by Steve Weinstein & Adam Parrish, both from the current century. Objectives are to stop at three of the minor when both partners are minimum; declare 3 NT from the right side; avoid 3 NT when the opponents have five fast tricks; and get to good slams – all aided by showing shortness.

After the Single Raise of a Minor Suit Opening (LR+), Forcing to 3 of the Minor		
2♦/2♥/2♠	Usually the cheapest stopper, does not want to declare notrump. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To show shortness in a hand not strong enough for a splinter, opener bids three suits, bidding the longer side suit next. With 6-5 shape, opener bids the 5-card suit, and then bids it again. (Note: opener might have to repeat a 4-card major, if responder rebids something other than 2 NT.) Continuations, other than splinter jumps, are natural.	
2 NT	Shows a balanced hand with stoppers for notrump in all side suits (at most one partial stopper), with a decent minimum or 18-19.	
	3 m	Only invitational, not forcing.
	3 suit	Singleton or void, forcing to game, but not strong enough for an immediate splinter response.
	3 NT	Excellent invite or better. Opener bids 4 NT with 18-19.
3 ♣	[other minor] Natural, forcing, could be 5-4 either way.	
3♣/3♦	[re-raise] Weakest possible bid (weaker than pass in competition); does not deny stoppers.	
3♦/3♥/3♠	[jump shift] Singleton or void in bid suit, with 15+ HCP.	
3 NT	Balanced hand with 18 HCP and only three cards in the minor.	
4♣/4♦	[over 2 ♦] crosswood/♣splinter [or ♣splinter/minorwood].	

Opener's rebid in a new suit is natural, often the cheapest stopper for notrump. Over this, responder's new suit also shows a stopper; with two suits in doubt, bid what you have.

Opener's rebid of 2 NT is natural, and not a bare minimum. With a balanced hand, responder will usually raise to 3 NT or try to sign off at three of the minor. Responder's bid of a new suit at the 3-level shows a singleton or void in that suit (in a hand not suitable for an immediate splinter response). With three unbid suits, this non-jump splinter pinpoints the main issue for notrump or slam immediately. (While this is technically superior to natural bids, it might be messed up at the table; your choice.)

Be alert to the possibility of playing in a 4-3 major suit fit when 3 NT is unattractive. Specifically, if hearts have been bid, 4 ♥ becomes an offer to play, and does not ask for keycards when playing kickback or redwood.

Interference

If LHO acts immediately over the opening minor suit bid, systems are off. We cue bid or use the standard Jordan 2 NT (or equivalent) to show a LR+ hand.

If they double the LR+ raise, redouble shows extras and suggests defending; otherwise, the systems are on. Pass with a balanced hand that might want to be dummy.

If they overcall our LR+, doubles are penalty; otherwise, we play natural bids, splinter jumps, etc. Opener's cue bid shows shortness, but bidding may stop at four of the minor.

Weinstein has additional specifics:

- a. If they bid at the two-level, and responder is a passed hand, double is takeout by responder, and shows general extras by opener.
- b. If they bid 3 ♦ or 3 ♥, opener's double shows shortness; responder's double shows 3+ cards in the bid suit.
- c. If they bid 3 ♠, double by opener or responder asks partner to bid 3 NT with a stopper, or otherwise respond to a takeout double.
- d. General principle: fast arrival in competition (therefore, bidding three of the minor is weaker than passing, when forced to that level).
- e. When we are in a force, a new suit is natural but shows an offensive hand.

Alternative Methods

Hardy recommends playing opener's rebid of 3 ♣ as the club splinter, over the 2 ♦ raise. This may be technically superior, but it installs a memory trap into the system. Better is to play 3 ♣ as natural.

We play crosswood: after a minor suit becomes trump, four of the other minor asks for keycards, so 4 ♦ over 2 ♦ becomes a splinter in clubs. If you play something else, use 4 ♣ as the splinter in clubs.

Some folks who play style (A) reportedly require opener to jump to 3 NT with a 14-point balanced hand; with 18-19, opener bids 4 NT. Both bids waste an essential level of bidding, when responder has an unbalanced hand with slam interest. In contrast, Rodwell recommends that responder's jump to 3 NT be made with 18-19 balanced, but only with three cards in the raised minor, or a poor hand for slam. Weinstein further restricts this jump to 18 HCP and three cards.

Some folks play the single raise as forcing to game. With this, some play the jump shift in the other minor as a limit raise, a method known as criss-cross raises. This sounds grand, but after having multiple auctions founder, we stopped playing it. Also, if you play the auction { 1 ♦ – 2 ♣ } as forcing to game, you need { 1 ♦ – 3 ♣ } to be invitational with a good suit. Rodwell suggests playing responder's jump shift to 2 ♥ as the limit raise. This makes good sense, if you don't need the bid for something else.

Rodwell also suggests that responder's jump 2 ♠ response can be played as a mixed raise: not strong enough for a single raise, but enough values to support opener's 3 NT bid on 18-19 balanced. When playing this way, the jump raise to three of the minor does not promise much of anything, and opener seldom moves toward game over that raise.

Some partnerships permit responder to have a 4-card major for the single raise, along with 6-card support and/or slam interest. We do not wish to wrestle with the complications of such a scheme, which I did not find in the literature for standard methods. However, responder may judge to suppress a 4-card major when determined to play in the minor suit.

Without discussion, inverted minors apply in all seats. However, Marshall Miles recommends that they not apply to a passed hand. He wrote that some hands are hard to bid when playing inverted minors; while many of the advantages of inverted raises disappear when responder is a passed hand, these problem hands remain. From a poll on Bridge Winners, 80% of respondents play inverted minors as a passed hand, as do my other sources.

Annotated References

1. *Two Over One Game Force, Revised – Expanded*, Max Hardy, © 1989.
2. *Advanced Bidding for the 21st Century*, Max Hardy, © 2002.
3. *Modern Constructive Bidding*, Marshall Miles, © 2005.
4. [Bridge World Standard 2017](#), Bridge World Magazine, © 2019. Confirms style (B).
5. *Eric Rodwell's Bidding Topics*, Book 1, Eric Rodwell, © 2017. Unlike the references above, Rodwell offers complete coverage of his recommended methods, including interference.
6. <http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/inverted-minors-by-passed-hand/>
7. <http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/how-far-is-an-inverted-minor-raise-forcing/>
8. <http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/1m-2m-now-what/>, Steve Weinstein & Adam Parrish, 2014. A comprehensive description and summary, this article and Rodwell's are the basis for style (B) and interference. If you adopt this plan, definitely read the article, which has many examples.
9. <http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/1m-2nt-natural-and-forcing-is-that-legal/>, Steve Weinstein, 2010. Continuations after { 1 m – 2 NT } forcing; implied but not stated, 2 NT denies a 4-card major. Playing a 1 NT opening 14+ to 17, they respond 1 NT with up to 11, and have no balanced invitation. They play 1 NT with a bad 14 opposite 11, and drive to game with 12 as responder.
In this context, consider the example for style (A). Is opener's hand a good 14 (play 3 NT)? Is responder's hand good enough for an inverted minor raise (play 3 NT)? Or would you be playing 1 NT? Do you care?
10. <http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/1m-2nt-natural-and-forcing/>. In a comment, Greg Humphreys suggests these simple continuations after { 1 m – 2 NT } forcing, possibly containing a 4-card major: 3 ♣ = Stayman; 3 ♦ = I was going to rebid my minor; 3 M = short in bid suit.