

# Unusual Minor

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# Introduction

This document sets out an artificial bidding system that is easy to learn and apply, and uses a disciplined, formal approach to encourage competitive bidding. It places a strong emphasis on Major suit holdings, and focuses on quickly conveying the key elements of opener's hand in a way that resists disruption by competitive bidding.

Bidding systems provide a form of communication in an extremely constrained environment: there are only so many bids available at any point in the auction, and partners have to use them to exchange information and identify at what level (if at all) they should be playing while their opponents do the same, all without going past their best spot.

Actually identifying what contract you should be playing in is a non-trivial task that requires considering many factors; and some thought (or even better, practical experience) should be enough to convince you that no bidding system is really good enough to always get it right – the language of bidding, and the limited space provided by the auction, place strong constraints on the information you and your partner can exchange.

The Unusual Minor system aims to meet this challenge by setting out clear rules for openings, responses and rebids; by relying on partnership discipline to adhere to the standards required for systemic bids; and by relying on careful analysis by both partners at every stage of the auction, not just in considering what a particular bid signifies, but also in why it was chosen from amongst the available alternatives.

Before we move on to the details of our system, here are some general principles that should be borne in mind throughout:

- The first two rounds of the auction - the opening, initial response, opener's rebid and responder's next bid - should provide the most accurate picture possible of your hand's strength and shape.
- The third round is generally where the final contract is decided. In an uncontested auction you'll bid what you expect to make, if game appears possible; in a contested auction, it's a question of bidding what will get you the best overall score on the board.
- The auction is an open forum – you use it to exchange information with your partner, but the opposition hear everything you say. Don't ask a question if the answer will be more useful to them than to you, and don't volunteer information that isn't going to help your side.
- You should generally aim to limit your hand as quickly as possible, unless you have slam ambitions and need to keep the auction open to find out more about your partner's hand. Passing on a shapely 5-count may feel hard, but once you've passed anything you bid on subsequent rounds will be interpreted in the context of your original pass.

- Except where explicitly required, never bid NT out of desperation or as a “last resort”.

## Overview

Here’s a list of the key features of the Unusual Minor system; you can use it to provide a quick summary of the system.

- 1NT opening is used for any balanced hand with 12-14HCP, no exceptions for 5 card Majors.
- All suit openings at the 1 level identify specific holdings in one or the other Major suit, and do not necessarily identify the longest suit in the hand;
  - 1♣: Exactly 4 Hearts, or a single-suited hand with 6+ Hearts;
  - 1♦: Exactly 4 Spades, or a single-suited hand with 6+ Spades;
  - 1♥: 5+ Hearts, but not an unbalanced single-suited hand;
  - 1♠: 5+ Spades, but not an unbalanced single-suited hand
- 2♣ opening shows an opening hand with no 4-card Major that isn’t suitable for 1NT.
- Strong 2♦ opening, with control-showing responses.
- 2♥ and 2♠ are both weak 2s.
- Opening 2NT shows a balanced 21-22 HCP.
- Suit raises are based on the Losing Trick Count (LTC).
- After an 11-20HCP opening other than 1NT, a bid showing a new suit by a responder who has neither passed nor doubled is always forcing.
- After an 11-20HCP opening other than 1NT, opener’s rebid is only ever forcing if it’s a conventional call that requires a response (e.g. Blackwood, or a splinter or cue bid).

# Opening Hands with 11-20 HCP

## Opening Standards

Balanced (4333, 4432, or 5332) hands with between 12 and 20 HCP are opened with a call in the range 1♣ to 2♣. We also open unbalanced hands with 11+ HCP, so long as they have no more than 7 losers.

Within the notional 11-20HCP range we make a distinction between lower-range hands and stronger, typically unbalanced hands with about 17+HCP and (generally) 5 or fewer losers. These stronger hands we call **reversing** hands, and they are usually indicated by either a jump rebid or by showing a higher-ranking suit on the second round than on the first, forcing responder to raise the level of the auction in order to show preference. Reversing hands will almost without exception be at least 5-4.

## Opening 1NT

Balanced hands with 12-14 HCP are always opened 1NT, without regard to suit texture or where the points lie. Occasionally, opener will also opt to open 1NT with 15HCP but no 4-card Major; usually, when they are a 4333 with a 4-card minor

## Opening 2♣

Hands with no 4-card Major that can't be opened 1NT are opened 2♣.

Opener will have one of the following hand types:

- 15-20HCP balanced, no 4-card Major; or
- 5-4 or greater minor 2-suiter, 11-20HCP; or
- 6+ cards in one or the other minor, 11-20HCP.

As a general rule, opener will either rebid in NT with a balanced hand, support responder's suit, or name their own; in any of these sequences, if opener rebids a Major (other than to support responder), it's asking for a stopper.

## Opening Hands with One Major Suit

Firstly, if the hand is balanced and contains 12-14HCP we open 1NT.

If the only Major suit is exactly 4 cards long, we open 1 of the corresponding minor: with exactly 4 Hearts we open 1♣, and with exactly 4 Spades we open 1♦.

If the hand is a single-suited hand with a 6+ card Major, we also open 1 of the corresponding minor: 1♣ with 6+Hearts and no other 4-card suit, or 1♦ with 6+Spades.

Any other hand will be either a balanced hand with a 5-card Major that is too strong to open 1NT, or a 2-suiter with a 5+-card Major; we open 1♥ if the Major is Hearts, or 1♠ if the Major is Spades.

## Opening Hands with Both Majors

As always, if the hand is balanced and contains 12-14HCP we open 1NT.

With hands of reversing strength we choose our opening bid to show the Heart suit, and then reveal the Spade suit on the second round; with other hands, we show the Spades on the first round and the Hearts on the second.

With balanced hands that are 4-4 in the Majors we usually anticipate rebidding in NT; if the hand is particularly strong it still makes sense to show the Hearts first (by opening 1♣). Should partner be considerate enough to respond 1♠, our direct support of their suit – even with a simple call of 2♠ - reveals a hand that was preparing to reverse. Other balanced hands, that fall short of 5 losers, are better opened 1♦ to avoid suggesting that strength.

Unbalanced hands with both Majors that aren't strong enough to reverse are normally opened with a bid that shows the Spade suit (1♦ with exactly 4, 1♠ with 5+), planning to reveal the Heart suit on the second round.

## After 1♣ and 1♦ Openings

Opener has one of the following hand types:

- A single-suited hand with a 6+-card Major, 11-20HCP; or
- An unbalanced 2- (or 3-) suited hand with exactly 4 of the indicated Major, 11-20HCP; or
- A balanced hand with exactly 4 of the indicated Major, 15-20HCP.

### Responding with 0-5HCP

In a natural system, you'd be encouraged to pass with less than 6HCP; however our 1♣ and 1♦ openings don't show a holding in the suit named, so the "default" action on a poor hand is to bid 1 of partner's Major: 1♥ over 1♣, or 1♠ over 1♦.

There is an exception to this rule, however: while partner has not indicated any particular holding in the minor they've opened, they are also likely to have only a 4-card Major; so with 0-5HCP, fewer than 3 of their Major, and 5 or more of the minor they actually named, you should pass.

### Responding with a Fit

With 4 or more cards in partner's Major and no slam ambitions we normally just bid the Major at the appropriate level, based on the Losing Trick Count: we assume opener will have a 4-card suit and 7 losers and bid 2, 3 or 4 of their Major with 9, 8 or 7 losers respectively.

### Responding with 6+HCP, but No Fit

In principle, responder bids their longest suit first.

With a fair hand and 2 or more 4-card suits you should bid them upwards, with the "cheapest" suit (i.e., the one that uses the least space in the auction) first, and with 2 or more suits of 5 or more cards you should bid the highest-ranking first.

Those are the principles we try to follow, but as with most natural systems we require 10+HCP to call at the 2 level; so with weaker hands some adjustment is often necessary. We still show a suit at the 1 level if we can – even if it's not our longest, and particularly if it's a Major – but otherwise we respond 1NT. As with Acol and Standard American, 1NT is not so much about what you have (6-9HCP) as what you don't have (direct support, or an alternative call), and you shouldn't be too concerned about responding 1NT on an unbalanced hand; partner will have some idea what to expect, as you've effectively denied a 4-card holding in each of the suits you've bypassed.

## **Opener's Rebid**

Opener's rebid clarifies which of the three hand types they have.

First of all, if partner has directly supported your suit then the normal rules apply: with a minimum hand (7 losers) you would probably prefer to pass, but if partner's bid suggests an 8 loser hand then, at IMPS scoring, it's probably worth bidding game – partner's raise is premised on you having exactly 4 cards in your Major, while you actually have 6+.

Over a raise to 2 you may make a long-suit trial if game appears close, or simply raise further; over a raise to 3 you can pass or bid game, or if game appears certain and slam possible you can use 3NT as Roman Keycard Blackwood, or start cue bidding to find out more about your partner's hand.

## **Rebidding with a Single-suited Hand**

If partner has show a poor hand by correcting to 1 of your Major, a basic opening hand should just pass: partner may have 10 or more losers, and they may not even have a fit for your suit. If you have a particularly good hand, you may consider raising the Major based on partner having a notional 10 losers (e.g., raising to 3 with a 5-loser hand).

Over other responses, simply rebid your suit; if you have a hand of reversing strength, make a jump rebid to indicate 5 or fewer losers and a 6+-card suit.

## **Rebidding with a Balanced Hand**

In the absence of direct support for your Major, you'd normally rebid in NT. Over a weak correction bid just bid 1NT with anything better than a scant 15HCP; over other bids a simple rebid in NT shows 15-17HCP, and a jump rebid shows 18-19HCP. With 20HCP, bid 3NT.

## **Rebidding with a 2-Suited Hand**

In the absence of direct support for the Major you've disclosed, just bid your other suit.

## ***Reversing***

If your hand is strong enough to reverse (i.e., 17+HCP and about 5 losers or fewer) then show that by rebidding at the 2 level or, if your main suit ranks lower than the Major you showed with your opening, with a jump.

## After 1♥ and 1♠ Openings

Opener has one of the following hand types:

- An unbalanced 2- (or 3-) suited hand with 5+ cards in the indicated Major, 11-20HCP; or
- A balanced hand with exactly 5 cards in the indicated Major, 15-20HCP.

Here our methods are much as they might be if we were playing a 5-card Major system with simple limit raises.

With a fit (3 or more cards in partner's suit) and no slam ambitions, we make a limit raise according to the Losing Trick Count.

Over 1♥, we may call 1♠ with 4 cards and as few as 6HCP; with 10+HCP we call our longest suit, at the 2 level if necessary, and with less than 10HCP and no call available at the 1 level we call 1NT. With 2 suits of 5 or more cards, we'd usually call the highest-ranking first.

## Opener's Rebid

Again, if partner has directly supported your suit then the normal rules apply: with a minimum hand (7 losers) you would probably prefer to pass.

Over a raise to 2 you may make a long-suit trial if game appears close, or simply raise further; over a raise to 3 you can pass or bid game, or if game appears certain and slam possible you can use 3NT as Roman Keycard Blackwood, or start cue bidding to find out more about your partner's hand.

## Rebidding with a Balanced Hand

In the absence of direct support for your Major, you'd normally rebid in NT. A simple rebid in NT shows 15-17HCP, and a jump rebid shows 18-19HCP. With 20HCP, bid 3NT.

Opener has now clearly indicated his point range and is known to be 5332; responder may continue if he wishes. As always, a new suit by a responder who has neither passed nor doubled is always forcing.

## Rebidding with a 2-Suited Hand

A hand that isn't strong enough to reverse should repeat their Major if it is of 6 or more cards, or name their other suit. As a single-suited hand would have opened either 1♣ or 1♦, repeating the Major both reveals a 6th card in that suit and indicates a second suit. In the case of a 1♥ opening followed by a 2♥ rebid, it's clear that their second suit will be a minor: with both Majors but lacking the power to reverse, opener would choose an opening that shows the Spade suit.



## ***Reversing***

A hand that was intending to reverse will usually complete their reverse, either jumping in a lower-ranking suit on the second round, or bidding 2♠ after opening 1♥ to reverse into Spades.

An exception can arise if completing the reverse would take the auction past 3NT - in that case, opener with a 6-card Major can make a jump rebid in the suit opened; for instance, 1♥ - 2♦ - 3♥ shows a strong hand with 6 or more Hearts and a 4+-card minor, 17+HCP and 5 or fewer losers. It isn't clear at this stage which minor opener holds, and it's still possible that their best fit is in their partner's minor, but opener should be clear where the best fit is by the time they next speak.

## ***3rd Suit Forcing***

In some auctions, like 1♠ - 2♦ - 2♠ and 1♥ - 2♦ - 3♥, opener's second suit hasn't yet been disclosed but is known to be a minor (if opener held both Majors, their opening and rebid would disclose it). It's clear that the partnership don't have a fit in the unbid Major, as responder would have named a 5-card Major on the first round.

In these specific circumstances, responder can bid the other Major as a general forcing bid without promising a holding. Opener should respond in a similar style as they would to 4th Suit Forcing: showing a stopper in the Major by bidding 2NT, bidding 3NT with stoppers in both the Major and the unbid minor, or bidding their as-yet undisclosed minor (which, of course, may involve supporting responder's suit).

## After a 1NT Opening

1NT shows 12-14HCP in a balanced hand (any 5332, 4432 or 4333 hand); responses are as follows:

- Pass:
- 2♣: Stayman, 0+HCP
- 2♦: Transfer to Hearts
- 2♥: Transfer to Spades
- 2♠: Transfer to Clubs
- 2NT: 11-12 HCP, balanced.
- 3♣: Transfer to Diamonds
- 3♦: Game forcing; set the trump suit and requests cue bids.
- 3♥: Game forcing; set the trump suit and requests cue bids.
- 3♠: Game forcing; set the trump suit and requests cue bids.
- 3NT: 13-15HCP, balanced.
- 4♣: Minorwood
- 4♦: Minorwood

We use simple Stayman, even though opener may have a 5-card Major. A new suit after a Stayman response is forcing.

We play simple super-accepts over Major suit transfers: with 4 cards in the suit and either 7 losers or a maximum hand, opener bids 3 of the transfer suit rather than 2.

## After a 2♣ Opening

Opener will have one of the following hand types:

- 15-20HCP balanced, no 4-card Major; or
- 5-4 or greater minor 2-suiter, 11-20HCP; or
- 6+ cards in one or the other minor, 11-20HCP.

## Responding with 0-7HCP

With little prospect of a Major suit fit, game is unlikely if responder has fewer than a fair 8HCP. With a 5 card major and a “good” 7HCP they may consider upgrading their hand and bidding it at the 2 level, but most of the time they won’t.

As with our 1♣ and 1♦ openings there’s no guarantee opener has any particular holding in the suit he’s named, so even weak hands can’t pass unless they have a fair Club holding in their own right. We use a similar rule here as we do over 1♣ and 1♦: responder should bid 2♦ as a “pass or correct” bid unless their Club holding is at least 3 cards longer than their Diamonds.

Opener then has several options:

- Pass, suggesting 5+Diamonds;
- 2♥ or 2♠: officially this asks for a stopper in the suit named, and opener can bid 2NT (or 3NT with a max) if they have one; however they are known to have less than 8HCP, so they most likely won’t. In that case they can name their own 6-card suit (or pass or raise, if it’s the named suit); or failing that, bid their better minor at the 3 level.
- 3♣ with a long Club suit; unless responder has their own 6-card suit, they should pass this.
- 3♦ shows a long diamond suit in a strong hand, that hasn’t entirely given up on game even though responder has less than 8HCP.
- 2NT with about 17-20HCP in a balanced hand; responder can still name their own suit if they have a weak hand with a 5+-card suit, or bid 3NT with a “good max”.

## Responding with 8+HCP

As opener is known not to have a 4-card Major, responder shouldn’t bother showing a Major unless it’s of 5 or more cards. With a scant 8HCP and a hand that’s unsuitable for NT, responder may be better off downgrading their hand and responding accordingly. Their other options are:

- 2♥ or 2♠: 8+HCP, 5+ cards in the suit. Opener should raise with 3 cards in the suit, working on the assumption that responder will have about 8 losers. Without support, opener can bid:

- 2NT with cover in the other Major and about 15-16HCP in an essentially balanced hand;
  - 3NT with cover in the other Major and 17-20HCP in an essentially balanced hand;
  - The other Major with a good 15-20HCP in an essentially balanced hand, to ask responder for a stopper;
  - 3♣ or 3♦ with a long minor and no support for responder's Major.
- 2NT: anywhere from a (good) 8HCP up to about 12HCP in a balanced hand with no 5-card Major. Opener can pass, raise, or bid a 5+-card Minor if their hand is unsuitable for No Trumps.
  - 3♣ or 3♦: 8+ points with a 5+-card minor, in a hand that prefers not to call NT. Opener can bid 3NT with a balanced hand with stoppers in both Majors, bid either Major to ask for a stopper, raise responder's minor, or name their own minor.
  - 3NT: 13-16HCP in a balanced hand with no 5-card Major.

## Opening 2♦

The 2♦ opening is reserved for strong hands, where there is a real danger of missing a game if partner is too weak to respond to a normal opening. These hands will be either 23+HCP balanced (21-22HCP hands are opened 2NT), or contain 8+playing tricks; unbalanced hands that open 2♦ will typically contain 20 or more points, but we do occasionally open weaker hands where opener's primary concern is to identify how many controls (Aces and Kings) partner holds.

Partner responds showing how many controls their hand contains (an Ace counts as 2 controls, a King counts for 1; there are a total of 12 controls in the deck); with a particularly poor hand, they also disclose whether they hold a 6-card Major:

- 2♥: 0-1 Control, and no 6-card Major; responder may pass any continuation, unless opener makes a jump rebid.
- 2♠: 2 Controls; responder must make at least one more bid, unless opener bids a game directly.
- 2NT: 3 Controls; the partnership are forced to game.
- 3♣: 4 Controls; the partnership are forced to game.
- 3♦: 5 Controls; the partnership are forced to game.
- 3♥: 0-1 Controls, with a 6+-card Heart suit. Responder need not bid again.
- 3♠: 0-1 Controls, with a 6+-card Spade suit. Responder need not bid again.
- 3NT: 6 Controls

...and so on.

## Rebidding with an Unbalanced Hand

Opener's rebid in a suit shows an unbalanced hand with 5 or more cards in the suit named; responder should always support it directly if they are in a position to do so, even if (e.g.) they hold a 5-card Major and opener has named a minor.

If responder changes suit, they should try to hold 5 cards in their suit; but that's not always possible, and naming a 4-card Major below 3NT is generally the right thing to do; after all, opener may well be a 4-6 or 4-5 hand.

## Rebidding with a Balanced Hand

With a balanced hand opener should generally bid 2NT, unless responder has called 2♥ and opener believes they can make game anyway - but bear in mind that, while responder is not obliged to speak

again, with a King (or even a scattered 4 points) and a long suit they are likely to call again opposite a hand that contains 23+HCP. With a hand lacking in Queens and Jacks and an auction that suggests the side has sufficient controls for a slam, disclosing your full strength by bidding 3NT with 25+ may help responder to make a quantitative move if they hold the bulk of the missing minor honours.

Over a 2NT rebid by opener, we employ a structure very similar to the one we use over 1NT:

- 3♣: Stayman; after a negative response of 3♦, a call of 4 in either minor is Minorwood
- 3♦: Transfer to Hearts
- 3♥: Transfer to Spades
- 3♠: McPhee - our particular brand of minor-suit Stayman.

Over 3♦ and 3♥, a direct call of 3NT is a Queen Point ask.

## Opening 2NT

Our 2NT opening shows a balanced hand with 21-22HCP; as with our 1NT opening, the hand can be any balanced shape (5332, 4432 or 4333) regardless of any 5-card Major suit holding.

Responses are:

- Pass: No further interest.
- 3♣: Stayman; after a negative response of 3♦, a call of 4 in either minor is Minorwood.
- 3♦: Transfer to Hearts.
- 3♥: Transfer to Spades.
- 3♠: McPhee, our particular brand of minor-suit Stayman.
- 3NT: To play.
- 4♣: Minorwood (RKCB in Clubs).
- 4♦: Minorwood (RKCB in Diamonds).

## Slam Bidding

Our discussion so far has been restricted mostly to finding a fit and, if possible, a game.

Where slam appears likely or possible, we have a number of tools available. These are best used not to identify a slam we might not have otherwise found, but to avoid a "bad" slam we might otherwise have been tempted into bidding.

## Splinters

When responder has a raise to game in opener's suit and a shortage (void or singleton) in a hand of opening values or more (i.e., 11+HCP and 7 or fewer losers), they should show their fit, values and shortage using a splinter bid.

Similarly, when opener with a reversing hand (i.e., 5 losers in an upper range hand) and a shortage has a fit for responder's suit, they indicate this with a splinter bid if possible.

This is done by bidding the shortage at a level higher than they would use to show a holding in the suit, but still below game; for responder this typically means a with a single or double jump (e.g., 1 ♠-3 ♦ or 1 ♣-3 ♠), but for opener it may require a double or triple jump - if their shortage is in a lower-ranking suit than the last named suit, a single jump may already be reserved for hands with that suit and reversing values (e.g., 1 ♣-1 ♠-4 ♣, because 3 ♣ would show a reversing hand with 4 Hearts and 5+Clubs).

We use splinters to show either a singleton or void; if there are two levels of splinter available (e.g., 1 ♥-3 ♣ and 1 ♥-4 ♣) the lower bid shows a singleton and the higher shows a void; where only one splinter is available (e.g., 1 ♣-1 ♠-4 ♦) it shows either.

In the examples we've shown here the splinter is in support of the first suit shown, but it need not be: wherever an "unnecessary jump" is available below the level of game, it should be interpreted as a splinter in support of the last named suit.

A splinter bid sets the trump suit, is forcing to game, and encourages the exchange of cue bids.

## Cue Bids

In this context, a cue bid is a gratuitous bid in a suit other than trumps, after trumps have been agreed and either when the partnership is committed to game (e.g. after a splinter, or after a Blackwood enquiry) or at a level that commits the partnership to game (e.g., 1 ♠-3 ♠-4 ♣ or 1 ♥-2 ♥-3 ♠). It is game-forcing, requests partner to respond with further cue bids, and (in principle) promises first or second round control in the suit named.

Generally, you will make the cheapest cue bid available to you, without regard to whether it shows a first or second round control - unless you intend to continue cue bidding for at least a further round, you would not usually bypass a second round control in order to show a first-round control.



Also, if you have already splintered in a suit you would normally only make a cue bid in that suit for one of two reasons: if your splinter showed a singleton, cueing the suit reveals it to be the singleton Ace; and if your splinter may have shown either a singleton or void, cueing the suit confirms it is a void or the singleton Ace.

Occasionally when you make a cue bid, you're only really interested in partner's holding in a specific suit; you're entitled to make a cue bid in the suit below the suit of interest regardless of your holding in that suit, or in the suits you've skipped.

## Roman Key Card Blackwood

RKCB is a call of 4NT that's used as a 5-Ace Blackwood enquiry. The 5 Aces are the four Aces and the King of trumps. In the absence of an agreed trump suit, the responses should assume that the last suit shown is the proposed trump suit. Please bear in mind that this explicitly excludes the suit named in a 4th Suit Forcing (or 3rd Suit Forcing) call, as the response to that call reveals details of the holding in that suit, which commonly makes using it as the "anchor" of a 5-Ace Blackwood less useful.

When a Major is agreed at the 3 level (e.g., 1♣-3♥, 1♠-3♠ or 1♦-1♥-3♥) we don't entertain the possibility of playing in 3NT; in these auctions, we use 3NT as RKCB rather than 4NT.

Responses to RKCB (assuming it's called as 4NT) are as follows:

- 5♣: 0 or 3 key cards;
- 5♦: 1 or 4 key cards;
- 5♥: 2 key cards, but not the Queen of trumps;
- 5♠: 2 key cards, and the Queen of trumps.

Sometimes, one or the other partner may use a call of 4NT with an implied trump suit not because they intend to play in that suit, but because they regard the King or Queen of that suit as crucial to determining the final contract. This can be a useful tool, but you must bear in mind that partner is not in on the joke: if you then bid the implied trump suit they may take it that you intend to sign off at that point, and if you attempt to sign off in a suit they haven't previously named they may take it as a cue bid in support of the implied trump suit. Bidding a slam, or returning to a Major that partner has already shown, should always be taken as a sign-off in the absence of a clearly agreed trump suit.

## Minorwood

In some sequences (over a negative Stayman enquiry, and directly over 2NT and 2♦-2♠-2NT) a call of a minor at the 4 level is Minorwood.

Minorwood is a form of Roman Key Card Blackwood with the implied trump suit set to the named minor; responses are the same 4 steps as for Roman Key Card Blackwood; e.g., over 4♣ 4♦ shows 0 or 3 key

cards; 4♥ shows 1 or 4; 4♠ shows 2 key cards without the ♣Q; and 4NT shows 2 key cards and the ♣Q.

## Queen Point Asks

When partner's controls or key cards have already been shown (in response to a 2♦ opening or a RKCB enquiry) a call of 4NT (or 3NT, in the sequence 2♦-2♥-2♠-3♠) asks partner to show, by steps, how many undisclosed Queen Points their hand contains.

Queen Points are a hand evaluation metric that falls between counting Controls (where an Ace is 2 and a King is 1) and high card points (where an Ace is 4, a King is 3, a Queen is 2, and a Jack is 1). When counting Queen Points, an Ace counts for 3, a King is 2 and a Queen is 1; so there are 40 HCP, 24 Queen Points, and 12 Controls in the pack.

### *After Roman Key Card Blackwood*

When one or the other partner has used RKCB, the next available call of NT (most commonly, 5NT after 4NT RKCB) asks their partner to show by steps how many Queen Points their hand contains, **excluding** the key cards (and possibly, the Queen of trumps) that they showed with their RKCB enquiry. In case it needs to be said, the first step (e.g., 6♣) shows 0 Queen Points outside of the key cards shown by their previous response.

### *After a 2♦ Opening*

When you've opened 2♦ responder has already shown you the number of controls their hand contains; if you then call 4NT (or 3NT, in the sequence 2♦-2♥-2♠-3♠-3NT) this is a Queen Point ask.

Unlike after a RKCB enquiry, you may be genuinely uncertain how many of partner's controls are Kings and how many are Aces; to avoid confusion, partner doesn't simply ignore the controls in their hand, and respond simply with the number of Queens they hold. Instead, the first step (e.g., 5♣ over 4NT) shows the minimum number of Queen Points consistent with their initial response.

if the auction started 2♦-2♥ they may hold a zero count, and so the first step must show 0 Queen Points.

If they have shown 2 or more controls, things get more complicated: the fewest Queen Points they can hold will be a hand with no Queens, and as many of their controls held as Aces as possible.

For instance with 2 Aces and nothing else they hold 4 controls, and 6 Queen Points; but either of those Aces could be a pair of Kings, and they'd have the same number of controls but more Queen Points - with 4 Kings and no Queens they'd still have 4 Controls, but they would have 8 Queen Points.

Fortunately, there's a "short cut" that helps them figure out how many steps to bid. Responder should count the Queens in their hand, and add 1 for each pair of Kings they hold. The total is the number of

steps they should advance beyond 5♣ - for instance with an Ace, 2 Kings and a Queen, they should advance 2 steps (one Queen, and one pair of Kings) beyond 5♣ and bid 5♥.

# McPhee

We use 3♠ as a form of minor suit Stayman after both 2NT openings, and 2♦ openings followed by 2NT rebids. There is a slightly different form of MCPhee for each case, as after a 2♦ opening responder has already declared how many Controls his hand contains.

In either case, the caller has a hand that's at least 5-4 in the minors, and the task is to try to find the best spot to play: 3NT, 4 of a minor, 5 of a minor or 6 of a minor. To invoke MCPhee, responder must first make the judgement that neither Pass nor a direct call of 3NT is in the partnership's best interests: with sound stoppers in both Majors opener will probably just call 3NT anyway, but otherwise the partnership is likely committed to playing in a minor at the 4 level or above.

## McPhee After a 2NT Opening

After 3♠, opener's options are:

- 3NT: No 4-card minor, or double stoppers in both Majors and no slam interest.
- 4♣: 4+Clubs, not good enough to bid 4♥ (RKCB in Clubs).
- 4♦: 4+Diamonds, not good enough to bid 4♠ (RKCB in Diamonds).
- 4♥: RKCB in Clubs.
- 4♠: RKCB in Diamonds.
- 4NT: Pick a minor
- 5♣: To play
- 5♦: To play.

In response to 4♥ and 4♠, responder has 3 steps available below game - the fourth step (showing 2 key cards and the Queen of the minor) would commit the side to 6 of the (presumed) preferred minor; if 2 key cards is not, on the face of it, enough for slam then opener will bid 4 of their preferred minor instead.

Over a call of 4♣ or 4♦, responder can use this inference to judge if their hand is worth going on: with 2 key cards and a Major suit void they can cue bid their void, to see if that provokes opener's interest; with 3 key cards, they may choose to bid 6 directly. With 2 key cards alone, they should raise opener to game.

## McPhee After a 2♦ Opening

After 3♠, opener's options are:

- 3NT: No 4-card minor, or double stoppers in both Majors and no slam interest.

- 4♣: 4+Clubs, not good enough to bid 4♥ (Queen Point ask).
- 4♦: 4+Diamonds, not good enough to bid 4♥ (Queen Point ask).
- 4♥: Queen Point ask.
- 4♠: Weakness in Spades, asking partner if they have a corresponding shortage.
- 4NT: Weakness in Hearts, asking partner if they have a corresponding shortage.
- 5♣: To play
- 5♦: To play.

If opener bids 4♣ or 4♦, it implies that it isn't safe to ask for Queens with 4♥; in turn that implies that 3 QP (if playing in Clubs) or 4 QP (playing in Diamonds) beyond responder's declared controls would not be sufficient to make a slam, very likely due to the side missing 3 or more controls. Responder with at least 1 control and a major suit void can cue bid their void, to see if that inspires opener.

4♠ and 4NT both commit the partnership to 5 of an as yet undisclosed minor, but warn that slam appears unlikely as opener is missing both A and K of a specific Major (Spades in the case of a call of 4♠, Hearts in the case of 4NT). With no shortage in the suit, responder should bid a single step and opener will bid game in their preferred minor; with a singleton responder should bid 2 steps (i.e., 5♣ over 4♠) and with a void they should bid 3 steps.

## Alerts & Announcements

The rules governing alerting and announcing calls vary from time to time and place to place; these alerts and announcements are appropriate for our openings and initial responses, as currently required in Australia. Announce the quoted phrase when the call is made; say the rest on request.

1♣: "Unusual" - Either single-suited with 6+♥, or exactly 4♥ in a hand that can't open 1NT. May not show the longest suit.

Pass: "Alert" - 0-5HCP, 5+♣ and fewer than 3♥.

1♥: "Alert" - 0-5HCP, 3+♥ or fewer than 5♣.

1♦: "Alert" - Either single-suited with 6+♠, or exactly 4♠ in a hand that can't open 1NT. May not show the longest suit.

Pass: "Alert" - 0-5HCP, 5+♦ and fewer than 3♠.

1♠: "Alert" - 0-5HCP, 3+♠ or fewer than 5♦.

1♥: "Alert" - Either a 2-suited hand with 5+♥, or 5332 15-20HCP; may not be the hand's longest suit.

1♠: "Alert" - Either a 2-suited hand with 5+♠, or 5332 15-20HCP; may not be the hand's longest suit.

1NT: "12-14HCP" - Any 4333, 4432 or 5332 hand with 12-14HCP; occasionally, 15HCP 4333 in a minor.

2♣: Not alerted, unless there has been an intervening double.

2♦: "Alert" - Transfer to ♥.

2♥: "Alert" - Transfer to ♠.

2♠: "Alert" - Transfer to ♣.

3♣: "Alert" - Transfer to ♦.

2♣: "Alert" - 11-20HCP with no 4-card Major, in a hand that can't open 1NT.

Pass: "Alert" - 0-7HCP, 3+ more ♣ than ♦.

2♦: "Alert" - 0-7HCP, not 3+ more ♣ than ♦.

2♦: "Alert" - Strong hand with 8+PT, or 23+HCP balanced.

2♥: "Alert" - Fewer than 2 controls, no 6+-card Major.

2♠: "Alert" - Any hand with exactly 2 controls.

2NT: "Alert" - Any hand with exactly 3 controls.

3♣: "Alert" - Any hand with exactly 4 controls.

3♦: "Alert" - Any hand with exactly 5 controls.

3♥: "Alert" - 6+♥, fewer than 2 controls.

3♠: "Alert" - 6+♠, fewer than 2 controls.