

BARBARA'S MINI-TIP: WORST OPENING LEAD IN BRIDGE

Singleton Queen, Doubleton Queen or Singleton or doubleton King. Unless partner has bid this suit, it is almost always wrong. Please avoid these (unless you are playing against me!!)

ALEX'S BRIDGE TIP

Often in a partnership, there are different opinions as to what conventions are to be used. I suggest that the stronger, more experienced player should accommodate the less experienced player. The best conventions are the ones that both partners have agreed on and remember well.

Whenever you have a choice of two bids to make, pick the one that you know your partner will understand.

Whenever we decide which conventions to play, we always pick the ones that occur most often.

After each game, you and your partner should spend 15 minutes to half an hour looking over the boards where you did poorly. Sometimes there was nothing you could have done about it; the opponents just got lucky. But very often, it was either your partner's or your partner's mistake!!!!

THE SMOLEN CONVENTION

Presented by ROBIN STEPHENS

Smolen is an extension of the Stayman convention. It is used after getting a 2D response to a Stayman bid. You hold 5/4 in the majors & 10+ points. A jump to 3 in a Major shows 4 cards in that Major, 5 cards in the other & 10 + points.

Note: 5/4 in the Majors refers to 5 Spades/4 Hearts or 4 Spades/5 Hearts.
It can also be used after a 1NT overcall.

Let's take a look at the 3 options & games available to you after partner opens 1NT & you have 5/4 in the majors

1. 5/4 in the majors with less than 8 points.

No chance for game so you transfer into the 5-card major & when partner bids the transfer suit pass

[P'ner = Partner]

e.g. Your hand. Partner opens 1NT

S Q9876
H KJ52
D 105
C 86

P'ner - You
1NT - 2H*
2S - Pass

2H Transfer to spades

Note: Even with 0 points & a 5 card major you should always transfer into the major. The reason being is that it is safer to play in a suit contract than in NT.

2. 5/4 in the majors with 8-9 points:

This is an invitational hand so you start with Stayman

If partner bids a major, then bid 3 of the major, inviting

e.g. Your hand. Partner opens 1NT

S K10984
H Q952
D K5
C 86

P'ner - You
1NT - 2C
2H - 3H

If partner bids 2D denying a 4 card major then bid your 5 card major e.g. Your hand

S 109754
H AQ63
D 92
C K5

P'ner - You
1NT - 2C
2D - 2S

3. **Smolen** - 5/4 in the majors with 10+ points

Smolen is used when partner opens 1NT, 2NT or overcalls 1NT. You as the responder have 5/4 in the majors (either way) & game going values (10+)

e.g. Your hand

S AJ872
H KJ63
D 8
C J105

Start with Stayman.

If partner bids a major then raise to game.

If partner bids 2D denying a 4 card major.

Now, the contract of 4H is out of the picture (no 4-4 fit), but 4S is still a possibility (there could be a 5-3 fit). So, responder has to indicate that he has 5 spades.

They are too strong to bid at the 2-level (that would be invitational); they must force to game.

In Standard bidding, they would jump to 3S, showing 5 spades and game forcing values. By inference it shows 4 hearts (otherwise, they would have started with a plain transfer to spades and not used Stayman).

So, in **Standard Bidding**,

P'ner - You

1NT - 2C
2D

NEXT: 3-of-Major by you shows 5 in that major, 4 in the other major and enough for game. Opener will then choose between 3NT, or playing in responder's 5-card major.

The **Smolen** convention makes a slight improvement on this auction.

Responder, instead of jumping from 2D into his five-card major, jumps into his four-card major! Why? Because now, **if opener wants to play in the five-card major, it is played from the strong side. As is usually the case after a notrump opening, you want the strong hand playing the contract (for opening lead purposes).**

So, using **Smolen**:

P'ner - You
1NT - 2C
2D

NEXT: 3-of-Major by responder shows 5 in THE OTHER major, and by inference, four cards in the major jumped into.

Now if opener has 3 card support for the 5 card major they bid 4 of that major or they bid 3NT with only 2 of that major

1. e.g. Your hand. Partner opens 1NT

S AJ872
H KJ63
D 8
C J105

P'ner - You
1NT - 2C
2D - 3H

3H is Smolen showing 5 Spades and 4 Hearts & 10 or more HCP

2. e.g. Your hand. Partner opens 1NT

S K974
H AQ842
D K9
C 83

P'ner - You
1NT - 2C
2D - 3S*

*3S is Smolen showing 4S & 5H & 10 or more HCP.

3. e.g. Your hand. Partner opens 2NT

S Q974
H KJ842
D 73
C 82

P'ner - You
2NT - 3C
3D - 3S

*Smolen showing 4S & 5H

Smolen is alertable. The jump after partners 2D bid is alertable.
You would explain as 10+ points & 5S & 4H or whichever case it is.

Ed. Note: You and partner must agree on whether or not you are playing Smolen.

If playing Smolen after a 2NT opening bid, then you cannot play BOTH Smolen and Puppet Stayman. You must decide which one you are playing.

Some also use Smolen after partner has opened 1NT and they use Smolen at the 2-level to show 8-9 HCP and 5-4 in the majors. Just agree with partner, before the game, on what you are playing.