



Bridging the Gap

By Kathy Falandys Tilyard

Due to a font error at the printer, last month's "Bridging the Gap" column was printed with missing card suit designations.

The issue has been addressed and we are reprinting this article with the correct card suits in place. We apologize for any inconvenience.—The Editors

The 1-Club Opener

Q: If I am your partner and open 1♣ or 1♦ and you have less than 6 points, what will your bid be? Is a 1♣ bid forcing?

A: I cannot tell you how many times I have heard, after a partner passes a 1♣, in a loud and forceful tone, "You can't pass my 1♣ bid. Bid your four-card major."

I know this article will cause some controversy, especially for those who are still using old bridge rules. When I returned to bridge at the Country Club of the Crystal Coast about six years ago, everyone was playing the opening 1♣, which they referred to as "the short club," when they did not have a five-card major. In fact, some were opening four-card majors at that time, but we definitely don't do that, do we? However, I learned a lot of bridge from those players. This is what I still hear: 1) You must respond to your partner's 1♣ opener, and 2) You must answer in a major suit because, they argue, that is what your partner is looking for. Many use this same reasoning with the 1♦ opener. The reasoning is that your partner needs to be "rescued" from the bid.

First, let's discuss why one would open a minor suit and how to choose which minor to open. Then we will discuss responding to that opening bid. Modern bridge suggests that if one has opening count, but does not have a five-card major or 15-17 points, has no voids and no singletons and only one doubleton required for a 1NT opening, one can open either 1♣ or 1♦, which is now referred to as "the convenient minor." How do we choose which to open? To review: Open the longer minor. If they are of equal length and 4+, open 1♦. I must tell you, not even the experts agree on this, but to make it simple, if you have two four-card minors, open the diamond suit; otherwise, open 1♣. I make clear to my partners that if they hear an opening 1♦, they will know I have at least four in that suit. I do not open 1♦ with less than four pieces—but that is partnership agreement. What would the opener be looking for? Often, they look for the ever-hoped-for eight-card fit in a major. They don't always find it.

Some examples of an opening hand for the convenient minor:

- ♠AQ43 ♥KQ3 ♦765 ♣K97=14 points. No five-card major and not enough for 1NT; open 1♣
- ♠Q96 ♥A852 ♦K63 ♣AKQ=18 points. No five-card major and too many points for 1NT; open 1♣
- ♠AQ6 ♥QJ7 ♦Q1043 ♣K65=14 points. No five-card major and not enough for 1NT; open 1♦
- ♠KQ5 ♥AJ3 ♦KJ8 ♣9653=14 points. No five-card major and not enough for 1NT; open 1♣
- Without 15-17 points, open 1♣ with a "4-3-3-3" distribution unless the hand has 4♦

I want to dismiss the idea that you must rescue a 1♣ opener. If you have heard that you cannot leave your partner in 1♣, that advice is wrong; with 0-5 points, PASS.

Q: What is the great fear of leaving your partner in a 1♣ opener?

A: The fear is that he/she may get set. It goes without saying, but I will say it anyway: if there is an intervening bid, the responder is off the hook. Let's say opener, your partner, opens 1♣. Opponent passes. You have less than six points and pass. That leaves the fourth chair with enough points to bid or your partner with so

many points, he/she can make the seven required tricks or make his/her 1♣ bid—even if he/she has few clubs. If your partnership goes set, that means the opponents have probably missed a bid. The more tricks they take in the club contract, the more they missed a better score in their direction. I have said it before and will say it again: you will not make every contract your partnership bids even if bid correctly. It happens! Don't use that as an excuse for every "down bid," but do recognize that it can happen and does.

Q: What is your responsibility to your partner's bid of 1♣?

A: Your responsibility as the partner of a 1♣ or 1♦ opener is to let him/her know immediately if you hold 6+ points, or if you hold less than 6 HCP. Some believe in bidding 1♦ or 1NT as a denial of points. If you rescue your partner with a 1♦ or a 1NT to deny points, how will you communicate a true 1♦ or a true 1NT balanced hand with 6-9 HCP?

Read on to see what happens when the responder mistakenly tries to rescue a 1♣ opener by partner.

1♣ by the opener gets a response of 1♦ or 1NT: This response supposedly says (from those who "save" 1♣ openers), "I have no support, no suit of my own and I have less than 6 points. So, go ahead and bid the suit you want." How is that helpful? With that bid, your partner will think you have at least 6 points. Yes, I know if you have a regular partner, you can have an agreement. If partner had 19 points, he adds them to your 6-9 and bids 3NT. Remember, he did not have a five-card major. He did not have 15-17 points and a balanced hand, but he did have at least 13 or more points. He could hold 19 points. If you answer 1♦ just to keep the bid open and he has 19 points, he will go straight to 3NT and you will have overbid! This is why I ask you to stop rescuing the 1♣ bid by your partner.

Q: How many points does a partnership need to be successful at a given level?

A: Haven't you wondered, as the bidding progresses, "How high should my partner and I bid?" You add his/her points to what you are holding. Keep in mind, one bid by either partner seldom tells the whole story and you need to make true bids. Also, if you play with a regular partner, have you made partnership agreements on communication, e.g. cue bids and whether you do respond to a convenient minor with less than 6 and if you agree to do that, what is the preferred response? If you are rotating partners, as many of us in Pine Knoll Shores do, clarify as much as you can with your "new" partner before any hand is dealt. Is there enough time to cover all of the nuances with this new partner? That is doubtful. The following are guidelines, as always. Try to commit to memory how many points it takes for the different levels of bidding.

Contract requirements: What you and your partner need in your two hands to make these contracts.

- *Suit partscore* (bid of 1, 2 or 3 in any suit)—18-24 points and at least an eight-card trump fit.
- *No trump partscore* (bid of 1NT or 2NT)—20-24 points and preferably no eight-card major-suit fit.
- *Major-suit game* (4H, 4S)—25-26+ points and at least an eight-card fit. (Game and slam contracts pay a scoring bonus.)
- *Minor-suit game* (5C, 5D)—28-29+ and at least an eight-card fit.
- *No trump game* (3NT)—25-26+ points and preferably no eight-card major-suit fit.
- *Small slam* (any bid of 6)—33+ points. NT bidding counts only HCP.
- *Grand slam* (any bid of 7)—36+ points and all four aces.

Remember to count only HCP for NT bids.

These contract guidelines apply when you have relatively balanced hands. If you have a strong trump fit, long side suits and/or unusual distribution, you'll need fewer points to make these contracts. Remember to reevaluate with every bid.

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