

Fifth Chair



Smolen

Smolen is an adjunct to Stayman and Jacoby xfrs, originated by Mike Smolen of Los Angeles CA

After a 2 diamond response to Stayman, responder rebids his four-card major at either the 2 or 3 level. This enables opener to become declarer in responder's five-card major, at the 2 or 3 level, or higher.

Bidding:

1NT	p	2C	p
2D	p	2H	

= 5 spades, 4 hearts, not game going unless opener is max

Bidding:

1NT	p	2C	p
2D	p	2S	

= 4 spades, 5 hearts, not game going unless opener is max

Smolen is on when responder jump rebids a major after a 1NT opening:

Bidding:

1NT	p	2C	p
2D	p	3H	

= 5 spades, 4 hearts, game going

Bidding:

1NT	p	2C	p
2d	p	3S	

= 4 hearts, 5 spades, game going

If opener only has a doubleton for responder's five-card major, he rebids 3NT. If responder has a six-card suit, he can bid the suit below it as a transfer. For instance,

1NT:	2C
2D :	3S
3NT:	4D

Responder has four spades, at least six hearts, and is asking opener to bid 4H.

A VARIATION: Bid the 5 card suit at the 2 level, in order for the partnership to be in the best trump fit.

See reasons below:

After 1 NT, 2 C, 2 D (opponents silent)

Assume responder is 5-4 or 4-5 in the majors, and opener is 3-2, 3-3, or 2-3.

Why does one pick a particular method for Smolen. Here is why I use the method taught to me by Michael Jones.

1. Consider if responder has a drop dead hand. In that case, the responder would not have used Stayman. Responder would just transfer into the 5-card suit and pass.
2. Consider if responder has a game-forcing hand. The goal is for the strong hand to be the declarer at game. It is known that there cannot be an 8-card fit in responder's 4 card suit. So, responder bids the 4-card suit at the three level. Then opener can pick an 8-card fit at the four level, or can bid 3 NT if there is no 8-card fit.
3. But, what about that game-invitational hand? Now the goal is to play in the safest place if you are not going to game. And to have the strong hand as declarer if you are going to game. How often does declarer go to game on a game invitational hand? Not often. Why? We already know there is no super-fit. And in fact, should be treated as a misfit. So any game bid will be made based on maximum strength. Is declarer more likely to have a maximum opener? Or a minimum opener? Obviously, a minimum is more likely. So game is unlikely, and safety is the most important criteria. This is especially true since you have already discovered a misfit. So how do you find the safest place to play. Safest means play at the lowest level, with the best trump fit possible.

(And since there is a misfit, and the game is bid on strength, the final game bid is just as likely to be 3 NT, as it is to be four of a suit. In this case, opener will be declarer anyway.)

So, what if responder has a 4-card spade suit and 5-card heart suit. I argue that responder should bid 2 hearts, the longer of the two suits.

- a. Opener can be 3-3 in the majors. The best contract is 2 hearts. Responder's 2 heart bid finds the 8 card fit at the two level. A 2-spade bid would force the partnership to play at the three level.
- b. Opener can be 2-3 in the majors. The best contract is 2 hearts. Responder's 2-heart bid finds the 8 card fit at the two level. A 2-spade bid would force the partnership to play at the three level.
- c. Opener can be 3-2 in the majors. Two hearts is probably the best contract. Responder's 2-heart bid gives the opener the choice of playing the 7 card fit in either major, or 2 NT. A 2-spade bid by responder would eliminate the possibility of playing in the (likely) safest fit at the 2-level, and likely forces the partnership to play at 2 NT when the competition is at 2 hearts.

What is the down side? If a game in hearts is the final contract, it is played from the least effective side.

NOW FOR THE REBUTTAL.

Another downside is possible. What if you and your partner have a different definition of "Invitational".

Case 1. Assuming opener is 15-17, and the partnership is defined to be "invitational" when the total is 22-24 HCP. (Pass with min and go with max.) Then responder can invite with 7 HCP plus distribution. If this is the definition, then safety is paramount, as game is rare. The version of Smolen that bids the longer suit at the two level is indicated.

Case 2. However, what if your partnership's definition of "invitational" is a total partnership holding of 24-26. Then responder needs 9 HCP plus distribution. In this case, it is much more likely that a game will be bid if an 8 card fit is found. And playing an 8 card fit at the three level is rather safe. In this case, the partnership should use the version of Smolen that bids the shortest suit at the two level.

If an invitational response with 9 HCP plus distribution is your style, you should use the version of Smolen that bids the short suit at the two level. However, then you need to assume that an 8 point hand is not invitational, and must transfer and pass. This is ok too, as not many games will be missed. However, being unable to use Stayman means you will miss playing 4-4 spade fits, and will miss game on some 5-4 heart fits, unless you use mandatory Super-accepts regardless of whether responder has 0 or 8 HCP.

CONCLUSION

I have been using the weaker definition of "invitational", 7-8 HCP plus distribution, so it is complemented by the safety-oriented version of Smolen that bids the longer suit at the two level.