

Two Over One

Walsh Relays

Minor suit slam tries over 1 notrump opening

When players are using standard bidding methods, they can jump to 3 clubs or 3 diamonds over partner's 1NT opening to show slam interest in their minor suit. But the system we have been constructing will not allow that bid for that purpose. Over partner's 1NT opening, our jumps to 3 clubs or 3 diamonds describe weak but promising hands, so that we hold a 6-card minor headed by AQ or KQ. This weaker use of the jump to 3 of a minor allows us to reach good but somewhat offbeat 3NT contracts that otherwise cannot be easily or intelligently reached. But that doesn't at all mean that we must give up on minor suit slams.

Indeed, thanks to a convention called the Walsh Relay, we can signify to opener that a minor suit slam may be possible, and we can also give opener important details about the quality of our minor suit. Armed with these added details, opener is better informed and better able to make a good decision. So how do Walsh Relays work?

Here is how a Walsh Relay sequence begins:

opener	responder
1NT	2♦

It appears to be a Jacoby transfer to hearts. Indeed, opener will announce "transfer" and then comply with the transfer by bidding 2 hearts. When this happens, responder next bids 2 spades, effectively "erasing" the transfer, announcing a minor suit slam try and requesting opener to now bid 2NT:

opener	responder
1NT	2♦ <i>transfer</i>
2♥	2♠ <i>alert</i>
2NT <i>alert</i>	

Now the stage is set for responder to describe his hand. All the bids up to this point have just been preliminaries preparing for responder's description.

- 3♣ 6-card club suit, broken honors (AJxxxx or KJxxxx or the like)
- 3♦ 6-card diamond suit, broken honors
- 3♥ 6-card club suit, 2 of top 3 honors
- 3♠ 6-card diamond suit, 2 of top 3
- 3NT 6-card solid minor, headed AKQ, plus a 7th trick

The entire 3 level has been utilized to show distinctions in the identity and quality of the minor suit. The text calls for 6-card suits, but the bids also apply to 7-card suits. Note that the 3NT call shows a solid minor, but does not distinguish whether it is clubs or diamonds. Don't worry. The identity of responder's suit will not be a mystery. It will be the minor suit in which opener has no honors. In all cases, responder has enough values to invite slam.

Look at the following hands. Presume that you have bid 2 diamonds and so forth and partner has bid 2NT. Which 3-level call would you use to describe each of the following hands?

1. 8 KQ6 A74 KJ10953
2. 8 864 A74 AKQJ93
3. AQ8 864 7 AQJ1095
4. A85 8 AK10742 Q95
5. A85 6 AJ10742 KJ9

Walsh Relays

page two

Answers

1. 3 clubs
2. 3NT
3. 3 hearts
4. 3 spades
5. 3 diamonds

When opener hears the invitation, he re-evaluates his hand in light of responder's information. Minimal openers will tend to decline. Maximal openers will tend to accept, but if responder has shown a broken suit, opener should have a better fit with at least one honor. If your support for partner's minor suit is only 2 cards, you will probably need some sort of compensating strength to have good play in slam.

When opener does have slam interest, he indicates this to responder either by cuebidding or else by bidding 4 of the minor, which will be Minorwood. If opener lacks slam interest, he simply bids 3NT over responder's slam try. Usually responder will respect this 3NT signoff and pass. But sometimes responder's hand will be worth further action. Responder's new suit bids over 3NT would be cuebids. If responder bids 4 of his minor, he is using Minorwood. Note that 4 of the minor by either partner is Minorwood.

The solid suit 3NT call reprised

We have just observed that a responder who has established a Walsh Relay will bid 3NT when his minor suit is solid and when he possesses a 7th trick. In actual fact, there is no reason to limit the meaning of this 3NT call to minor suits only.

AKQJ84 A84 6 953

With this hand, too, even though the solid suit is spades, establish a Walsh Relay and then bid

3NT. Opener will identify your suit as spades since he will have no spade honor. Opener may pass, bid 4 spades, or else pursue a slam of one kind or another. The field will tend to play the contract at 4 or 6 of responder's major, when in fact 3NT or 6NT will typically win the same number of tricks. The Walsh Relay describes this hand so well that opener is well positioned to elect the notrump contract.

Finally, if responder has more than 7 tricks, then instead of bidding 3NT he will bid higher in notrump, showing one extra trick for each notrump step higher than 3.

AKQJ84	AK8	98	53
opener		responder	
1NT		2	◇
2♥		2	♠
2NT		4NT	

Responder's 4NT call promises a solid suit with 8 winners.

When opener has super-accepted the heart transfer

To establish the Walsh Relay we must first transfer to hearts and then "erase" the transfer with a following call of 2 spades. Although partner should always be aware that your 2 diamond bid could be the beginning of a Walsh Relay, in fact it seldom is. So by dint of actual practice, opener will typically be expecting you to have hearts. Indeed, he may have a hand that can super-accept in hearts. Fortunately we have agreed that to super-accept in hearts, opener does not leap to 3 hearts, as standard bidders would, but instead passes by 2 hearts and super-accepts with a call of 2 spades, as shown following:

Walsh Relays

page three

opener	responder
1NT	2♦
2♠	

This super-accept of hearts is handy when we have hearts, but how does it effect our Walsh relays?

This is a tricky point. Both partners need to stay aware. The positive side is this. If opener has indeed remembered to super-accept the proper way, with this 2 spade call, then he is also probably ready to hear the Walsh Relay continuation and to distinguish it from hands when partner actually holds hearts.

When responder does actually hold hearts, then he in every case, with every strength of hand, simply rebids 2NT. This single bid affirms to opener that responder's suit is indeed hearts. Opener should now bid 3 hearts, accepting the transfer, whereupon responder will pass, or raise, or do whatever his hand calls for.

When responder's hand does not contain 5 hearts, when instead responder wants to describe a Walsh Relay hand, then responder simply makes the descriptive bid he wants to make. That is, 3 clubs is clubs with a broken suit, 3 diamonds is diamonds with a broken suit, 3 hearts is clubs with 2 of the top 3 honors, and so forth.

opener	responder
1NT	2♦
2♠	3♠

Here responder does not have hearts because he did not bid 2NT over the super-accept. Instead, responder has described his hand directly, a 6-card diamond suit with 2 of the top

3 honors and slam invitational values.

To help eliminate any potential confusion, let's write out the critical comparisons once again:

The basic Walsh Relay sequence

opener	responder
1NT	2♦
2♥	2♠
2NT	<i>and all 3-level calls are Walsh Relay descriptions</i>

Super-accept, responder has hearts

opener	responder
1NT	2♦
2♠	2NT

Super-accept, but Walsh Relay

opener	responder
1NT	2♦
2♠	<i>and all 3-level calls are Walsh Relay descriptions</i>

Remember that Minorwood applies to Walsh Relay sequences because strength has been clearly expressed.