



Convention of the Week

18th June, 2008

TWO-WAY CHECKBACK

Most are familiar with “New Minor Forcing (NMF)” as in this auction:

1♣	Pass	1♠	Pass
1NT	Pass	2♦	

Playing NMF, 2♦ is artificial and guarantees at least game-invitational values. The normal motive in NMF auctions is to uncover a major fit, in this particular case a 5-3 Spade fit or a 4-4 Heart fit. This week we look at an alternative to NMF, namely Two-Way Checkback (2Way). Playing 2Way, *both* minors are used artificially, as follows:

2♣	Invitational values
2♦	Game-going values

Invitational Auctions

Suppose that the auction starts:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♣	1♠
1NT	2♣
2♦	??

Opener was *required* to bid 2♦ (no exceptions) after which Responder will use describe his invitational hand further:

2♥	4 Hearts, and thus 5 Spades (if 4-4, Responder’s first bid would be 1♥)
2♠	5+ Spades
2NT	Invitational, with 4-card support for Opener’s minor (Clubs here). This allows Opener to sign off in 3 of the minor if he wishes.
3♣	Club support
3♦	Diamonds

Note the response of 2NT, showing support for Opener’s minor. If Responder has no such support, and has no interest in pursuing a major fit, then he simply raises 2NT directly to 3NT without going through the 2Way rigmarole.

Here are some hands for Responder after the bidding starts: 1♣ 1♠, 1NT 2♣, 2♦:

♠ QT9873, ♥ KJ7, ♦ A8, ♣ 94
Bid 2♠, invitational with at least a 5-card suit.

♠ QT98, ♥ 76, ♦ K63, ♣ AQ64
Bid 2NT, inviting game, denying further major suit interest, and showing 4-card Club support. Partner may now opt to play in 2NT or 3♣, or else accept the game-try and play 3NT.

♠ QT98, ♥ 5, ♦ K63, ♣ AQ643
Bid 3♣. Invitational, of course, but this time with *five*-card support for Opener’s minor.

♠ Q983, ♥ J76, ♦ K63, ♣ AQ6
If Responder has this hand he has already gone wrong. Instead of using 2Way, he had a simple raise of 1NT directly to 2NT.

♠ QT987, ♥ KJT7, ♦ A8, ♣ 94
Bid 2♥, invitational with 5-4 in the majors.

Strong Auctions

Using 2Way, 2♦ creates a game-force, let’s consider this start to the auction:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♦	1♠
1NT	2♦
??	

♠ T87, ♥ A87, ♦ AQJ87, ♣ K8
Bid 2♠, showing belated 3-card support. It’s not a good idea for Opener to jump here in order to show his maximum values, for two reasons. Firstly, the auction is already game-forcing. Secondly, Responder may not have 5 Spades, he may be using 2Way as a means of creating a game-force before he supports Diamonds, for example.

♠ T87, ♥ A874, ♦ AQJ8, ♣ K8
Bid 2♥. If Opener has 5 Spades and less than 4 Hearts he can bid 2♠ next, which we will raise to 3♣. If Opener has 5 Spades and 4 Hearts then it is anybody’s guess whether we belong in Spades or Hearts. We’d guess Hearts here, if only because our Hearts are stronger and because perhaps our hand needs protection from the opening lead.

♠ 543, ♥ KJ9, ♥ QJ83, ♣ AQT
Show that 3-card Spade support if you really must, but this looks more like 2NT to us.

Weak Hands

The bidding starts:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♣	1♠
1NT	??

♠ K876, ♥ 965, ♦ QJT97, ♣ 7

Most players nowadays, with a weak hand, would bypass those Diamonds in favor of getting the Spades into the auction. But having done so, and then got that 1NT rebid, Responder sees that 2♦ is likely to be a better contract. Of course, Responder cannot bid 2♦, that would be game-forcing. No problem, Responder bids 2♣, Opener is forced to accept the relay to 2♦ and now Responder passes. So, that 2♣ bid (over the 1NT rebid) shows an invitational hand *or* a weak hand with Diamonds.

♠ K876, ♥ 965, ♦ 7, ♣ Q9752

Responder cannot bid 2♣, that would be an invitational hand (or, as we just saw, a weak hand with Diamonds). So, the common treatment is that a jump to 3♣ here is weak and to play. If the auction had started 1♦ 1♠, 1NT then again 3♣ shows a weak hand with Clubs, presumably 6.

♠ KQT85, ♥ 965, ♦ 7, ♣ 9754

This looks like a 2♣ bid to us. True, some players will occasionally rebid 1NT with a singleton Spade, but even so we'd expect 2♣ to play better than 1NT most of the time.

♠ KQT85, ♥ 9654, ♦ 7, ♣ 975

An obvious 2♥ bid, surely 2-of-a-major will be better than 1NT.

Jump Bids

How do you play this sequence?

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
1♦	1♥
1NT	3♥

Those secondary jumps by Responder are often played as invitational, in this case with a 6-card Heart suit. But, playing 2Way, the sequence 1♦ 1♥, 1NT 2♣, 2♦ 2♥ is available for invitational Heart hands. So we can find a better use for the direct jump to 3♥, namely that it's slammish, and shows a good suit: ♠ 82, ♥ AKQ765, ♦ AQ7, ♣ 84. That's a minimum hand for 3♥, we would say.

The same applies to other jumps, such as 1♦ 1♥, 1NT 3♦, where Responder would have at least ♠ 82, ♥ AKQ76, ♦ AQ765, ♣ 8.

The one exception is a jump to 3♣, which is always weak, even if it is a new suit, as in: 1♦ 1♠, 1NT 3♣. Responder is weak, 4-6 in the black suits and Opener must now pass. If Responder has a *good* hand with Clubs he must bid the game-forcing 2♦ over 1NT and then introduce Clubs.

In Competition

<i>Opener</i>		<i>Resp.</i>	
1♣	1♥	1♠	Pass
1NT	Pass	??	

Does anything change if there is one-level interference? Our own preference is that 2Way is still on in this situation, but others play that it is not, so as usual be sure to discuss this one with Partner.

By a Passed Hand

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
	Pass
1♣	1♠
1NT	??

Even as a passed hand, the 2♣ part of 2Way is still playable, we suggest that you use the full invitational machinery outlined earlier. And how about 2♦ in this situation? Obviously, there is no use for the game-forcing interpretation and our own preference is to play it as 2Way still, but, instead of being game-forcing it shows an "unusually good passed hand". Another common treatment is for 2♦ to be weak and natural, so take your pick.

XYZ

Some partnerships extend the Two-Way Checkback concept to auctions where Opener's rebid is 1♠ instead of 1NT:

1♣	1♦, 1♠
1♣	1♥, 1♠
1♦	1♥, 1♠

After each of these auctions, 2♣ and 2♦ are used in exactly the same way as we have described above. Note that some XYZ auctions will usurp your 4th Suit Forcing auctions:

1♣ 1♦, 1♠ 2♦

This replaces 2♥ as the artificial force to game.

1♦ 1♥, 1♠

2♣ is artificial and forcing, but 2♦ is the bid that forces to game artificially.

Alas, space does not allow us to do justice to XYZ, for more please refer to *Advanced Bridge Bidding for the 21st Century*.