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Play & Learn

Reverses – you can't back away from them!

Articles in this series have mentioned the reverse, but you might have pushed the examples aside thinking to yourself, "We don't do reverses." Whether you "do" them or not, the mere fact that you have made a bid that is considered to be a reverse by those in the know has an impact on your bidding. It's time for us to remove the mystery surrounding reverses.

After a one-level opening bid and a response that guarantees no more than minimum strength, any new suit rebid by a minimum opener must be below two of opener's original suit. In each of the following auctions, opener can make the rebid shown with a minimum hand:

1. 1♦ – Pass – 1♥ – Pass; 1♠
2. 1♥ – Pass – 1♠ – Pass; 2♣
3. 1♥ – Pass – 1♠ – Pass; 2♠

In the first two auctions, opener's rebid was in a new suit. In No. 1, the new suit was on the one level, where a minimum opener is free to make any bid he chooses. In No. 2, opener's new suit rebid was on the two level, but 2♣ is lower than 2♥ (two of opener's first suit). In both cases,

opener might still have a dead-minimum opening hand. In No. 3, opener's rebid of 2♠ is actually higher than two of his first suit (2♥), but 2♠ is an *old* suit (already bid), not a *new* suit. This is the most specific rebid of the three. An old suit bid at the two level shows a minimum. In 1 and 2, opener's new suit rebid could be made with a minimum (13–15 points) or medium (16–18 points) hand. In the next three auctions, opener shows extra strength:

4. 1♦ – Pass – 1♥ – Pass; 2NT
5. 1♦ – Pass – 1♥ – Pass; 2♠
6. 1♣ – Pass – 1♠ – Pass; 2♥

Opener's 2NT rebid in No. 4 shows a balanced hand with 18–19 high-card points. Opener can skip over a four-card major to make this bid, so it's possible for West to hold four spades. 2NT is highly invitational but not forcing.

Opener shows an unbalanced hand in the next two auctions. In No. 5, opener's jump shift shows a maximum (19–21 HCP) and is *game-forcing*. No. 6 is the one that gives many players trouble. We're so focused on finding a major-suit fit that opener feels compelled to show a four-card heart suit no matter what his strength, but 2♥ as in No. 6 cannot be bid with a minimum. Why not? Responder's 1♠ could have been made with as few as 6 HCP. *Opener shows an unbalanced hand by rebidding in a new suit on the two level*, so a minimum responder will often take a preference between opener's

two suits. If responder prefers clubs to hearts, he must rebid 3♣, but *two minimum hands should stop below 2NT*. Opener's 2♥ rebid may force the bidding to 3♣, a bid higher than 2NT, so opener must have more than a minimum to make that bid. Opener's 2♥ is a reverse, showing extra strength. Opener's reverse doesn't have to be quite as strong as opener's jump shift, but it could be. *Opener's reverse is forcing for one round*.

Next time, we'll see how to continue the auction after opener reverses. For now, let's focus on exactly what a reverse shows. Opposite a possible minimum responder, opener's reverse shows:

- ♣ A medium or maximum opening hand — usually 17 or more HCP.
- ♣ An unbalanced hand with more cards in opener's first suit than in his second suit (often 5–4).

A possible hand for opener in No. 6 is:

♠4 ♥A Q J 3 ♦A J 7 ♣K Q 9 8 6.

Responder will expect opener to have at least 5–4 distribution with the five-card suit being opener's first-bid suit. Opener has shown "real" clubs without ever needing to rebid them. Opener's 2♥ rebid also shows four hearts. A reverse is a forcing bid, so even a dead-minimum responder must take one more bid. We'll talk about what to bid next month. Until then, try to gear your bidding to your strength — and don't reverse without extras. □