



Glenn Grøtheim

he will know just about every card in his partner's hand!

In this case, after all his questions, Geir found out that Glenn held 2-2-6-3 distribution, no aces, three kings and the queen of diamonds. Good to know, isn't it? Geir saw the golden opportunity of playing in a very unusual contract, a grand slam in hearts on a 4-2 fit, instead

of an eight-card spade fit or a reasonable seven-card diamond fit.

Again, he could almost describe the play before dummy came down. And it was over in seconds. The queen of clubs was led and went to the ace. Then ace and king of spades, followed by a small spade ruffed with the king of hearts. After that came four rounds of hearts, and he could claim when trumps were 4-3.

In the other room North/South bid Seven No-Trumps, to be fair at least as good a contract. A 3-3 split in diamonds or a favourable spade split were quite good chances but, as the cards lay, the reasonable grand slam had to go down. The percentage-calculating guys can work out whether, and by how much, Seven Hearts was worse than Seven No-Trumps, but many spectators, including myself, would not have listened. We were simply enthralled to watch such a beautiful sequence, and see the spectacular contract. After the match Geir admitted he just had to try the 4-2 fit grand slam, even though from the bidding he knew Seven No-Trumps might be significantly better.

## 1♥/1♠ - 1NT - 2NT

After a few international events playing an artificial system Geir gave it all up. The system in his world now is, and will always be, natural. In the years that I have played with Geir we have developed our natural methods together. We agreed early on that something had to be done about the superiority of the club systems, especially when bidding big hands.

A convention we developed was the rebid of Two No-Trumps after having opened One of a major, and got the response of One No-Trump. I guess many people throughout the world use it as a forcing bid, but I think we have found a good way of using it by fitting in some hands that occasionally give natural bidders big problems. We use a standard 15-17 no-trump, so a rebid of Two No-Trumps after a One-over-One shows the 18-19 range. What about raising the One No-Trump response to Two No-Trumps?

For many years I used the bid naturally to show 18 points. That gave partner the option of passing with 6 or 7 bad points and we could avoid some shaky game contracts. To be honest, this situation rarely arose. The idea of using the Two No-Trump rebid as something else came when playing a regional team tournament in Trondheim.

All Vul  
Dealer S

♠ J 2  
♥ A 2  
♦ 10 3 2  
♣ K 10 8 6 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K 10 9 6 5  
♥ 4 3  
♦ A 4  
♣ A Q 9

This hand is easily solved by strong club systems. But most of the players in Trondheim play natural methods, and settled for Four Spades, making eleven tricks after a heart lead. Some played in Three No-Trumps after 1♠ - 1NT - 3NT. The problem is that Seven Clubs is almost as safe as those games! It would have been easy to bring home even when West held four spades to the queen, since the queen could have been ruffed out after drawing trumps. Five spade tricks, six trump tricks (clubs) and two aces makes a total of thirteen, and the score of 2140 instead of 650. How should we have bid it?

Some people tried to argue that if South opens the bidding with Two Clubs it would at least be easy to reach slam, but South's hand is not nearly strong enough for a standard Two Club opening, is it?

The problem natural bidders have with strong, unbalanced hands after opening One of a major is substantial, especially after a One No-Trump response which can be anywhere from 6-11 HCP, and a lot of different distributions, from 3-3-3-4 to a six-card suit! Discussing this, we discovered different opinions on different bidding situations starting that way. What for instance does this mean: 1♥ - 1NT - 3♦?

Natural, of course. One-round forcing, say some; game forcing, say most. But how many diamonds are needed? Five is ideal, and then it is easier and more comfortable to bypass Three No-Trumps when responder has a slam try with diamond support. But what if the opener is 5-4 and, let's say, 19-20 HCP? Some play Two Diamonds as a one-round force over One No-Trump, and they escape with that. But as lovers of matchpoint bridge we disliked such a solution and followed

traditional methods by sometimes jumping to Three Diamonds with only four diamonds. But we had to admit that such hands, and other similar hands could cause severe problems. It could be even worse for opener with 6-4 or 7-4 distribution and hands close to a Two Club opening bid.

After discussing the issue for a long time we decided to start using the Two No-Trump rebid (only over the One No-Trump response) as a game-forcing, artificial bid. What we lost was the natural, invitational sequence, and with such a hand we now have to jump to game, sometimes ending in a very shaky contract when partner holds a minimum for his One No-Trump response. Only then does the jump to game become a problem, and in some of those cases the game makes anyway. You can live with that sort of problem!

This convention solves a number of problem hands where club systems had previously been far superior. How should the weak hand respond to this Two No-Trump asking bid? It is possible to do that in different ways, but something like this sounds reasonable:

- 1♥ 1NT
- 2NT 3♣ = natural, 5 cards (+)
- 3♦ = natural, 5 cards (+)
- 3♥ = 3-card support
- 3♠ = 2 hearts, tending to suggest 3-2-4-4
- 3NT = 5-5 in the minors

We use a four-card One Heart opening, but require five for opening One Spade. Therefore in our system there will be a slight difference between 1♥ - 1NT - 2NT and 1♠ - 1NT - 2NT. Another difference is that after 1♠ - 1NT responder may have a heart suit, but after 1♥ - 1NT he should not have a spade suit. This is how we bid after a One Spade opening:

- 1♠ 1NT
- 2NT 3♣ = unknown 5(+)-card minor
- 3♦ = 4-card heart suit!
- 3♥ = 5(+) cards in hearts
- 3♠ = 2 spades, suggesting 2-3-4-4
- 3NT = 5-5 in the minors

Over Three Clubs, a Three Diamond bid asks which minor responder holds: Three Hearts shows a club suit, Three Spades diamonds.

The reason Three Spades shows only two spades is that we normally support immediately with three cards when the opening has guaranteed five. If you require five cards for opening One Heart as well you can amend the first scheme of responses. The Two No-Trump forcing/asking bid can be incorporated in your system whether you use four- or five-card majors, or if you use both (as we do)!

Further bidding is natural, which means this is a good way of bidding with all (very) strong, unbalanced opening hands, except the 5-5 (or 6-5) hands, which are better handled by bidding naturally. For instance, a 17-18 pointer including a good seven-card suit can be bid by saying Two No-Trumps over partner's One No-Trump response. Over responder's next bid opener simply bids his suit at the three level (or four level), and it is still possible to reach slam if the One No-Trump bidder has a maximum, including top controls.

On the above-mentioned deal from the regional match in Trondheim the superior grand slam could have been reached with the 'new' convention.

A couple of years after we started to use the Two No-Trump bid over partner's One No-Trump response as forcing, the convention was put to good use in TGR's Auction Pairs in London, in the summer of 1998, where I partnered Geir. In the qualifying round this hand gave us a good score:

- None Vul ♠ A K 9 8
- Dealer S ♥ A 10 7 6 5
- ♦ A
- ♣ A 4 2



- ♠ Q 4 2
- ♥ 2
- ♦ Q 9 8 2
- ♣ K J 8 5 3

The bidding:

West	North	East	South
—	<i>Geo</i>	—	<i>Geir</i>
—	—	—	Pass
Pass	1♥	Pass	1NT
Pass	2NT	Pass	3♣
Pass	4♦	Pass	4♥
Pass	6♣	All Pass	

Two No-Trumps forced to game, and Three Clubs showed a five-card suit. Later we discussed whether my Four Diamond splinter was the correct bid. There were two problems with it: first, I should really have had four-card club support, and, second, a singleton honour in the splinter suit is far from ideal. On the other hand, the good thing about bidding the splinter Four Diamonds was that I found out from my partner whether he liked his cards or not, and letting Geir Helgemo judge is seldom a bad idea!

His Four Hearts was a cue-bid and, according to our agreements, it could be a

- All Vul ♠ J 2
- Dealer S ♥ A 2
- ♦ 10 3 2
- ♣ K 10 8 6 5 2



- ♠ A K 10 9 6 5
- ♥ 4 3
- ♦ A 4
- ♣ A Q 9

The bidding:

West	North	East	South
—	—	—	1♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	2NT
Pass	3♣	Pass	3♦
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♣
Pass	4♥	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♥	Pass	5NT
Pass	7♣	All Pass	

Two No-Trumps establishes the game-force, and Three Clubs promises a minor suit. Three Diamonds asks which, and Three Hearts (lowest) shows at least five clubs. Four Clubs is natural and slam invitational. Then North cue-bids the ace of hearts. Now comes Four No-Trumps, 'Roman Key Card Blackwood', and South shows two out of the five aces (the trump king included). At this stage South could gamble on the grand, but this is may be a bit too ambitious if North holds only five clubs. Five No-Trumps is a grand slam invitation, and North's sixth club enables him to accept.

Having adopted this convention, we found that the opportunity to use it came up frequently, something that proved it to be useful. There is little point to conventions that seldom or never come up - when they do either you or your partner forget it!

singleton. We have no way back to a heart contract in this type of sequence; that is our style, right or wrong. Over Four Hearts it was pretty obvious that Six Clubs would have chances. With a bad club suit, or a worthless diamond honour, partner would have bid Five Clubs over Four Diamonds. But he had a reasonable trump suit, the queen of spades and a heart control, so a cue-bid was reasonable

The seven of spades was led and it was up to Geir to bring home the slam. He thought for a long time before playing to the first trick. I got pretty nervous while I was waiting.

Before the lead West had produced a short, but obvious, hesitation. Geir's table feel is marvellous; he always notices such things as the time taken to make the opening lead. But here it did not determine his plan of play. He analysed the complete hand on the basis that the seven of spades was probably a doubleton.

The spade lead was taken by the ace. Then he cashed the ace of diamonds followed by a spade to the queen. A diamond was ruffed and now he played the ace of hearts and ruffed a heart. One more diamond was ruffed in dummy before he cashed the ace of clubs. The king of diamonds had not showed up, and he took another heart ruff in hand. Both defenders followed suit in hearts and diamonds. This was the ending:

♠ K 9  
 ♥ 10 7  
 ♦ —  
 ♣ —

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 4  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ Q  
 ♣ K J

So far Geir had had three chances for his contract. The king of diamonds could have dropped, if it had been in a three-card suit – but that did not happen. There was a slight chance that spades were splitting 3-3, something that Geir, as explained earlier, did not believe. Most probably East held four spades. Still there was a good chance if East also held Q-x-x in trumps. After the king of clubs declarer could simply play a spade to the king and the last spade from dummy. The jack of clubs would give him the twelfth trick en passant. None of those lines worked, but a fourth possibility came in. When the king of clubs was played, East's queen dropped. This was the full deal:

♠ A K 9 8		♠ J 10 5 3
♥ A 10 7 6 5		♥ Q 9 8
♦ A		♦ K 7 6 4
♣ A 4 2		♣ Q 7

♠ 7 6	N W     E S	♠ J 10 5 3
♥ K J 4 3		♥ Q 9 8
♦ J 10 5 3		♦ K 7 6 4
♣ 10 9 6		♣ Q 7

♠ Q 4 2		
♥ 2		
♦ Q 9 8 2		
♣ K J 8 5 3		

After the king of clubs Geir simply cashed his last trump and squeezed East in spades and diamonds for the thirteenth trick.

# The One Diamond response

In developing our natural bidding system we hoped to create methods to cover the most frequent problems in the bidding. We were especially keen to devise conventions to deal with the sort of situations where artificial club systems had shown themselves superior. The above-mentioned Two No-Trump rebid after the response of One No-Trump was just such a solution. Another idea was to use an initial One Diamond response to a One Club opening to be flexible. Most of us decided to use the response as either natural and weak (normally a six-card suit), or as a game-going hand either with diamonds and a major, or club support. Some of us also like to use 1♦ – 2♣ as consistent with a strong hand with support for opener's suit. These methods mean that you do not have to play inverted minor-suit raises, although many people are happy to do so.

The real advantage lies in the efficiency of the One Diamond response. By using it as weak with long diamonds, or as a game-going hand, we can keep the bidding low in situations where slam prospects needed to be investigated.

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♦
1♥	2♣

Two Clubs in this situation can now become a slam invitation with a club fit, though normally only three-card support (with club support and a weak hand we support at once and do not introduce the diamonds). This means the Two Club rebid would also have been a slam try if opener's second bid had been One Spade or One No-Trump. In these positions Three Clubs would indicate a stronger slam try, with at least four-card support



Tor Helness

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♦
1♥	2♥

Two Hearts shows a slam try with a diamond suit and four-card heart support. With a weaker diamond/heart hand responder would skip the diamonds and bid his hearts at once, even if he had longer diamonds. The advantage of doing things this way is, of course, that you keep the bidding low and get efficient auctions when you have strong hands. The disadvantage is that you may have problems getting to the best partscore when your side has a diamond fit, though what comes back as partial compensation is that the defence is tougher when responder conceals his diamond suit.

A memorable hand was this one from a knock-out match in Norway in 1994. It was the last match before the play-off, and the Students Bridgeclub from Trondheim met Carnegie from Oslo.