

Jacoby Transfers (Majors Only) Versus Four-Suit Transfers and Pre-Accept (Mark Oettinger)

Most players use Jacoby Transfers. The basic structure is as follows:

1N P 2♦*...

...which says that responder has at least 5♥, and requires opener to rebid 2♥, thereby “accepting the transfer.” [1N-P-2♥*... is the parallel sequence for Spades.] How many high card points does responder promise? Most would say “none,” since it is almost certainly better to play in the guaranteed 7-card major suit fit (opener has to have at least 2♥ for his opening 1N bid), even at the 2-level, than to play in 1N. Consider a typical worst-case hand for such an auction:

♠ xxx
♥ 10xxxxx
♦ xxx
♣ xx

♠ AKx
♥ Qx
♦ Kxxx
♣ Kxxx

In 2♥, you will probably take 2♠ tricks, one of your Kings, and at least 2♥. Down 2 is never pleasant, but in 1N, with good (i.e., “passive”) defense, you could easily be held to your 2♠ tricks, for Down 5. Don’t lose sight of the fact that you and your partner only have a combined total of 15 high card points. In other words, the opponents have 25 high card points. They can therefore almost certainly make 3N, which would be -400 or -600 for your side, so going -100 or even -200 is likely to be a pretty good score.

Before we transition into considering *four*-suit transfers, let’s consider the concept of super-accept. When you open 1N and partner “Jacoby Transfers” (2♦* or 2♥*),

many partnerships agree that opener should accept the transfer by jumping a level if he (opener) has a maximum (normally 17 HCPs and 4-card trump support). Again, let's look at the worst-case example:

♠ xxx
♥ 10xxxxx
♦ xxx
♣ xx

♠ AKx
♥ Qxxx
♦ KQxx
♣ Kx

Yes, responder will inwardly cringe when opener “super-accepts,” but the Law of Total Tricks (LoTT) provides that we are usually “safe” playing for the number of tricks that is equal to our combined number of trumps. We know that we have at least 9 trumps, so we should be safe committing to the 3 level...which requires 9 tricks for success. NOTE: I am not saying that we will necessarily *make* 3♥, but if we go down, we are likely to suffer a smaller minus than if we had let the opponents play (and make) their partscore at the 2- or 3-level. The LoTT is a bit beyond the scope of this article, but will be the subject of future articles in *Table Talk*, and is an indispensable part of the repertoire of all aspiring players. The seminal works on the subject are Larry Cohen's classics entitled *To Bid or Not to Bid* and *Following the Law*. I commend them to you.

So...we turn to 4-Suit Transfers, which start with the following sequences:

1N P 2♦*...showing ♥

1N P 2♥*...showing ♠

1N P 2♠*...showing ♣

1N P 2N*...showing ♦

Two considerations must kept in mind:

(1) Since transferring to either minor suit gets us to the 3 level, we must have 6 cards in the minor suit to initiate the sequence; and

(2) You will notice that the ♦ transfer takes away our standard 1N-P-2N... invitational to 3N. How then do we invite to 3N? The answer is that we first bid 2♣ (nominally, Stayman), and we then rebid 2N regardless of what opener rebids. Opener must then Alert responder's 2N rebid, and if asked, explain that "responder may *or may not* have a 4-card major."

One further (and very useful) extension of four-suit transfers is the concept of pre-accept. This concept has application beyond minor suit transfers, but *in the minor suit transfer context*, if opener does not immediately accept the transfer, but instead bids the suit between responder's transfer and the suit that responder is showing (thereby "*pre-accepting*"), opener is showing a good fit for responder's suit...typically "Queen third or better." The corollary of this principle is that when opener immediately accepts the minor suit transfer, he is showing less than "Queen third" in responder/transferor's minor suit. Why does this matter? Because, in this way, the partnership gains in two situations: (1) When opener has less than Queen third, it is likely that 3 of responder's minor will be the final contract, and in that event, opener (the stronger hand) will become declarer, will have his hand remain "closed," and will have the opening lead come "up to" his hand (often gaining a trick or tempo); and (2) If responder has a 6-card minor with 2 of the 3 top honors, and opener pre-accepts, responder knows that we have 6 tricks in the suit if it splits normally, and that may give responder the information that he needs in order to place us in a point-shy but successful 3N contract. Consider the two following hands and their different auctions:

(A)

♠ J10x

♥ xx

♦ KQxxxx

(B)

♠ J10x

♥ xx

♦ KQxxxx

<p>♣ XX</p> <p>♠ Axx</p> <p>♥ KQx</p> <p>♦ Axx</p> <p>♣ QJxx</p>	<p>♣ XX</p> <p>♠ AJxx</p> <p>♥ KQx</p> <p>♦ xx</p> <p>♣ KQJx</p>
<p>1N 2N*</p> <p>3♣** 3N</p>	<p>1N 2N*</p> <p>3♦*** P</p>

In Hand (A), responder drives to game, knowing that the ♦ should be good for 6 tricks (90% of the time), whereas in Hand (B), responder is content to play in 3♦, since the ♦ suit will likely not run, and is a far greater resource as a trump suit...as opposed to a source of tricks in notrump. You will note that a one-round hold-up of the ♦A will limit declarer to one ♦ trick in 3N.

CAVEAT: No convention works in every situation, and every convention usurps the otherwise natural meaning of the sequence. That said, bridge is a game of probabilities, and when a convention (if fully understood and properly used) produces a greater probability of a better result, it is worthwhile on balance.