

Smolen Convention

Since modern techniques suggest we should open as many hands as possible one no trump a comprehensive system of responses becomes very useful for most partnerships. Two weeks ago we took apart the Puppet Stayman convention and hopefully established how useful the convention can be.

This week we looked at what we can and should do as a responder when partner opens one no trump and we have a five card major and a four card major. The most important situation occurs when responder knows the partnership has a game going hand.

First let's discuss the specifics of the Smolen convention and when we can recognize it is applicable. Partner opens one no trump and you have five hearts and four spades and at least ten points (game going hand). If we know we have a major suit fit we will jump to game in the major otherwise we will bid three no trump. Some might argue we can transfer in one suit and bid the other major. That might work fine but you can see there is a chance the wrong hand will be playing the hand.

The nice thing about the Smolen convention is it starts with a bid of two clubs after the one no trump opening. Two clubs asks partner for a four card major, just as before. As a matter of fact there is no indication that anything else is going on. The no trump opener will respond normally. If the no trump bidder has four hearts he will bid it and you as the responder with five hearts and four spades will jump to four hearts. If the opener bids two spades then you will jump to game in spades. Smolen comes into play only when the no trump opener bids two diamonds showing no four card major. Now the responder will jump to the three level in his four card suit. In this situation the responder will jump to three spades. The three spade bid shows four spades and five hearts. With three hearts the opener will bid four hearts. with only two hearts opener will revert to three no trump.

So in review, after a Stayman response of two diamonds by the no trump opener a jump to three of a major shows four of that suit and five of the other major with a game going hand. The three level bid is the bid that is alertable.

Why do we not use Puppet on this hand? Because responder is the one with both majors, including one five card major which you would normally transfer the no trump bidder into.

Are there any side benefits to this convention? Yes! The no trump bidder gets to play the hand. It is most often better for the stronger hand to be hidden. Now you can use a different bidding sequence with five hearts and five spades if you like. If you have five - five in the majors and a game going hand you can transfer into one and bid the other to show five - five with a game going hand.

Are you ready to add Smolen to your no trump arsenal?