

More minor matters *by Derrick Browne*

What opening do you make with the following hand?

S 5  
H 874  
D AQT5  
C AQ876

American expert Larry Cohen poses this question on his website. There is no question that you should bid something – 12 HCP with a good 5-card and a good 4-card suit is much too good to pass. Here are some of Larry's views, mixed with an Australian perspective.

There is no "right" answer. Many experts open 1C (this is the usual style amongst Aussies) and then have to figure out how to cope with a 1S response by partner. Some would then rebid 1NT which is unappealing with a singleton, especially with all the HCP in the two long suits. Others would repeat the 5-card club suit, also not ideal. The natural rebid would be 2D but that is unacceptable – it would be a reverse, promising extra values.

Cohen prefers to avoid the rebid problem by opening 1D. "When partner (you know how disappointing partners are) answers 1S, I am ready. I rebid 2C. It's true that I have lied by bidding my long suit second. However, I have shown both minors and am willing to live with the fact that partner won't realise which is the 5-card suit and which is the 4-carder. I've managed to show both minors and have avoided rebidding notrump with a singleton. Neither approach is perfect – choose your poison."

With over 16 points, there is no need to distort your shape when holding five clubs and four diamonds – you are strong enough to bid the clubs and then bid your diamonds. This promises extra values because if partner doesn't like diamonds and wants to go back to clubs, the bidding will be at the 3-level. That is the essence of a reverse, sometimes defined as a "non-jump new suit higher than rebidding your opened suit" (you can see why we shorten that to "reverse", even though the name doesn't have much meaning or relevance). Let's see it in action.

Dealer South, nil vul.

NORTH  
S 8763  
H AQJT2  
D Q5  
C AK

WEST	EAST
S KQT9	S 52
H 43	H 98765
D 96	D KT873
C T8542	C 6

SOUTH  
S AJ4  
H K  
D AJ42  
C QJ973

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1C
Pass	1H	Pass	2D
Pass	2S	Pass	2NT
Pass	6NT	All pass	

South has a mediocre 16 HCP, about rock bottom for a reverse, although the singleton HK is not as bad a feature as usual given that hearts is partner's long suit (and indeed it turns out to be a handy filler).

After the reverse, North realises slam is likely but bids a gentle 2S to find out more about partner's hand, then makes the dramatic raise to 6NT.

The SK was led. There are 12 top tricks if clubs break normally, so declarer won the first trick to keep open the possibility of an overtrick.

Both hearts and clubs require unblocking plays. Cash the HK first, because the clubs are then needed to get to the North hand. On the run of hearts from dummy, West must not discard clubs unless South discards one first (keep length with declarer).

Given the bad club break, declarer has only 11 top tricks but can take the diamond finesse to make the contract as the king is onside.