

# The Unbalanced Heart Convention

Contributed by: Mr. Marvin French

There is one sort of hand that is hard to describe opposite a 1NT opening: an unbalanced hand of game-invitational strength with five hearts and less than four spades, e.g., ♠-AQ3 ♥-J8732 ♦-3 ♣-Q842.

Assuming you want to try for game, how do you proceed? Using Jacoby transfers, you might bid 2♦ and then raise 2♥ to 3♥. Or should you bid 2NT after the 2♥ bid? Would Stayman be the answer?

Any of these routes is risky. Raising hearts could result in a 3♥ contract with Kx or worse opposite your jack-fifth, if opener has a minimum and has to pass. Besides, that sequence shows six hearts. Bidding notrump after a transfer bid is supposed to show a balanced hand. Opener might pass 2NT or go on to 3NT with a 4-3-3-3 hand that would play better in hearts. With Stayman, a 2♠ response by opener shuts out the heart suit (a 3♥ rebid is too dangerous, even if you play it non-forcing).

An invitational two-suited hand can also be a problem: ♠-5 ♥-K8764 ♦-AJ832 ♣-64. After a 2♦ transfer to hearts, most people play that a 3♦ rebid is forcing, but this hand is not good enough for that. If 3♦ is not forcing (as Alvin Roth says), then a game-going two-suiter becomes a problem. Is there another way to show both suits invitational? Try this: With an unbalanced heart hand, transfer to 2♥ and then bid 2♠ artificially:

Opener	Responder
1NT	2♦ - Jacoby Transfer
2♥	2♠ – Unbalanced Heart Convention

Opener	Responder
1NT	2♦
2♥	2♠ – Jacoby Transfer

The 2♠ bid says, "Please tell me about your heart support and hand strength." Opener obeys by bidding 3♥ or 4♥ (or a cue bid) with heart support, 2NT or 3NT without it.

The invitational two-suiter is shown this way:

Opener	Responder
1NT	2♦
2♥	2♠ – Unbalanced Heart Convention
2NT	3♣/3♦ – not forcing

Responder is showing a second suit with invitational strength. Opener will probably pass with his minimum hand and lack of heart support (as indicated by the 2NT bid), but could go on with a good fit. With game-going strength, responder uses a standard forcing Jacoby sequence:

Opener	Responder
1NT	2♦ - Jacoby Transfer
2♥	3♣/3♦ - forcing

What if responder has an unbalanced hand with five spades? No problem, since opener's response to Stayman cannot shut out the spade suit. After opener's 2♦ or 2♥ response, responder can bid 2♠ (forcing, as I play it) and then show a second suit on the next round, not forcing, if opener rebids 2NT:

Opener	Responder
1NT	2♣
2♦/2♥	2♠
2NT	3♣/3♦/3♥ – not forcing

With a game-going hand, responder would use a forcing Jacoby sequence, transferring to spades before showing the second suit.

The Unbalanced Heart Convention is also useful after a 2NT opening, but there is no stopping below game:

Opener	Responder
2NT	3♦
3♥	3♠

The 3♠ bid is Unbalanced Heart Convention, showing an unbalanced hand with hearts. With a balanced hand, responder would rebid 3NT instead of 3♠.

### Opener's Response to Unbalanced Heart Convention

When responder uses Unbalanced Heart Convention, opener's next bid clarifies his hand:

Opener	Responder
1NT	2♦
2♥	2♠
2NT - no heart support, minimum hand (cheapest bid)	
3♣ - no heart support, maximum hand (next cheapest bid)	
3♦ - notrumper cue bid in support of hearts, minimum hand	
3♥ - heart support, minimum	
3♠/4♣/4♦ - heart support, maximum, notrumper cue bid	
3NT - maximum, heart support, no good notrumper cue bid holding	
4♥ - same, with four good hearts	

The reason for bidding 3♣ with a maximum and no heart support is that the bid provides room for responder to show a diamond suit. If the 1NT bidder has ♠-AJ32 ♥-K4 ♦-AKJ2 ♣-763, he would certainly be interested to know that responder has a heart-diamond two-suited hand. The 3NT raise serves a similar purpose, leaving room for a 4♣ or 4♦ slam-try bid by responder.

See the previous chapter for a description of notrumper cue bids.

(These show secondary values, e.g., KQx, KJx, etc., not Axx)

Opener may count a moderate hand as a "maximum" if it contains good heart honors and outside points consisting mostly of aces. If in doubt, however, call it a minimum--let responder do any stretching.

Note that with a minimum and heart support, opener can only bid 3♥ or make a notrumper cue bid in diamonds. Responder may sign off in 3♥ if she does not like the 3♦ cue bid (i.e., with a singleton diamond). The 3♣ rebid is forcing to game.

When opener bids 2NT or 3♣ over 2♠, a minimum heart "rebid" shows six hearts and an unbalanced hand. This bid is invitational if opener bid 2NT, forcing if he bid 3♣. A jump to 4♥ over 3♣ is therefore a mild slam try featuring a strong suit. A 4♥ jump over 2NT only says that responder wants to be in game.

Opener	Responder
1NT	2♦
2♥	2♠
2NT/3♣	3♥/4♥

Opener will probably pass 3♥ when he has bid 2NT, showing a minimum. With a balanced hand and six hearts, responder immediately raises 2♥ to 3♥, invitational. Why differentiate? Because Unbalanced Heart Convention gives opener a chance to make a trial bid (but only in diamonds) in support of hearts when she has a minimum. Responder may be able to bid game on the basis of a good diamond fit. With a balanced hand, she doesn't care where opener's outside strength lies--she just wants top cards.

If the next hand bids over opener's 2♥ rebid in response to 2♦, Unbalanced Heart Convention does not apply:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	3♣/3♦	3♠ – natural, spade stopper(s)	

A Unbalanced Heart Convention spade bid must be made at the same level as the transfer. North implies no stopper in the opposing suit, and only a five-card heart suit (but may be cue bidding toward slam). He can't have four spades, of course.

The Unbalanced Heart Convention was published in The Bridge World magazine, February 1978, and in the Contract Bridge Forum, August 1977. It is included in the book Bridge Conventions Complete, by Amalya Kearse.