

The Bourke Relay - Possible Variations

Auctions that start 1x-p-1y-p-2x-p are good candidates for a relay approach. One method discussed in Bridge World in 1996 issue (July, page 21) by David Bird and Tim Bourke is known as the Bourke Relay. The basic idea is to make the cheapest available new suit or no trump bid a relay by responder, allowing the description of more hand types than in standard methods. Many times responder simply won't have a natural descriptive bid available, so the need for an artificial force is a common occurrence. The main issues will be level and the choice of playing no trump, responders suit or opener's suit.

The method should allow for:

1. Responder to invite, force, or sign off in his own suit.
2. Responder to invite or force in opener's suit (perhaps slam interest).
3. Determine if extra values and stoppers are present to play No Trump.
4. Occasionally find an undisclosed 4-4 fit in an unbid Minor.
5. Possibly for responder to sign off in Clubs (unbid suit).
6. Opener to show varying degrees of support for responder's Major suit (1m-pass-1M auctions).
7. Where relevant, attempt to right side No Trump contracts.

Issues that have to be agreed on (since there is more than one way to implement the above objectives) include:

1. Does the relay bid create a game force, pseudo game force (the auction may stop at 4 of a Minor when opener had bid and rebid a Minor.)
2. Should the non-relay bids such as a raise of opener's suit or a jump rebid in responder's suit be forcing or invitational only. Jeff Rubens argues that the raise of opener's suit should be forcing, to invite only you first relay then raise. This implies that the relay only creates a limited force, somewhat similar to the old fourth suit one-round force style from that convention's Acol origin.
3. What auctions will this relay apply to, and will the application be the same in all cases.

We will start the analysis with auctions that start with 1♦, a 1♠ response and a 2♦ rebid. My own preference is to rebid 1NT as opener with 1453 if the hand has the right strength for that rebid, but we still have to allow for the occasional 2♦ rebid on a five card suit. If we assume that responder's 2♥ rebid is a one round force only, opener can not rebid 3♥ to show hearts without extra values. In fact any bid beyond 3♦ (the safety level) will have to show at least modest extra values. With that in mind invitational or weaker hands with 5-4 or 5-5 in the Major suits should respond 2♥ to 1♦. Having eliminated the need for opener to show Hearts (if responder has a strong 5-4+ he relays, then rebids 3♥), we are left with opener's rebids:

2♠: three Spades, not substantial extras.

2 NT: natural, may have singleton Spade, not forcing.

- 3 ♣: more than minimum, at least a Club stopper.
- 3 ♦: decent suit, playable opposite a singleton, no game interest
- 3 ♥: more than minimum with heart stopper or suit (in which case 46 in reds)
- 3 ♠: 3 decent spades (KJx for example) and often a singleton.

I see no pressing need for further relays. If available responder can bid 3 Diamonds to limit his hand, or bypass 3 Diamonds to force to game.

Responders alternatives to the relay (after 1♦-1♠-2♦)

- 2 ♠: to play, or mild invite if weak jump shift response of 2 Clubs available over 1 Diamond.
- 3 ♦: **forcing to at least 4 Diamonds**, asks for stopper, opener bids 3 Hearts with Heart stopper, 3 Spades with Club stopper, or 3NT with both suits Hearts stopped. Note that responder must have Spades stopped to pass. 4-level bids show singletons by opener.
- 3 ♠: invitational, good 6+ suit
- 3 NT: To play.
- 3 ♥: Splinter bid.
- 3 ♣: 6 card suit, to play, but opener can bid 3 Diamonds with singleton Club and excellent Diamonds.
- 2 NT: natural invite with fewer than 3 Diamonds. Opener needs good Diamonds to pass or raise, else should usually retreat to 3 Diamonds or bid 3 Clubs with 3 plus Clubs (responder will often have 5 Clubs in this auction).

After 1♦ -1♥ -2♦, opener will not hold 4 Spades, so responder's relay is 2 Spades, with the following rebids by opener:

- 2 NT: no singleton or 3 card Heart support if minimum.
- 3 ♣: either 3 Hearts or other extras; forcing; may be artificial
- 3 ♥: extras with 3 Hearts.
- 3 ♠: Spade stopper and extras; strongly suggests singleton Club.
- 3 NT: singleton Heart; extras and stoppers.
- 3 ♦: none of the above.

After 1♣-1M (natural)-2♣ we have an ordinary new minor auction where responders 2♦ is artificial asking for delayed support or a hidden Heart suit. The key difference from standard methods is that a raise to 3♣ would be forcing, 2♦ followed by 3♣ would not. Thus opener can afford to rebid 2♣ on a five-card suit with 1-4-3-5 after a 1♠ response, since responder will rarely pass this rebid on a singleton Club. Using this method reduces the necessity for playing Walsh responses to 1♣, although I still believe it is best to open 1♦ with 4-4 or 4-5 in the Minors.

After 1♥-1♠ opener should only rebid 2♥ with a limited hand and a good suit. With extras and a hand unsuited to any no trump or jump rebid, opener can resort to a short 2♣ rebid (in analogy with the Cole-Gazzilli 1♠-1NT-2♣ auction). Responder then prefers Hearts or rebids 2♠ with poor hands, raises to 3♣ forcing with game going hand, or bids 2♦ with invitational hands with Clubs, or game forcing hands where he needs more information. The safety level on this auction is presumed to be 3♣, a rebid past that level by either partner establishes a game force. Over 2♦ opener bids 2♥ with a minimum, 2NT shows around 16-17 HCP.

The above principles do not apply to 2 over 1 auctions, in those responder's rebid of 2NT is forcing, but not to game, and other rebids are natural.

The above is my adaption of an idea described by Jeff Rubens which he calls TSAR, see <http://www.bridgeworld.com/default.asp?d=esoterica&f=TSAR.html>.

The key point in the above analysis:

1. After 1x-1y-2x, a raise to 3x is a quasi-game force, the cheapest new suit is a relay, after which a rebid of 3x by responder is invitational only.
2. After 1♥-1♠, openers 2♣ may be a 2-card suit, then 2♦ is a relay as in 1, and a Club raise is forcing.
3. The same method can be applied to auctions over 1♣ and a transfer response, when opener rebids 2♣.