

Strong hands with both minor suits

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Hands with both minors are often awkward to bid. Over an opponent's opening of 1-of-a-major, most players would be familiar with the unusual 2NT bid showing 5+/5+ in the minors and some 7-8+ hcp. This overcall typically aims to interfere with the opposition bidding as well as to find a worthwhile partscore contract. With a stronger hand that has game potential if a worthwhile fit can be found, an even more obstructive overcall is 4NT. Of course this is potentially hazardous, because it means contracting for 11 tricks, but it is nevertheless a recommended bid.

What about showing hands with 5+/5+ in the minors as opener? Some do use a 2NT opening for this purpose, often playing it as weak (say 7-10 hcp) or game invitational (say 15+ hcp) but not intermediate. However, most players prefer to use 2NT as a natural strong opening.

What about a 4NT opening? Is it possible to use that to show a strong hand with both minors? Indeed it is, but the partnership needs to be quite clear about the sort of hand that will be shown. A fairly common agreement is that the bid promises a 3-loser hand, based on the standard losing trick count.

Exactly that sort of hand turned up on Monday 20 January – see the South hand below. After 3 passes, if South opens 4NT, North can see that he covers 2 of South's losers in clubs, so the combined hands must have only one loser – which means a direct jump to 6C is reasonable. This contract proves to be cold.

BD: 16 ♠K8 ♥T876 ♦632 ♣AQ95 ♠QJT72 ♥KQ94 ♦J8 ♣T6 ♠3 ♥A ♦AKQT97 ♣K8432	Dlr: W Vul: EW ♠A9654 ♥J532 ♦54 ♣J7
♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N T	
N	6 6 6 9
S	6 6 2 9 6
E	1 1 16
W	1 1

Things are a bit more complicated if South opens a strong 2C and over partner's 2D waiting bid, rebids 3D. Now North, with sure stoppers in the black suits and a four-carder ♥10, will almost certainly bid 3NT. This rebid will leave South feeling uncomfortable, although as it happens 12 tricks are also cold in this contract if played by North. More likely, though, is that South will rebid 4C. Will slam now be found?

It might be, although it would be somewhat unclear to North whether South was showing 6+/4 or 5+/5+ shape, so perhaps the contract will be 6D. In any case, though, even a game bid would turn out better than playing in a part-score, which was unfortunately a frequent outcome at our club session.

As South, you really don't want that happening to you with such a good hand, so consider adding a 4NT opening to your arsenal – it's easy, as there is no other purpose for the bid. Hands suitable for a 4NT opening aren't that rare, but actually remembering to use the opening when it turns up is the key to success!

