

Transfer Responses to Flannery Two Diamonds

[Pete Matthews](#) – July 19, 2009

A minimum opening hand with four spades and five hearts presents substantial problems:

- Over a forcing 1NT, the 1♥ opener may have to pass, or rebid a 5-card heart suit or a 2-card minor.
- Playing 4- or 5-card majors, opening 1♠ distorts the distribution and may lead to trouble.
- Opener will often raise spades on 3-card support, leading to an inferior contract when responder has a bad suit and a doubleton heart. Opener may be in a quandary with 3-card support and extra values.
- Many responders bypass a bad 4-card spade suit, and bid 1NT instead, sometimes missing a spade fit.

The Flannery 2♦ opening shows an opening hand with four spades and five hearts (some permit six), but not strong enough to reverse. The standard responses include 2NT as an artificial inquiry into shape and strength.

Over 40 years ago, in college, my regular partner and I played Flannery. As students will do, we played *lots* of bridge. We concluded then that the most frequent desirable constructive action was 2NT – *natural!* Well, in order to play 2NT natural and invitational, we had four pages of notes. In those days, we played Kaplan-Sheinwold, a weak notrump system. Jacoby had invented his transfers, but they were seldom used over weak notrumps – if at all. It never occurred to us to use transfers in response to Flannery.

In the intervening years, I have refused to play Flannery, because the responses are either inferior or too complex, and because I like a weak two diamond opening. Now I'll revisit Flannery, with 2NT natural and transfer responses. This scheme makes a Flannery 2♦ opening attractive.

Before I proceed, let me say that the technically superior method of handling the Flannery problem is the Kaplan Interchange: a 1NT response to a 1♥ opening promises five or more spades and is forcing. A 1♠ response takes the place of the usurped 1NT response, is forcing, and promises 0-4 spades. In my version, opener's rebid of 1NT over the 1♠ response shows four spades. With all other hands, opener rebids as over a forcing 1NT response. There's more, but... this system does not meet the conditions of the ACBL General Convention Chart (GCC), making it largely irrelevant to most players in North America. Fortunately, the systems that I describe below are all GCC-legal: the ACBL grants wide latitude to responder over opening bids of 2♣ or higher.

Variations in responses to Flannery are out there already. In the chart that follows, I present typical responses and some alternatives in two schemes, and my new transfer responses. Opener promises exactly four spades and five hearts, although Marshall Miles recommends it with a bad six card heart suit in a bad hand. He says "Extended Flannery" could be 4=6 or 5=6.

Note: I just invented these responses and have not played them. There definitely are not enough bids to go around. Just one more bid would make a huge difference, for example, a Flannery 2♣. Transfer responses to a Flannery 2♥ opening are inadvisable, because there would be no way to sign off in diamonds.

References: *Better Bidding with Bergen, Volume One, Uncontested Auctions*, Marty Bergen, pp. 92-95. *Aces Scientific*, Bobby Goldman, pp. 47-49, 50-54. *Modern Constructive Bidding*, Marshall Miles, pp. 18-21.

| Flannery 2♦ Opening: four spades, five hearts, and an opening hand (not strong enough to reverse). | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| | Bergen Responses | | Miles Responses | | Transfer Responses | |
| Pass | Misfit with long diamonds | | | | | |
| 2♥/2♠ | Signoff, may not have good trump support | | | | | |
| 2NT | Artificial game force. Opener rebids: | | Artificial, at least invitational, no interest in major suit slam. | | Natural, invitational, non-forcing. Opener may rebid: | |
| | 3♣ | 3 clubs, 1 diamond | 3♣ | 3 clubs, 1 diamond | 3♣ | Refusal with club suit or strong fragment |
| | 3♦ | 1 club, 3 diamonds | 3♦ | 1 club, 3 diamonds | 3♦ | Refusal with diamond suit or strong fragment |
| | 3♥ | 4=5=2=2 minimum | 3♥ | 4=5=2=2 minimum for hearts (may accept 3♠) | 3♥ | Acceptance with club suit or fragment |
| | 3♠ | 4=5=2=2 maximum | 3♠ | 4=5=2=2 accepts hearts, but minimum for spades | 3♠ | Acceptance with diamond suit or fragment |
| | 3NT | 4=5=2=2 maximum with honors in both minors | 3NT | 4=5=2=2 maximum | 3NT | To play |
| | 4♣ | 4 clubs, 0 diamond | 4♣ | 0 club, 4 diamonds | 4♣ | 4=5=0=4 maximum (rare) |
| | 4♦ | 0 club, 4 diamonds | 4♦ | 4 clubs, 0 diamond | 4♦ | 4=5=4=0 maximum (rare) |
| 3♣ | Signoff. [Alternative: asks for 3NT with a top honor.] | | Signoff. [Aces: mildly invitational] | | Signoff. | |
| 3♦ | Natural, invitational. [Alt: asks for 3NT with a top honor.] | | Long diamonds, invitational. [Alt: slam in hearts] | | The suit above is trumps, invitational or better. Opener completes the transfer to refuse; 3NT (or 3♠ cue) accepts. | |
| 3♥ | Natural, invitational. | | Natural, forcing, sets trumps for slam. Opener bids a minor suit fragment; otherwise, cheaper is better. [Aces: an asking bid, in the advanced version.] [Alt: invitational or preemptive.] | | | |
| 3♠ | Natural, invitational. | | | | Transfer to 3NT!!! Responder: 4♣/4♦ natural and forcing; 4♥/4♠ non-forcing, NT slam try without control of other major | |
| 3NT | To play. | | To play. | | The suit above is trumps, at least game invitational. Opener: transfer refuses, cue accepts. | |
| 4♣ | Transfer to 4♥, so that opener declares. | | Roman Keycard Blackwood for hearts. [Aces: Gerber] | | | |
| 4♦ | Transfer to 4♠, so that opener declares. | | Roman Keycard Blackwood for spades. | | (Gerber) | |
| 4♥/4♠ | Natural, to play (may be preemptive) | | | | | |