

The Wolf Sign-off is a simple, valuable convention for players of five-card major standard systems. This small modification makes it a game and slam bidding tool as well. 2014 re-edit.

Wolff sign-off revisited again in 2014.



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2014

If you play a five-card majors standard system and hear partner open 1C, a rescue is usually the best action when short in clubs. Recommended is to rescue to a 5+card suit when in the 3-5 point range with 0-2 clubs. The shorter partner is, the more likely the opponents are to hold too many clubs to come to your aid. If you are lucky enough to hear a new suit or a raise, pass, but expect partner to bid 2NT.

Playing Wolf Sign-off, you now bid 3C, forcing partner to bid 3D. If diamonds is your suit you pass, you correct to your bid suit, not forcing, or if you first bid was 1S you can bid 3H now asking partner to pass or correct.

The modification suggested is to make opener's first priority to show three-card support, to bid 3D without. This small change assists with your game and slam auctions as well, and at no cost.

Whether you play Better Minor or, as recommended, you open 1C on all the 4432 and 4333 shapes, it is generally better not to rescue 1D. It is not necessary to rescue a third or fourth position 1C or 1D opener as you must play four-card suits opposite a passed partner.

The 2NT rebid can create an extremely critical bidding situation, you may be at the limit of your resources or you may wish to investigate slam, and bidding-space is limited. Good fits are the basis of many sub-33 point slams. Your bidding methods must enable you to find them in all the suits.

Three classes of good hand are bid through (modified) Wolff, game-going, or better, hands with two or three four-card suits, potential slam hands with a four-card major and long clubs and game-going hands with a five-card major. This means that other types of good hand do not go through Wolff and bidding sequences are unambiguous.

These are the constructive sequences that follow your 1C opening and a 2NT jump rebid. The first three involve Wolff. They are all extremely natural.

1. When partner takes you through Wolff and rebids in a suit, higher ranking than his first bid suit, he is showing a game going hand with 4-4 in his suits. If responder bids 1H, then 3S over opener's 3D or 3H reply to Wolff, he shows 4-4 in the majors. If he responds 1D, then 3H over your forced 3D, you can try 3S, with four spades and without four hearts, to cater for partner holding 4441 shape. Opener's 2NT rebid should not conceal four-card support for responder's suit. A direct double raise, strong but not forcing is preferable to

a 2NT rebid. A four-four fit is not a plus feature in a NT contract, but you may well have a suit slam. If partner passes, you will often find the 3NT contract you did not bid does not make

2. When partner takes you through Wolff and bids 3NT over your three-card raise, he has only four cards in his suit, 5+ clubs and a good (10+) hand. He shows a hand not quite good enough to insist on slam. Opener with a club suit in a good hand can move. 4C, instead of 3NT, shows a similar but stronger hand.
3. With a game-going 5332 or similar, responder uses Wolff to elicit three-card support and subsides in 3NT if it is not found. With this shape and at best an eight-card fit, play in game unless you know you have a combined 33 points. This auction says nothing about club length.
4. When responder bids a suit and rebids it over 2NT, it shows a 6+card single-suiter and is a slam try. This is the suggested scheme. If opener holds an outside ace or a trump honour shows it up the line. 3NT shows Ax(x), Kx(x) or Qx(x) in the key suit. Four of the key suit denies an ace or a trump honour. Opener will hold two or three cards in the key suit, never one card or four cards.
5. When responder bids two suits without invoking Wolff, he shows 5+4+ in those suits and game values at least. A higher-ranking second suit will always be a four-carder. If one of those suits is diamonds he is offering the eleven-trick contract as an option and thus a twelve-trick contract when opener holds just the right cards. A cue-bid will agree the second bid suit.

Examples

♠KJ105	♠Q732
♥AK6	♥QJ54
♦K52	♦QJ64
♣A86	♣5

1C	1D
2NT	3C
3D	3H(1)
3S(2)	4S

1. Showing four diamonds and four hearts, game going.
2. Four spades

Strangely, standard players without methods might miss this spot. East might respond 1H and then raise 2NT to 3NT fearing that by bidding his spades he may get unwelcome heart preference. Check-back bidders may find the fit but without the co-operative exchanges of information that Wolff permits, see examples two and three.

♠A5	♠K6
♥K63	♥AJ75
♦AK5	♦43
♣AJ654	♣Q10732

1C	1H
2NT	3C
3H(1)	3NT(2)
4D(3)	4H(4)
4S(4)	5C
6C(5)	

1. Showing three hearts.
2. Showing four hearts and long clubs. With three prime cards and the possibility of a fifth club in opener's hand this slam try is justified. Without the ♣Q East would raise 2NT to 3NT.
3. Unequivocally a cue bid setting clubs, with a likely ten-card fit, and a slam try.
4. Further cue bids.
5. Maximum, good controls and a fifth club.

How do you play on a spade or diamond lead? Do you lay down the ♣A, and if the ♣K does not drop eliminate spades and diamonds and exit with a trump? Or do you take two finesses? If the trump finesse is working, you don't need to take it!

♠AQ105	♠KJ32
♥Q52	♥AKJ4
♦AK6	♦75
♣A87	♣543

1C	1H
2NT	3C
3H(1)	3S(2)
4C(3)	4H(4)
5D(4)	6S(5)

1. Three-card heart support.
2. Four-card suit.
3. Cue bid, agreeing spades after re-evaluating his spade and heart queens
4. Further cue bids
5. With all this enthusiasm from West, East cannot do less.

♠74	♠AK8532
♥AK65	♥Q7
♦KQ6	♦A83
♣KQJ3	♣62

1C	1S
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2NT 3S (1)
4H (2) 4S

1. 6+card suit, slam try, demanding a cue-bid.
2. ♥A, no trump honour, no ♣A, no ♦A

Head note for Wolff Revisited Again.