

PUPPET, MUPPET, OR SCRUBBIT?

We asked Liz McGowan, World & European Champion (oh yes she has won a few other things as well) to write a piece on a relatively new convention that is gaining in popularity.

Who could not love a convention called Muppet?

Take Puppet Stayman (though some, such as David Burn, prefer to leave it) and exchange the 3♥ and 3NT responses to 3♣. And you have Muppet.

Why? There is a perceived problem over a 2NT opener when responder has a weak hand with five spades and four hearts. Opener may be 2-2 (even 1-3) in the Majors, so if you transfer to 3♠, then bid 4♥ over 3NT, you may reach a silly spot. And when opener has four hearts you have made sure the strong hand is dummy.

Some Puppeteers get round this by using a 3♠ response to show the weak 5-4. Opener will choose the best contract, but if that happens to be 4♠ the wrong hand is declarer.

Others use 3NT. This ensures that opener will declare. But, as Muppeteers point out, it is forgettable. When only one member of the partnership remembers a conventional response, the result is generally poor.

Muppet ensures that the strong hand will always declare. Furthermore, it solves the 5-3 conundrum (responder has five spades and three hearts and transfers into spades only to find that opener has two spades and five hearts.)

This is how it works:

2NT 3♣	An enquiry showing interest in opener's Major suit holdings
3♦	'I have at least one 4-card major'
3♥	'Sorry, no 4+card Major'
3♠	'I have five spades'
3NT	'I have five hearts'

Further bidding is averagely complicated.

2NT 3♣	
3♦	With one 4-card Major responder bids the one he does not have.
	With 4-4 in the Majors he bids 4♣ (slam interest) or 4♦ (no slam interest)

Over 4♦ opener bids his major and all is well.

Over 4♣ he can do the same, expecting partner to cue – or, if you like artificiality, you can bid the suit below your real suit, since it may not matter who is declarer and responder can still cue, though we have not saved any space.

Over responder's rebid of 3♥ opener bids 3♠ with four hearts and three spades, 3NT with four hearts and two spades, something at the 4-level with four spades. Over opener's 4 minor responder retransfers with 4♥, then passes or investigates slam.

Similarly over 3♠ opener bids 3NT with 4 spades, something at the 4-level with four hearts.

2NT 3♣
3♥

Opener has no majors, but responder may still be 5-4, or 5-3 in the majors. Responder bids 3♠, puppet to 3NT, without 5 spades, and 3NT to show five spades allowing opener to choose, and declare, the final contract.

2NT 3♣
3♠

Most play that 4♥ is the only slam try for spades and 4 minor is natural

2NT 3♣
3NT

To play in 4♥ responder transfers with 4♦. 4♣ could be a mild slam try....

Muppeteers plead their cause further.

With five hearts and four spades you transfer to hearts, and if partner bids 3♥ you bid 3NT, showing four spades. Without four spades you relay with 3♠.

After 2NT-3♦ if opener has five spades and only two hearts he can bid 3♠, thus finding a 5-3 fit.

With 5-5 in the Majors responder bids 3♣, and over the expected 3♥ he bids 4♥.

(You are NOT worried about what happens when opener shows a 4-card major! See 4♣/4♦ above...)

So Muppet uncovers every possible 5-3 fit and ensures that the strong hand is always declarer.

"Coupled with the use of 2NT – 3♠ for a minor slam try, Muppet always brings home good results."

Ron Koshoshek

Well, it does if you remember it all.... Is it worth it?

2NT auctions are quite infrequent, perhaps one a session if you also use your methods after a natural 2NT overcall of a Weak Two opener.

The 5-3 fit is overrated when both hands are balanced. To quote Hugh Kelsey: '3NT is the contract most often let through when it could be defeated'.

So some experts have given up on the whole Pup-Mup thing, and simply play Stayman and Transfers.

