

THE WALSH CONVENTION

The subject of the article is not really a convention. It is more of a style. It is about what you respond when partner opens 1♣ and you have four or more diamonds and a 4-card major suit.

Your partner has opened 1♣ and you hold ♠ Kxxx ♥ Qxx ♦ Kxxx ♣ xx.

Some people respond 1♦ while others skip diamonds and respond 1♠. The former group like to respond up the line, while the latter group think that finding a major suit fit is much more important than finding a diamond fit.

It is wise to formulate a definitive treatment for this type of holding, as well as for a stronger holding, like ♠ AKxx ♥ Qxx ♦ KQxx ♣ xx.

Agreeing to play the Walsh style, you would skip the diamonds if your hand is weak enough that you may not get another chance to bid. This may be your only chance to get spades mentioned and thus, your only chance to find a spade fit. This would describe your action on the first of the two hands above.

Alternately, in the second case, holding a strong hand where you know you will be able to afford a second bid, you don't mention the spades, but respond 1♦. Since the 1♦ response is forcing, you will rebid spades over whatever your partner rebids. This describes the action on the second hand, above.

Now imagine you are the 1♣ opener. Your partner has responded 1♦. You can now assume that he has no 4-card major. If he had four hearts or spades he would have skipped over diamonds and bid them. **Therefore, you will not bid your own 4-card major if you have one.** You assume there is no possibility of a major suit fit. Instead, you rebid 1NT if your hand is balanced; support partner's diamonds; or rebid your clubs, depending on your hand. Now, if the responder does have a 4-card major that he hadn't mentioned, he will bid it now. He will be strong enough to take a second bid. Then you will know both his shape and his strength and can find the optimum contract.

Let's look at a few examples:

West	East
♠AJxx	♠Qxxx
♥Kxx	♥x
♦Qxx	♦AKxx
♣Axx	♣xxxx
1♣	1♠
2♠	Pass

East is too weak to take two bids. He skips the 4-card diamond suit and gets his spades involved in the bidding. When West makes a single raise, he is denying more than 15 or so points and East passes. Depending on the three available finesses, East should take 8 tricks.

Contrast that example with this one, where East's hand is stronger:

West	East
♠AJxx	♠KQxx
♥Kxx	♥x
♦Qxx	♦AKxx
♣Axx	♣Kxxx
1 ♣	1 ♦
1NT	2 ♠
4 ♠	4NT
5 ♥	6 ♠
Pass	

West assumes East doesn't have 4 spades and rebids 1NT to show his minimum balanced hand. East, however, has a powerful hand and reverses to 2 ♠. West now knows his partner is strong and shows both his spade support and his strength by rebidding 4 ♠. West decides that slam is possible with some breaks and launches in Blackwood. Finding his partner with the 2 missing aces, he bids 6 ♠.

Assuming spades behave, East should get 4 spades, 2 heart ruffs, 3 diamonds and 2 clubs for a total of 11 tricks. If diamonds break 3-3 and spades break 3-2, 12 tricks are possible. In notrump, West would only score the 9 top tricks, although with a heart lead, he would score the ♥K, as well.

Here is the whole deal:

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> ♠ 8 </div>	N North ♠ 1085 ♥ QJ853 ♦ J97 ♣ Q4	<table border="0"> <tr><td>W</td><td>N</td><td>E</td><td>S</td></tr> <tr><td>1♣</td><td>P</td><td>1♦</td><td>P</td></tr> <tr><td>1NT</td><td>P</td><td>2♠</td><td>P</td></tr> <tr><td>4♠</td><td>P</td><td>4NT</td><td>P</td></tr> <tr><td>5♥</td><td>P</td><td>6♠</td><td>P</td></tr> </table>	W	N	E	S	1♣	P	1♦	P	1NT	P	2♠	P	4♠	P	4NT	P	5♥	P	6♠	P
	W	N	E	S																		
	1♣	P	1♦	P																		
	1NT	P	2♠	P																		
4♠	P	4NT	P																			
5♥	P	6♠	P																			
W West ♠ AJ74 ♥ K94 ♦ Q83 ♣ A83	E East ♠ KQ62 ♥ 6 ♦ AK62 ♣ K952																					
S South ♠ 93 ♥ A1072 ♦ 1054 ♣ J1076	6♠ E NS: 0 EW: 0																					

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link:

<http://tinyurl.com/gdtjo5a> . Or, copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick. Alternatively, by clicking on "Play" you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own.

So the main benefits of the Wash convention is:

With weak responder hands, the major get first attention

The opener doesn't need to rebid his 4-card major when there is no hope in finding a major suit fit.

The strong responder can show both his diamonds and major suit, letting the opener decide the correct strain.

If you are playing in a duplicate game and using this convention, you want to check the box "Frequently bypass 4+ ", found under "Minor Suit Openings."