5. The Opener Rebids his Suit

Viewed from the responder's seat, how would you compare these two starts to an auction:

	West	*East*
(a)	1♦	1♠
	2♣	?
(b)	1♦	1♠
	2♦	?

Since the 2♣ rebid is less limited than a rebid of 2♦, you might think this would make responder's task in tracking down the best contract more difficult. In practice, this isn't the case. After the start in (a) responder can make limit bids in clubs, diamonds, spades or no-trumps. On any game-forcing hand he can invoke the fourth suit, after which a further rich seam of sequences becomes available.

Wouldn't it be great if responder had the same flexibility after a start such as (b), in particular if he could make both invitational and forcing 3♦ and 3♠ bids? He can! And this is the subject of the next section.

The Bourke relay

When the opener rebids his suit at the minimum level, a bid by responder in the next available unbid suit is artificial and forcing to game. Similar in nature to a fourth-suit bid, it asks the opener to continue describing his hand.

Suppose that the auction starts on this track:

West	*East*
1♦	1♠
2♦	?

If East bids 2♥ now, this is the *Bourke Relay*, an artificial bid requesting further information. The opener's next move might take any of these paths:

2♠	usually honour doubleton spade support,
2NT	natural, probably 2-3-6-2, 1-3-6-3 or 2-2-6-3,
3♣	natural, 6-4 in the minors,
3♦	diamond single-suiter,
3♥	natural, four hearts,
3♠	three-card spade support,

To see how the relay fits into the general scheme, we will consider in turn the various aims responder may have. Some sample sequences will involve the relay (denoted by the abbreviation 'BR'), some will not.

Responder seeks to play in his own suit

After a start such as 1♣ - 1♠ – 2♣ responder has these options if he holds six or more spades:

2♠	5-9, sign-off
3♠	9-11, invitational
BR + 3♠	forcing

Here is an example where the responder wishes his 3♠ bid to be forcing:

West	*East*	*West*	*East*

♠ 54	♠ AQ10762	1♣	1♠
♥ K72	♥ A4	2♣	2♦ (BR)
♦ Q6	♦ AJ4	2NT	3♠
♣ AQ8762	♣ 103	4♠	End

Here 3♠ is made forcing by the interposition of the Bourke Relay. With six fair spades and limit-bid values East would instead bid a direct 3♠ on the second round.

When responder has only five spades he may seek support with the Bourke Relay, provided he has a hand strong enough for game.

West	*East*	*West*	*East*
♠ 1054	♠ AK963	1♣	1♠
♥ Q5	♥ K62	2♣	2♦ (BR)
♦ A6	♦ K94	3♠	4♠
♣ KQ10762	♣ 83	End	

Had West responded 2♠ to the relay, he would suggest doubleton honour spade support. Here, with 3-card support, he jumps to the three-level.

Make the East hand weaker, replacing ♠K with♠ J, and he would not be strong enough for the game-forcing Bourke Relay. He would make a limit bid of 2NT instead. The opener, if strong enough to advance, could then introduce three-card spade support. When 2NT is passed, a 5-3 spade fit can be missed (as when playing standard methods). On many hands with 3-card spade support, though, the opener would have rebid 2♠ in the first place, rather than 2♣.

Responder seeks a 6-2 fit in opener's major

When the opener has rebid a major suit, a principal use of the relay is to determine whether he holds six cards in the suit.

West	*East*	*West*	*East*

♠ A98762	♠ K3	1♠	2♦
♥ K4	♥ A972	2♠	3♣ (BR)
♦ KJ4	♦ Q853	3♠	4♠
♣ J7	♣ A54	End	

Playing standard Acol, many East players would bid 3NT at their second turn, missing the best spot. Here West shows the sixth spade and East raises to game in that denomination. Note that it is regarded as more important for the opener to show the sixth spade rather than the 3-card diamond support.

West must choose another call when he holds only five spades:

West	*East*
♠ A9876	♠ K3
♥ KQ4	♥ A932
♦ KJ	♦ Q853
♣ 872	♣ A54

West	*East*
1♠	2♦
2♠	3♣ (BR)
3NT	End

Here West suggests 5-3-2-3 or 5-2-2-4 shape. With five spades and 3-card diamond support his response would be 3♦.

Responder has a fit for opener's suit

When responder has a fit for the opener's suit, after a start such as 1♣ - 1♠ - 2♣, he may make these forward moves:

3♣	9-11, invitational
BR + 3♣	forcing
3♦ or 3♥	splinter bids

The Bourke Relay may be the springboard for a slam auction:

West	*East*
♠ 54	♠ AK983
♥ K1072	♥ A4
♦ K6	♦ Q94
♣ AQJ76	♣ K103

West	*East*
1♣	1♠
2♣	2♦ (BR)
2♥	3♣
3♦	3♥
4♣	6♣
End	

A direct raise to 3♣ on the second round would be a limit bid, so instead East makes the Bourke Relay of 2♦. His subsequent call of 3♣ is now forcing. With an unsuitable hand for slam purposes West would bid 3NT at some stage. When instead he makes two

cooperative bids (3♦ and 4♣), his partner is persuaded to jump to the slam.

The purpose of the splinter bids, facing opener's rebid of his suit, is to help the opener to judge the fit.

West	*East*
♠ 4	♠ AQ976
♥ KQ10	♥ 4
♦ AK8742	♦ QJ65
♣ J43	♣ A103

West	*East*
1♦	1♠
2♦	3♥
3NT	End

West has a very fair hand in the context of his 2♦ rebid and would move towards slam if partner made a splinter bid in clubs. A splinter bid in hearts is far less inviting, though, since his five points in that suit are likely to be wasted. West suggests a halt in 3NT and on this occasion East has no more to say.

Another advantage of playing the Bourke Relay is that a jump in a new suit by responder is always a splinter, never a high-card cue bid.

West	*East*
♠ AQ1076	♠ KJ4
♥ K10	♥ A832
♦ Q7	♦ AK1064
♣ J976	♣ 4

West	*East*
1♠	2♦
2♠	4♣ (1)
4♥ (2)	4NT (3)
5♦ (4)	5♥ (5)
6♥ (6)	6♠
End	

(1) Splinter bid.

(2) Cue bid.

(3) Roman Key-Card Blackwood.

(4) 1 or 4 of the five 'aces'.

(5) Have you the queen of trumps?

(6) Yes, and the heart king.

West has a hand of no special note, but if he can be sure that East's 4♣ is a splinter bid (rather than a high-card control) the value of his hand increases dramatically. He is well worth a cue bid in hearts, which in this case is sufficient for East to take control, bidding

the slam via Roman Key-Card Blackwood.

With a flatter hand responder would instead invoke the Bourke Relay, with the intention of agreeing spades as trumps and then exchanging cue bids. This aim may sometimes be thwarted by an uneconomical response to the relay:

West	*East*	*West*	*East*
♠ AQ1076	♠ KJ4	1♠	2♦
♥ K10	♥ J83	2♠	3♣ (BR)
♦ J7	♦ AK1064	3NT	4♥
♣ Q976	♣ A4	4♠	End

Had West bid 3♦ or 3♥ over the relay, East would have bid 3♠, inviting his partner to cue bid. Over West's actual 3NT, both 4♣ and 4♦ by East would be natural (the former call showing a big two-suiter in the minors). So, ugly as it is, 4♥ has to serve as a general slam try in spades. Although the bid does not guarantee a heart control, East's hand is quite well defined. Since he did not make a splinter bid, he will be fairly balanced with a good number of points. On the present occasion West has no reason to advance.

Responder has a second suit

Complications may ensue when responder has a second suit which coincides with the Bourke Relay. For the moment, though, let's assume that the auction has started 1♣ - 1♠ – 2♣ and responder has a second suit of hearts. These options are open to him:

2♥	8-10, non-forcing but constructive,
BR	to seek a 4-card heart fit,
BR + 3♥	forcing, usually 5-card hearts.

Remember that a direct jump to 3♥ would not be natural; it would be a splinter bid, agreeing clubs.

When you have a weak hand that is 5-4 or 5-5 in the majors, simply pass partner's two-of-a-minor rebid. He will often have a six-card suit and in any case it is better to keep 2♥ as a more constructive move.

As always, the Bourke Relay proclaims a game-forcing hand:

West	*East*	*West*	*East*
♠ A5	♠ KQ976	1♣	1♠
♥ 1083	♥ AK952	2♣	2♦ (BR)
♦ 86	♦ J9	2♠	3♥
♣ AK9852	♣ J	4♥	End

With four hearts West would have bid 2♥ at his third turn, instead of showing the honour-doubleton spade support. On this auction, therefore, he is happy to bid 4♥ on just three-card support - sufficient when East has five hearts. If East held only four hearts, having introduced the suit as a no-trump probe, he might well now retreat to the known 5-2 fit in spades.

There is no need for responder to introduce the relay when he has a forcing natural bid available:

West	*East*	*West*	*East*
♠ AQ983	♠ 7	1♠	2♦
♥ J53	♥ KQ106	2♠	3♥
♦ Q	♦ AJ10843	3NT	End
♣ AJ32	♣ Q4		

What does happen, though, when responder holds four or five cards in the suit of the relay bid? Usually this presents no problem:

West	*East*	*West*	*East*
♠ K1054	♠ AQ63	1♥	2♣
♥ AQ1096	♥ 3	2♥	2♠ (BR)
♦ Q7	♦ 1094	3♠	4♠
♣ J3	♣ AK972	End	

East, strong enough for game, makes the Bourke Relay anyway. West's response shows four spades and the 4-4 fit comes to light.

How big is the downside?

Any use of a formerly natural bid as an artificial device may have a downside when a hand arrives that would have suited the natural use of the call. How great is the downside in this case? When the opening is in a minor these three sequences involve rebids formerly available to a responder with 6-9 points:

West	*East*	*West*	*East*	*West*	*East*
1♣	1♠	1♣	1♥	1♦	1♠
2♣	2♦	2♣	2♦	2♦	2♥

West will freely support partner's major when he has three-card support (and a ruffing value - guaranteed when he has a long minor). So, after a start such as 1♣ - 1♠ - 2♣, responder has no need to bid again on hands of 8 or 9 points such as:
♠AQxxx ♥ 9xx ♦ Kxxx ♣ x.

The main occasion on which you may feel the loss of the natural bid is when your hand is of limit-bid strength:

East	*West*	*East*
♠ KQ1084	1♦	1♠
♥ AJ32	2♦	?
♦ 95		
♣ J6		

East is not strong enough for the Bourke Relay. Deprived of a natural 2♥ bid, he must therefore choose between 2NT (limit), or 3♦ (limit). Not ideal, but not the end of the world either.

Even allowing for our admitted bias in favour of the method, it does seem that the Bourke Relay's plus features greatly outweigh its downside. Give it a try for a few months and we think you'll come to the same conclusion.

Opener makes a jump rebid in his suit

Bidding space is at a premium after a start such as 1♣ - 1♠ - 3♣. The first point to note is that it is most unlikely that the best game will now be in a red suit. If responder's next effort is 3♦ or 3♥, this should be interpreted initially as a no-trump probe.

West	*East*
♠ 6	♠ AQ974
♥ Q85	♥ KJ4
♦ AQ6	♦ 74
♣ AKJ972	♣ 1085

West	*East*
1♣	1♠
3♣	3♥
3NT	End

Since responder can safely pass on any weak hand, a rebid of his own suit is forcing:

West	*East*	*West*	*East*
♠ J4	♠ AK10963	1♦	1♠
♥ A5	♥ J43	3♦	3♠
♦ AK10872	♦ 7	4♠	End
♣ A103	♣ Q85		

When opener makes a jump rebid in a major, the percentage game is to play a new suit by responder as a cue bid, rather than natural:

West	*East*	*West*	*East*
♠ AKJ1073	♠ Q4	1♠	2♦
♥ A5	♥ J42	3♠	4♣
♦ 84	♦ AK1032	4♥	4NT
♣ KJ4	♣ A85	5♣	6♠
		End	

East is unlikely to hold a minor two-suiter which justifies fighting partner's spade suit. When such a hand does arrive, East may have to rebid 5♣.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. When the opener makes a simple rebid in his suit, a rebid by responder in the next available unbid suit is the **Bourke Relay**. This is an artificial call, similar to 'fourth suit forcing'. It is forcing to game and asks the opener to describe his hand further.

2. Bids by responder which would would otherwise have been limit bids become forcing when preceded by the Bourke relay.

3. When opener rebids his suit and responder then jumps in a new suit (a sequence such as 1♣ - 1♠ - 2♣ - 3♦), this is a splinter bid.

4. After a jump rebid in a minor (a start such as 1♣ - 1♠ - 3♣) a rebid of 3♦ or 3♥ by responder should be treated initially as a no-trump probe. After a jump rebid in a major (1♠ - 2♣ - 3♠) a new suit by responder is a cue bid.