

4-4 Fits are usually Preferable to 5-3 Fits

Assuming that you get reasonable breaks in the suits involved, a 4-4 major fit will often yield one more trick than a 5-3 major fit. That is because the 5-card suit can serve as a side suit on which you discard losers. Consider a few examples.

HAND#1

Jxx QJxx Axxx Ax opposite AKQxx AKxx xx xx

If you play this hand in spades, assuming normal breaks, you get 5 spade tricks, 4 heart tricks, 1 diamond trick and 1 club trick for a total of 11 tricks. If, however, you play in hearts and hearts break 3-2, you get: 5 spade tricks; 5 heart tricks (4 heart tricks in one hand and one ruff in the other hand); 1 diamond and 1 club for a total of 12 tricks. [In this case, you would discard one club and one diamond on the long spades and trump a club in one hand and a diamond in the other (after giving up a diamond).

HAND #2

Kxx KJxx Axx Qxx opposite AQJxx AQxx xx xx.

Playing in spades, you get 5 spade tricks, 4 heart tricks and 1 diamond trick (total of 10 tricks). Playing in hearts, you get 5 spade tricks, 5 heart tricks, and 1 diamond trick (total of 11 tricks).

HAND #3

AKx KJxx AQx xxx opposite QJxxx AQxx xx Ax

Playing in spades, you take 5 spades, 4 hearts, 1 or 2 diamonds (depending on finesse), and 1 club, so make 11 or 12 tricks. Playing in hearts, you take 5 spades (discarding two clubs); 5 hearts (ruffing a club in one hand and a diamond in the other); 1 or 2 diamonds (depending on the finesse) and 1 club. So, you make 12 or 13 tricks.

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This potential difference between 4-4 and 5-3 fits is the reason we suggest that you use *Stayman*, and **not** *Jacoby Transfers*, when your partner opens 1NT, and you have 9 or more HCP and are 5-4 or 4-5 in the majors. With Hand #3, your partner should open 1NT. If you use *Jacoby Transfers*, you will automatically play spades (transfer; rebid 3NT; partner corrects to 4S) making 11 or 12 tricks. However, if you use *Stayman*, you will find your 4-4 heart fit and can take 12 or 13 tricks.

The 4-4 versus 5-3 fit also explains the logic behind New Minor Forcing sequences. Recall that when your partner opens a minor and you bid a major and partner rebids 1NT, you can use “New Minor Forcing” with a great 10 HCP or more and a 5-card major. However, if your major is spades, partner’s first duty is to show a 4-card heart suit BEFORE the 3-card spade support. That way, you can identify a potential 4-4 fit as well as a possible 5-3 fit. Hand #1 should go: 1D-P-1S-P-1NT-P-2C (New Minor Forcing)-P-2H-P-4NT (Roman Key Card)-P-5S (two key cards & queen of trumps—hearts agreed suit)-P-6H. Making 6.

Hand #2 should go: 1C-P-1S-P-1NT-P-2D (New Minor Forcing)-P-2H-P-4H. Making 5.

This is also the reasoning behind people sometimes bidding 1S over partner’s 1H opening—**when they have a good hand**—before showing their 3-card heart support. They want to check for a 4-4 spade fit before committing to the 5-3 heart fit. This is fine when you have a good hand. When you have a minimum hand, showing your support immediately is vital.