GETTING A PREFERENCE AT THE FIVE LEVEL

When you have bid one or both suits of a two-suited hand opposite a silent partner, and you want him to take a choice (as a save, perhaps) over, say, an opposing 4♠ bid:

-- With more length in the higher ranking suit, bid 4NT.

-- With equal length, bid a lower ranking enemy suit; if not possible, bid 4NT.

-- With more length in the lower ranking suit, bid that suit.

Suppose you open 1♥ with ♠2 ♥AJ10876 ♦AQ1098 ♣9, and the bidding goes:

South	West	North	East
1♥	1♠	Pass	4♠
4NT	Pass	5♣	Pass
5♦			

North's 5♣ bid just shows a preference of clubs over hearts; she doesn't know which minor you have. You correct to 5♦, and North knows you have a red two-suiter with longer hearts, or perhaps equal length. With 2-2 in the red suits, she will prefer hearts. If the hearts and diamonds were reversed, you would have bid 5♦ over 4♠. North would then pass with a doubleton in each suit, knowing your diamonds are longer.

Obviously the 4NT bidder must have touching suits or suits separated only by the opposing suit(s).

Another case: You open 1♥ with ♠ void ♥AK9843 ♦AJ10842 ♣4, and the auction proceeds:

South	West	North	East
1♥	2♣	Pass	4♠
5♣			

The 5♣ bid implies equal length in hearts and diamonds. With xx in hearts and Qx in diamonds, North should bid 5♦. With longer hearts you would have bid 4NT, and with longer diamonds you would have bid 5♦. Had the lower opposing suit not been available (e.g., the opponents had bid spades only), you would have had to bid 4NT. This would an unspecified minor, and partner would know only that the minor is not longer than the hearts.

When the opponents leap to a major suit game after you have opened 1♣, a 4NT bid by you asks for a minor suit preference. Of course the clubs will be longer:

South	West	North	East
1♣	1♠	Pass	4♠
4NT			

South's hand is ♠4 ♥8 ♦KQ1097 ♣AK10632

When the opponents rush to a major suit game after you have opened the bidding and partner has made a one-over-one response in a suit, a 4NT bid asks her to choose between your suit and hers:

South	West	North	East
1♦	Pass	1♥	4♠
4NT			

South implies a long, strong diamond suit and three-card support for hearts, something like: ♠4 ♥KQ3 ♦AK10853 ♣A94. In doubt whether to bid 5♦ or raise hearts, South lets North make the decision. South could also have both minors plus hearts: ♠ void ♥KQ3 ♦AK1085 ♣AJ976. With weak hearts, North should bid his better minor. With the first hand, South will correct a 5♣ bid to 5♦. Had North responded 1NT, the 4NT bid would show both minors. Had the response been two-over-one, 4NT would be Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKCB), with responder's suit "agreed."

Responder can use the 4NT bid in a similar fashion, provided opener has passed (i.e., 4NT is a reopening action):

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass	2♦	4♠
Pass	Pass	4NT	

This is not Blackwood. North has ♠5 ♥Q87 ♦KQJ973 ♣AJ9, and wants opener to choose between the red suits. If opener has not passed, however, 4NT would be RKCB:

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass	2♦	2♠
3♥	4♠	4NT - RKCB	

An overcaller can use the same device:

South	West	North	East
1♥	2♦	4♥	Pass
Pass	4NT		

West is asking for a minor suit choice, and his diamonds are the same length as his clubs, or longer. With longer clubs, the right bid is 5♣, not 4NT.
Also see section 6-7, Four Notrump - Blackwood or Natural?