

The 2/1 Game Force System

Background

2/1 GF is a variation on 5 card majors. The basic principle emerged in the 1950's, and it is increasingly the system of choice for keen duplicate players in the USA. A 1NT opening is played as 15-17. However 14-16 in first & second seat is better.

The basic idea is that opposite to a any 1 level opening a 2 level response (a 2/1) is game forcing. Professional bridge teachers say it is much easier to teach and learn than standard 5 card majors. Primarily this is because it removes the judgement element involved in making a traditional 2/1.

Because a response of 1NT can conceal a 12 count, after 1M it is played as forcing for 1 round.

Opening 1M

In line with standard practice a 1M opening is unbalanced or 5332 shape outside the 1NT range.

The Semi-forcing Option

If you play a response of 1NT as unconditionally forcing there is no way for the partnership to play in 1NT. Most 2/1 players accept this side effect, but a minority play the semi-forcing option. Then an opener with a weak and balanced hand is permitted to pass.

Those that play the semi-forcing option pass whenever they have a hand that would decline a game invite. Some now play that in first or second seat they play that 1NT is 14-16, but is 15-17 in third or fourth seat. This option means that opener facing a 1NT response can make a routine pass if they are 12-13 and balanced. Far more often than not, 1NT is a good contract.

The 1NT Response As Unconditionally Forcing

Playing 2/1 if responder has less than game points an opener with a 5-4 shape can always show their second suit. After looking at the bidding on many random hands I became convinced that the forcing option is much the best. Then if the bidding does start 1M 1NT, opener with a 5332 hand bids 2 of their lowest ranking 3 card minor. This strategy opens the door to opener being able to make a weakness takeout with a long suit. And if you read the literature you will discover a few bidding concepts that are only available with the forcing option

Raising Partner's Major

Because a 1NT response to 1M is played as forcing, responder gets a second bid. Opposite to a 1M opening, if responder has a limit raise hand they have two options. Standard is that with a 4 card fit you respond 3M. But with a 3 card fit you respond 1NT, planning to raise to 3M at your next turn. This is good as a 9 card fit normally plays at least a trick better than would a 3 card fit.

Some players also differentiate between a good/bad single raise. Then 1M 2M shows the good/constructive raise. The weak raise goes via 1NT. However many experts prefer the traditional and more preemptive 1M 2M at all times.

Summary Of Suggested System

- After an opening bid of 1♦/1♥/1♠ a 2/1 response is game forcing
- After an opening bid of 1M a response of:
 - 1NT is unconditionally forcing for 1 round
 - 1M 3M shows a good limit raise: either 4 trumps
 - XYZ (better than Checkback Stayman) to find major suit fits after opener rebids 1M/1NT

References

- 1) *Larry Teaches 2 over 1 Game Forcing* by Larry Cohen
- 2) *Two over One Game Force* by Hardy
- 3) *25 steps to Learning 2/1* by Paul Thurston
- 4) *2 over 1 Game Force* by Audrey Grant & Eric Rodwell
- 5) *Two Over One* by Michael Lawrence.
- 6) *Variable Strong One No Trump* by Andrew Garnett