

## EZ-EXPERT BIDDING TOOLS



**EZ-EXPERT**  
**BIDDING TOOLS**  
**FOR**  
**DUPLICATE BRIDGE**

*Ultimate Draft*

**Pete Matthews Jr**

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PETE MATTHEWS JR

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## Foreword – Ultimate Draft

This book is for duplicate bridge players looking to step up their bidding game. Learning these tools properly should provide a substantial return on your effort.

This book started out as a gathering of my past articles and some new material. I planned to polish up my best bidding tools and recommend that you play them. I would include variations and competing ideas, but recommend few. Reality intervened.

Competing tools are often worthy contenders, so the top two or more may be presented, for your partnership to make a choice. Some tools and options are better for matchpoints, some for IMPs. Some are easier to learn and remember, but others cover more situations. There are trade-offs to be made. This book helps you to choose the best quality tools for *your* partnership.

**Ultimate draft.** My plan for this book is to publish the first edition in late 2023. The current book is about as good as I can make it on my own, but I feel it could be better. I hope to enlist your help. What would be most helpful:

- Tell me of any errors, ranging from typos to bad or inferior bridge.
- Tell me of any section, paragraph, sentence or phrase that you found difficult to understand. For most of my career in information technology, this hung on my wall:

*If the reader is confused, the document is wrong.*

The tools on offer should be a solid selection. However, if you know that many experts prefer a completely different tool, or a different feature on a tool that I have recommended, by all means, send it on.

**Make it better!** If you find a way this book could be better, please let me know at PETE DOT 3NT AT GMAIL DOT COM. I acknowledge my sources – get yourself into print. This is not for profit – I just want the best book we can have!

**The tools.** This book is not comprehensive. I only write about topics on which I have something important to say, or that provide a foundation or context for other topics. The reader is assumed to have basic knowledge – this is not a beginner book – and to be able to read further as needed. But do write me with questions. (Please be sure to read the next section, first.)

These methods are among those invented or enhanced by the author:

- *Crosswood* and the newly named *grand slam demand* (2011).
- Current plan for major-suit raises and game tries (2018).
- *Fragment spiral* (2019).
- Invitational jump shift in clubs only (2023).

Discovering and solidifying new tools on your own is not easy. For the tools in this book, that work has been done for you. Watch for tools that slot into others, such as crosswood.

**Practice.** Any time, without the book, write out the chart for a tool that you play or want to play. Then, when you have time, check your work against the book. This will improve your knowledge, even if you make mistakes. With the first edition, I plan a companion book, *EZ-Expert Bidding Practice*, to help learn the tools. Research shows that rereading the text may only make the material familiar. Testing and practicing should engage your mind and help to make these tools yours. These ideas were inspired by an article by Daniel Willingham.

**References.** The sources mentioned in the text are listed at the back of the book. My own articles upon which this book is based may contain far more detail, especially regarding alternatives, but this book has often progressed well beyond the articles. Both the articles and this book are available FREE on my web site, [HTTPS://3NT.XYZ](https://3nt.xyz).

**Backstory & Alternatives.** History, references and prominent alternatives are presented at the end of each major section, as needed. They are in a smaller, different font, not so much to save space, as to make it easier to not wander out of the primary material.

Example deals are often from the *Bridge Bulletin*, the official publication of the American Contract Bridge League, where there is further discussion. I encourage looking them up, as noted in “References.” Note that scoring in “The Bidding Box” is matchpoints.



**Personal pronouns.** This book is written primarily in the first-person plural – we should be in this together.

When referring to an unknown other person, such as partner, RHO or declarer, I insist on a gender-neutral personal pronoun. I extend the plural pronoun “they” and its plural constructions to this singular application. Thesaurus.com reports “Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens, Austen, and many other beloved writers of the English literary canon used this indefinite singular *they*.” So, I refer to a known person as what he wishes, what she wishes, or *what they wish*. I hope the reader finds this soon flows as smoothly *for them*, as I find it now does for me.

This book mostly adheres to Richard Pavlicek’s excellent “Bridge Writing Style Guide.”

**Special thanks** to Gary Schwartz, my tournament partner for well over two decades. We worked out many details together.

Andrew Hanes and I explored the Unbalanced Diamond and Standard Modern Precision (SMP) systems, before returning to 2/1. We are the only pair I know who play Tucker. Thanks! And thanks to Stewart Rubenstein, Tim Hill, Al Muggia and other partners, past, present and future, who have helped me to better understand and enjoy our wonderful game.

Thanks to the many contributors on Bridge Winners who have taken polls posted by me and others, and those who continue to participate in lively discussions.

When it mattered most, my sister, Andrea Matthews, applied her prodigious technical editing skills to improve the consistency and presentation across the whole book. Thanks!

*Pete Matthews Jr – August 2023*

## Topic Format, Definitions and Notation

Each of the many topics in this book is presented in a consistent format. The main text describes the recommended methods, including any examples. Worthy alternatives or options are presented in the text with checkboxes (☐, ☑). Less important decision points are flagged with a diamond and note number (◊<sup>n</sup>). Otherwise, the main text should be relatively uncluttered.

### Definitions

min/max Within a given expressed range, a hand may be minimum or maximum. For example, a minimum small opening hand would refuse a limit raise, while a maximum small would accept.

*Hands with opening strength (held by opener or responder):*

small A *small* hand would open the bidding, but would not initiate a game try – a hand of about 13 points.

medium A *medium* hand would open the bidding and initiate a game try – a hand of about 16 points.

large A *large* hand would open the bidding and drive toward game – a hand of about 19 points.

*Further definitions:*

advancer is the partner of the first opponent to enter the auction for the opponents of the opening bidder. Opener and responder are partners, as are overcaller or doubler and advancer. Advancer's action is an advance.

BPH By passed hand.

BWS *Bridge World Standard* (see References).

DJS Double jump shift.

EKB Exclusion keycard Blackwood.

GLM Grand Life Master: A winner of a qualifying North American Bridge Championship (NABC) or similar event, who also has at least 10,000 ACBL masterpoints.

HCP	High card points.
JS	Jump shift.
LHO	Left-hand opponent.
RHO	Right-hand opponent.
RKB	Roman keycard Blackwood.
SAYC	Standard American Yellow Card is a basic convention card, originally printed on yellow paper, published many decades ago by the ACBL.
SP	Support points: when we have a suit fit, a doubleton counts as 1 SP, a singleton as 3 SP and a void as 5 SP.

## Notation

- ◇<sup>n</sup> This symbol flags a decision point explained in Alternative Methods below. Refer to the note number (<sup>n</sup>) at the end of the current topic.
- ☐ Check box for worthy option or choice.
- ☑ Check box for recommended worthy option or choice.
- A distribution given with dashes specifies suit lengths in any order. For example, 4-4-4-1 means any singleton. (The dashes may be omitted.)
- = A distribution given with equal signs means the specific order given (♠=♥=♦=♣), so 4=4=4=1 means a singleton club.
- ( ) Parentheses are used to contain part of a distribution. For example, 1=3=(5-4) means one spade, three hearts, and 5-4 minors, either way. Within an auction, parentheses enclose a bid made by an opponent.
- [ ] Brackets enclose a comment about a call within an auction.
- { } Braces enclose an auction or partial auction, such as { 1 ♠ - 2 ♠; ? }, when it is in line with text.
- M A capital M indicates the first major shown.

oM      The other major.

m        A lower case m indicates either minor, or the first minor shown.

om      The other minor.

## Key Features

- This section hits the highlights of the topic.
- If you are just exploring, seek out this section.

## Backstory

This section contains history and references – in a smaller, different font.

## ◆ Alternative Methods

<sup>n</sup> **Decision point.** This section contains a brief discussion of competing methods and opinions, flagged ◆<sup>n</sup> in the text – again in a smaller font.

The smaller font saves a little space, but is mostly so that the reader can easily distinguish the primary material from these supplementary sections.

# 1. General Principles and Tools

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## Two-over-One Game Force – Required

Most advanced duplicate bridge players in North America play that an opening bid in a major suit promises at least five cards in the suit, and that a two-over-one response forces the auction to game.  $\diamond^1$  This system is often called *two-over-one*, or simply *2/1*. If you are not playing 2/1, your time would be better spent learning it, rather than reading this book. Much of this book assumes that you are already playing 2/1. However, this introduction has good information for everybody.

### The Balanced-Hand Ladder

Most pairs play a ladder such as this for bidding balanced hands:

HCP	Bidding Plan
12–14	Open one of a suit, and rebid 1 NT.
15–17	Open 1 NT.
18–19	Open one of a suit, and rebid 2 NT.
20–21	Open 2 NT.
22–24	Open 2 $\clubsuit$ , and rebid 2 NT.
25+	Open 2 $\clubsuit$ , and rebid 3 NT (or other system).

## Hand Evaluation

We don't just evaluate a hand at the start of the bidding, and use that for the whole hand. Stuff happens, and we need to adjust. Here are some examples of stuff, and relative evaluations:

Stuff	Good	Bad
Partner bids a suit.	Length and fitting honors.	Short in the suit.
Opponent bids a suit.	Behind opponent: length and honors. In front: short.	In front of opponent: length and honors. Behind: short.

*Length* behind an opponent means that – beyond our honors being well placed – on offense or defense, partner may get to ruff behind the other opponent. Similarly, *shortness* behind an opponent means the other opponent may get to overruff us – and partner's honors will be poorly placed.

Later, we'll see that, point for point, the queen of partner's suit may be the best card in the deck. We should feel good when partner opens in our Q-x-x or even Q-x suit.

Watch for more of the many events that affect hand evaluation.

### Bergen Rule of 20 $\diamond^2$

Marty Bergen's rule says to add the length of our two longest suits to our HCP. If the total is 20 or more, we open the bidding. This is a good rule, but it needs adjustment. Look at these hands:

1.  $\spadesuit$  A J 10 4 2  $\heartsuit$  7 3  $\diamondsuit$  A J 10 7 6  $\clubsuit$  5

Hand [1] is a great rule-of-20 opening, with 10 cards in the two long suits, and 10 HCP, for a total of 20. We could have an unbeatable 4  $\spadesuit$  opposite  $\spadesuit$  K-x-x and  $\diamondsuit$  K-x-x. In contrast, hand [2] is a mess:

2.  $\spadesuit$  J 10 7 4 2  $\heartsuit$  A 3  $\diamondsuit$  J 10 7 6 5  $\clubsuit$  A

The honors in hand [1] are all in the two longest suits, helping out the minor honors there. The aces in hand [2] are in the short suits, primed to capture air. We need most of the honors to be in the long suits. Hand [3] is a minimum rule-of-20 opening:



3. ♠ QJ 10 4 2 ♥ K 7 3 ♦ 6 ♣ AJ 9 3

If partner has hearts, that king will be a joy. In contrast, in hand [4], the ♦ K is probably so much paste:

4. ♠ QJ 10 4 2 ♥ 7 6 3 ♦ K ♣ AJ 9 3

Properly applied, the rule of 20 defines a true opening hand. Don't sell the hand short later in the auction: it's not light.

## Adjustments for Opening the Bidding

**Three quick tricks.** Add one point.

$$A = 1, K = 1/2, AQ = 1 1/2, KQ = 1$$

Usually, we want two quick tricks to open the bidding, so if partner makes a penalty double, we can hold up our end. Having only 1½ makes hand [3] a marginal opening bid, but the ♠ 10 adds offense.

**Fewer than two quick tricks.** Subtract ½ to 1 point.

**Spade suit.** According to this old rule, add one point for a spade suit, which is a competitive advantage. Apply this rule as a final decider, or in second seat. (Partner would pass out a decent hand in fourth seat, holding 14 or fewer Pearson points [HCP + spades].)

**Singleton honor.** Subtract 1 to 1½ points. Subtract 2 full points from a singleton honor for suit play with 4-4-4-1 distribution – even if a discard is established in the short suit, it may not be useful.

**Honors in short suits – competition.** When competition gets fierce, honors in short suits are a strong argument for defending. On offence, the defenders will pick them off; on defense, the ignorance of the defenders may work in our favor. When partner is silent and the opponents are bidding, it's worse: we discount these points, but they are removed from the pool of points that partner might hold; there are only 40 HCP in the deck.

**No tweeners.** There is no range between opening one of a suit and opening a weak two-bid in the suit. Don't pass – pick one – but...

**Two flaws.** Avoid an action with two flaws. For example, a 5-card major or a singleton high honor is a flaw that we might choose to accept, for opening 1 NT. Don't do it with both.

**Don't buy a problem.** Some hand shapes are likely to be difficult to bid. In these cases, don't open the bidding on minimum values.

**Examples:**

5. ♠ A K 4 ♥ 7 6 3 ♦ 10 9 3 2 ♣ A 9 3

Hand [5] is a Bergen 18. Add one point for three quick tricks, and it still falls short.

6. ♠ A K 4 ♥ 6 3 ♦ 10 9 3 2 ♣ A 9 7 3

Hand [6] is a Bergen 19. Adding a point for three quick tricks brings us to 20. Open 1♦, in any seat.

7. ♠ 7 ♥ A K 6 3 ♦ 10 9 3 ♣ A 9 6 5 3

Hand [7] is a Bergen 20. Adding a point for three quick tricks brings us to 21, yet we should pass with this hand. Odds are, if we open 1♣, partner will respond 1♠. What now? We are not strong enough to reverse into 2♥, our clubs are too anemic to rebid, and we absolutely must not rebid 1NT. Why buy a problem on this minimum hand? Instead, we hope for an opponent to bid spades, so we can double.

Turn the ♣ 5 into the ♣ K, and we must open – fortunately, then we can stand to rebid our clubs.

## Key Features

- Hand evaluation should change as information is gained from the auction.
- Use the Bergen rule of 20 *appropriately*, to define the minimum for a true opening bid.
- Add a point for three quick tricks, and in a pinch or second seat, for a spade suit.
- Subtract a point or two from a singleton honor.
- Subtract up to a point for fewer than two quick tricks.
- No hand lies between an opening bid and a weak two-bid.
- Avoid an action with two flaws.
- With a difficult hand shape, avoid opening the bidding on bare minimum values.

## Games and Slams

Other things being equal, the risks and rewards of bidding a small slam are about the same, regardless of vulnerability or mode of scoring. If the slam is better than 50%, we want to be in it; and if less than 50%, not in it.

**Vulnerable games at IMPs.** At matchpoints, or not vulnerable at IMPs, 50% is also the mark for bidding games. At IMP scoring, we want to bid vulnerable games at 40% or better. That's where the risks and rewards balance out. However, if both partners are aggressive, we can wind up in bad games. Here is the rule:

*When vulnerable at IMPs, strain to invite game, but accept normally.*

With a solid invitation, we should just bid the game.

**Grand slams.** Events at other tables make a difference in the calculations, especially at a grand slam, where the raw odds are also at the 50% mark. Suppose half the field plays in game, and half bids and makes a small slam. Bidding the small slam wins 75% of the matchpoints on the board. Bidding a grand slam on this deal, and being wrong, costs us 75%. Stopping in the small slam and being wrong costs us only 25%. We need at least 3:1 odds (75%) to balance the actual risks. (See Kit Woolsey's superb *Matchpoints* for more about "cost of being wrong" analysis.)

Grand slams can be hard to bid accurately, and it turns out that the hypothetical analysis above is generally appropriate. The goal for a grand slam should be 75% or better. A grand slam is inflexible. We cannot lose a trick to rectify the count, execute a throw-in, fork an opponent, or duck to establish a long suit; we need all the tricks. Ideally, we should count 13 tricks, but that's too limiting. It's right to bid a grand slam when we can count 12 tricks, and the bidding suggests two or three prospects for a 13<sup>th</sup>.

*We don't bid speculative grand slams.*

**Game over slam.** An ambiguous bid should be assumed to be searching for the best game, rather than trying for slam. We should also design our system to put game-bidding first.

**Strain over level.** At matchpoints, finding the correct strain may be sufficient to assure a good score.

**Raise of a second suit.** A raise of partner's second suit promises 4-card support.

**Hand sizes.** The foundation of standard American bidding is:

opening bid + opening bid = game

Rewriting this using the small-medium-large terms defined in "Topic Format, Definitions and Notation" on page x:

small hand + small hand = game

**Slam zone.** We are in the slam zone when we think we might have at least a 50% chance of making a slam. Here are two prominent cases:

large hand + small hand = slam zone.

medium hand + medium hand = slam zone.

In the first case, the holder of the large hand can usually take charge, after finding out partner has opening values. The second case is more difficult. Either partner may be asking themselves, does partner have a small hand, or extra values? It sometimes comes down to a guess – and guessing wrong can mean a missed slam or getting too high. Look for a way to announce a medium hand!

Of course, freak distribution and great fits can put us into the slam zone with less strength. That brings me around to a rule stated by Bill Placek when we were in college:

*If we can picture a minimum hand for partner, where we can lay down a slam, we have to try.*

For Placek's rule to apply, we are talking about cashing tricks on relatively normal distribution – no extra values, finesses or 3-3 splits. A rule from Howard Piltch:

*Don't play me for perfect cards – I don't have them.*

These rules are compatible: Placek's rule specifies a perfect *minimum*. These rules can apply to games, as well as slams.

**All of a resource.** When personally holding A-K-Q of trump or all four aces, bid more aggressively. Holding none of that resource, partner sensibly should be timid.

**Ace or king in a 2/1 suit.** We avoid making a 2/1 response in a suit not containing the ace or king, especially when opener's major suit is likely to be trump. When we get to Serious 3 NT, on page 245, we'll see that our cue-bid of our own suit promises two of the top three honors – we have no way to show or deny a control in our suit, so the 2/1 should supply one.

**Doubts about 3 NT.** When exploring for a notrump game:

- With two suits in doubt, we bid the stopper we have, implying doubt about the other suit.
- With one suit in doubt, bidding it asks for a stopper in that suit – in desperation, for half a stopper (Q-x or J-x-x). When an opponent shows a long suit or a fit, that is the one suit.

#### ❑ Double of own-suit cue-bid.

The double of the cue-bid in his or her own suit by opener or overcaller *denies a strong suit* and suggests leading something else. The double does promise length, lest an opponent redouble. (Changing the normal lead is a useful message; doubling to show strength gives the opponents information and more bids.)

#### ❑ Weakest call, in traffic.

When we have a fit, are forced to a specific level, and the opponents compete, bidding our suit at the forced level is the weakest call. ♦<sup>3</sup>

**Simon's Rule.** Paraphrased from S. J. Simon's excellent book:

*When the balance of the evidence indicates a misfit, stop bidding.*

#### Example 1:

♠ A Q 3 2   ♡ 9 2   ♦ J 10 3 2   ♣ K 10 8

West   North   East   South

Pass   Pass   1 ♠

Pass   2 ♦ \*   2 ♡   ?

\* Diamond Drury, 3-card limit raise

We open the bidding in third seat, and partner shows a 3-card limit raise. When RHO sticks in a 2♥ bid, our weakest action is 2♠. Having opened light, that's what we do. In contrast, holding:

♠ A 7 5 3 2 ♥ Q 2 ♦ J 10 3 ♣ K Q 8

we have no interest in game, but we have five spades and a full opening bid, so we pass. Partner may wish to contest the partscore – or make a “do something intelligent” (DSI) double – if the opponents bid again. With a better hand, we could try for or jump to game.

**Example 2** – Looking forward to the fragment spiral section – as responder, we hold:

♠ Q 10 7 2 ♥ 6 5 ♦ K J 7 4 ♣ A 6 5

*Opener*

1♦  
2♠  
3♣ [3♠, max, ♣ fragment]

*Responder*

1♠  
2NT [fragment spiral inquiry]  
?

Hearts are wide open, so we are not playing 3NT. Our main choices are 3♦, 3♠ and 4♠, since our bare minimum is unlikely to be sufficient to make 5♦. The heart shortness is duplicated, a bad fit. With at most 24 HCP between us, we might try 4♠ vulnerable at IMPs, but even that is aggressive. Otherwise, the safe bid at IMPs is 3♦ – partner has at least four.

At matchpoints, 3♠ making three (+140) beats 3♦ making four (+130), so making 3♠ should earn a good score. Pushing to 4♠ would risk that score, trying to win the board a second time.

♠ K 9 2 ♥ 3 2 ♦ A Q 10 3 ♣ K Q 9 3

Visualize opener with this fine hand. With three top losers, 4♠ is a bad bargain, but 3♠ could earn a top – or a heart attack could kill it.

**Example 3** – “The Bidding Box” (7), February 2023 *Bulletin*.

West

♠ A Q J 9 8 7 4  
♥ 2  
♦ A 10 3  
♣ K 4

East

♠ K 10  
♥ Q 8 7 4  
♦ K J 9  
♣ A Q 9 7

Our auction 1:

1 ♠		2 ♣	[forcing to game]
3 ♠	[sets ♠ trump]	3 NT	[serious slam interest]
4 NT	[keycard Blackwood]	5 ♥	[2 keycards w/o the Q]
6 ♠			

The ♣ K-4 is a wonderful holding opposite partner's likely ace in the 2/1 suit. With controls all around, it's worth upgrading this marginal spade suit to set trump and imply slam interest. East then qualifies to show serious slam interest, and the rest is easy.

Our auction 2:

1 ♠		2 ♣	[forcing to game]
2 ♠	[catch-all]	3 NT	[balanced, medium hand]
6 ♠	[we should have a play]		

If West rebids 2 ♠, fog rolls in, unless East shows medium values. Trumps have not been set, so 4 NT by opener would be natural.

**Example 4** - "The Bidding Box" (8), February 2023 *Bulletin*.

West	East
♠ A J 6 4	♠ K Q 3
♥ 9 7	♥ A J 8 2
♦ A 10 6 5	♦ J
♣ A 7 4	♣ K Q J 9 6

Our auction 1:

1 ♦		2 ♣	[forcing to game]
2 ♠	[spade suit]	3 NT	[medium hand]
4 ♣	[raise & slam try]	4 ♦	[RKB ♣ (crosswood)]
4 ♥	[0 or 3 keycards]	5 ♦	[king ask, have them all]
5 NT	[no side king]	6 ♣	

Three aces are definitely slam-worthy, but 4 ♣ is aggressive. Would you do that? If so, the rest is easy.

Our auction 2:

1 ♦		2 ♣	[forcing to game]
2 ♠	[spade suit]	2 NT	[small or large hand]
3 ♣		4 ♦	etc.

In the previous example, East has only 15 HCP for 3 NT, but has two honors in the suit opener set as trump. Here, East has a misfit for opener's suit, but a fine suit of his own, extra HCP, and a spade fit, surely enough to sustain a contract of 4 NT, if necessary.

*Our auction 3:*

1 $\diamond$		2 $\clubsuit$	[forcing to game]
2 $\spadesuit$	[spade suit]	2 NT	[small or large hand]
3 $\clubsuit$		3 $\spadesuit$	
4 $\diamond$		4 NT	[RKB $\spadesuit$ ]
4 $\heartsuit$	[0 or 3 keycards]	5 NT	[king ask, have them all]
6 $\spadesuit$	[no side king]	Pass	

Perhaps far-fetched, but spades scores and probably plays best.

**Example 5** – “Mike’s Bridge Lesson” (2), May 2023 *Bulletin*:

Matchpoints, both vulnerable:

$\spadesuit$  6 5 4 2  $\heartsuit$  A 5 3  $\diamond$  K 4 2  $\clubsuit$  Q J 4

West	North	East	South
	1 $\spadesuit$	Pass	?

Lawrence chose 2  $\spadesuit$ , a bid for which I have sympathy. It’s surely more attractive than a limit raise. However, 2  $\spadesuit$  has two flaws: 10 HCP and four trumps. Declarer made 4  $\spadesuit$ , holding:

$\spadesuit$  Q J 8 7 3  $\heartsuit$  8  $\diamond$  A Q 7  $\clubsuit$  K 9 8 3

The fourth spade might be used to ruff the fourth club; depriving the opponents of that trump means that they are less likely to engineer a ruff. Look at the perfection of this fit: declarer has two tricks in the minors, on average. Dummy comes down, and now there are five!

Instead of 2  $\spadesuit$ , we should find a bid between that and 3  $\spadesuit$ , either a 4-card constructive raise (mixed, if available), or start with 1 NT (a 3-card limit raise). I’m a fan of the latter with a hand like this.

## Key Features

- Bid games and slams at 50% or better, except vulnerable games at IMPs (40%) and grand slams (75%). Don’t bid speculative grand slams.



- Build a system and resolve ambiguities to prioritize bidding game over slam.
- Finding the correct strain can be more important than the correct level, at matchpoints.
- The raise of a second suit promises 4-card support.
- The slam zone commonly consists of a small (normal opening) hand plus a large hand, or two medium hands, the latter often being harder to bid. Announce or deny a medium hand, if possible.
- For 2/1 response, especially when the final contract is likely to be in opener's suit, have the ace or king in the suit.
- For 3 NT, with two suits in doubt, bid the stopper we have; with one suit in doubt, bidding that suit asks for a stopper (half a stopper in a pinch).
- Opener's double of a cue-bid in the opening suit shows length, but weakness; it suggests leading something else.
- If we have a fit and are forced to a level, in traffic, the forced-to bid is weakest.

## Backstory

Harold Vanderbilt developed the game of *contract bridge* in the fall of 1925. It quickly superseded whist, auction bridge and other variants. Ely Culbertson was the first great American promoter of contract bridge. His method of hand evaluation was *quick tricks*. Strong players still consider hands that are rich in quick tricks to be superior.

After World War II, Charles Goren promoted Milton Work's 4–3–2–1 method, which he called *Point-Count Bidding* (the title of his sixth book, in 1949). Both the Culbertson and Goren systems opened four-card major suits.

In the 1950s, Alvin Roth, playing with Tobias Stone, developed a system that included sound opening bids, five-card majors, 1 NT forcing, 2/1 almost forcing to game, negative doubles, weak two bids, 2 ♣ opening forcing to game, weak jump overcalls and unusual 2 NT. Roth-Stone foretold of modern 2/1 methods, but had little impact on Goren's popularity.

In 1957, Edgar Kaplan and Alfred Sheinwold employed their system to finish first and second in the annual ACBL masterpoint race. Their subsequent book describes the Kaplan-Sheinwold (KS) system, which is still in occasional use in North America. Most prominent of many distinctive features was the use of the weak 1 NT opening (12–14 HCP or AK-A), and sound minor-suit openings

(a rebid in notrump promised 15–17 HCP). Their 2/1 was not forcing to game, if responder's suit was rebid. *The Bridge World* web site is the repository of Edgar Kaplan's final KS system.

The roots of modern 2/1 Game Forcing are also in Roth-Stone. Starting with those methods, Richard Walsh developed a system in the 1960s sometimes called *Western Scientific*. The late Max Hardy formalized this work in *Five Card Majors – Western Style* (1974 & revisions); Hardy's final versions are *Standard* and *Advanced Bridge Bidding for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. I refer to Hardy's very good books repeatedly in my writing.

More basic texts include Paul Thurston's superb presentation and the popular offering by Audrey Grant and Eric Rodwell. The content of both left something to be desired, when I was thinking of teaching 2/1 to my adult son.

## ◆ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Eastern Scientific** is based on KS, but with a strong 1 NT opening; responder's 2/1 is forcing to game, unless the suit is rebid. While Gary and I have been playing these methods for over two decades, I do not recommend them for anyone not already comfortable with KS or Eastern Scientific. The added complexity provides only modest gains. While relegated to the Appendix, these "Almost 2/1" methods work well with the tools in this book.

<sup>2</sup> **Other Bergen Rules.** For more aggressive openings, simply use a lower Bergen number. When we played Standard Modern Precision, with its 15 HCP cap on opening suit bids, we used a Bergen rule of 19, which may have been conservative in Precision circles.

<sup>3</sup> **Weakest bid in traffic.** Most partnerships have no specific agreement, and fall back on a default of pass being weakest. This is only a good plan, if we fear that we are about to get doubled and go for a number – that is, forcing to that level was a mistake. It seems nutty to play a system designed to recover from such a mistake. It also allows the opponents to cue-bid our forced-to bid; we should take that away from them.

However, I am told that the strongest player in New England plays this way. Maybe change "mistake" to "aggressive bid?"

Anyhow, having an agreement on this issue is important. A few years ago, Gary taught me to play that the forced-to bid is weakest, and I have passed it on to all my partners. It works well.

## System-Building Decisions

Building a system requires trade-offs, in advance. Unlike in football, we don't get to "call an audible" to change the meaning of a bid. Coverage, frequency and memory are important. The best tools win on the balance of these factors and more.

### *Example 1 – Jacoby Transfers:*

♠ A Q 9 6 3   ♡ 5 2   ♦ 9 7 6   ♣ ???

Partner opens 1 NT. In the old days, depending on our club holding, we would choose from:

- 2 ♠ (to play), or
- 3 ♠ (forcing to game).

Nowadays, we play Jacoby transfers, so our choices include, but are not limited to:

- 2 ♡ 5+ spades, planning to pass 2 ♠ (to play),
- 2 ♡ 5+ spades, planning to bid 2 NT (invitational), or
- 2 ♡ 5+ spades, planning to bid 3 NT (forcing to game).

**Coverage.** The old natural responses did not include an invitation, although one could be handled through Stayman, consuming sequences there. Natural responses frequently wrong-side a spade contract, exposing opener's other suits to the opening lead.

Jacoby transfers provide the invitation without invading Stayman. We lose the natural 2 ♦ response (to play), but gain the 2 ♠ and 3 ♠ responses, for whatever purposes. Transfers frequently right-side a spade contract, protecting opener's other suits from the opening lead. However, a transfer is exposed to a lead-directing double.

**Frequency.** All three of the listed Jacoby sequences are common.

**Memory.** Jacoby transfers are not as easy to play as natural bids. Back in the day, we did not have much trouble learning them and remembering them in the heat of battle. Even beginners learn them now. Easy on the memory means easy to play.

Jacoby transfers are wildly popular. Their flexibility provides substantial coverage for frequent issues, at minimal memory costs.

## Absolute (Plan A) vs. Flexible (Plan B)

When there are serious choices to be made, we present them as plans A and B, with a checkbox ( or =recommended), to pencil in a choice. Usually, flexibility is a key to the issue. The absolute or less flexible choice will be Plan A, while the more flexible will be Plan B. Absolutes often come with a coverage cost – there may be some hands that cannot be bid properly. Flexibility may come with a memory cost – more complicated or less intuitive. Here are some examples, to be discussed in detail later in the book, with some costs:

Situation	Absolute	Flexible
Responder's 2/1	Forcing to game: need a way to invite, based on a good suit.	GF unless suit rebid: lots; see "Almost 2/1" in the Appendix.
Opener rebids their major, after 2/1	Promises 6+ cards: typical 5-3-3-2 must rebid 2 NT, regardless of stoppers.	Catch-all: harder to sort out 5- vs. 6-bagger.
Fourth suit forcing (4SF)	To game: occasionally, responder may need to invite with 2 NT, regardless of stoppers.	One round: responder's subsequent bid at the three level forces to game.
{ 1 m – 1 M; 1 NT – ? } New minor forcing (NMF)	Two-way: cannot (offer to) play in two of opener's club suit.	One-way: opener jumps to force; responder bids as 4SF; other issues.
Inverted raise to 2 of a minor	Forcing to 3 m: cannot play 2 NT, possibly worse for matchpoints.	Forcing to 2 NT or 3 m: opener rebids a stopper, not 2 NT, with game values.
Strong takeout-doubler's cue-bid	(1) Huge hand: quandary with 3-card support. (2) 3-card support: huge hand issues.	Usually 3-card support, but could be a huge hand: need to jump or cue-bid again, to show a huge hand.

Absolute methods are popular, being easier to learn. The best choice may be the method the partnership agrees upon and then plays well.

## Value of a Method

A system method may provide advantages (gains or benefits) and/or disadvantages (losses or liabilities) for events associated with the method. The *expected value* of the method depends on the frequency with which those events arise. If we knew the average value ( $v$ ) and the frequency ( $f$ ) with each type of system event, we could multiply  $v$  times  $f$  for each event, combine them, and we would have an estimate of the expected value of the method. We don't know these values, but we can make WAGs (wild-ass guesses) and work from there.

### **Example 1 (continued):**

Let's guess that a Jacoby transfer will come up for our partnership once a session, on average.  $\diamond^1$  Let's consider some events that might arise when the transfer comes up, with some WAGs on effects:

- 50% of the time, declarer plays the hand in the major suit. Breaking that down, maybe 25% = it's a true advantage that opener declares. 20% = does not matter. 5% = it would be an advantage for responder to declare.
- 30% of the time, responder bids 2 NT after the transfer, a sequence not available with natural responses, and half of that time (15%) it makes a difference.
- 2% of the time, an opponent doubles the transfer, and half of that time (1%) it hurts us.

We have laid it out, and we can try to calculate the results.  $\diamond^1$  Instead, back in the day, people said, hey, we are going to gain useful sequences and right-side a bunch of contracts; it won't happen often, but if they double our transfer, we'll work it out. It's clear that saying "hey" is a more than adequate justification for the convention, in this case. We should keep an eye on any new method: does it actually come up, does it work, are there additional things to consider?

**At matchpoints**, a reasonable estimate of a significant effect on the score is half a board, roughly 2% of the total score for the session. Examples include a system win (or loss), an error by any player, or when half the field bids and makes game, and half plays a partscore.

**At IMPs**, the value of such an event varies, and each deal has its own value. A grand slam swing could easily determine the result of a 7-board match, overshadowing all other results. As a result, methods that improve bidding and making slams are highly important at IMP scoring; partscore methods, not so much.

## Cost of Changing

Any change to our system increases the chance of a mistake. A system that we know and play well is better than one that is technically superior, but that we mess up.

As a result, it's important to only make changes that will provide benefits that exceed the pain of the transition period – and it's possible that we'll never truly get the new method right.

## Key Features

- Coverage, frequency, memory and absolute vs. flexible are key issues related to adopting a bidding method.
- At matchpoints, all boards count the same. A typical swing is about half a board, or 2% of the score for a session. On frequency, partscores are more important than games, which are more important than slams.
- At IMPs, the value of a swing varies widely, with slams being most important, and games after that.
- Any change to a system must be learned and remembered. Mistakes will probably be made during the process.

## ◆ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup>**Simulations.** For the computer-savvy, simulations can easily calculate the frequency of various hands and deals, based on HCP, hand shapes, and more. The way this works, we tell the software to generate random deals, say for a Jacoby transfer. The first thing we do is to tally each deal. Then we check to see if the first hand to have an initial action has an opening 1 NT bid. If not, we get another random deal. If this is a 1 NT deal, we check to see if the next hand passes, if responder would transfer, etc. Then we tally the keepers. After getting (up to) 5,000 keepers, we write them to a file for future reference – perhaps more simulations or practice bidding. Dividing the total number of deals examined by 5,000 produces the frequency of a Jacoby transfer (one in so many deals). Dividing by 12 (24 boards per session, on half of which our

side gets the 1 NT opening) might produce 1 Jacoby transfer per session, our WAG. Creating the specifications for the keepers does take some work.

A simulation based on 1,000 deals is likely to deviate a little from the results for 5,000 deals, which provide near-perfect results. Using Bridge Composer software, we can easily cause each deal to be quickly played double dummy, but double dummy is not bridge. With a retail copy of GiB, we can tell GiB to bid and play all boards – and with some work, we can preconfigure the bidding and, optionally, the opening lead for each deal. (See “References” for the software.)

Computer programs don’t bid very well, and they range from mediocre to useless on methods that are not built in. The program has to handle all features of all the methods being compared. GiB could actually do this for Jacoby transfers, because it can be configured to play or not play them; run the sim once each way. Running 1,000 deals with GiB takes many hours. (I actually burned out an early 8-way CPU running eight simultaneous sims – AMD replaced it under warranty.)

That leaves human simulations (e.g., me in the middle). I have done this for some methods. It’s both tedious and imperfect – it has to be done on each deal for each method to be compared, likely 25 to 100 deals, not 5,000. The results are an indication, not proof. (I spent some time developing an app to allow bidding a set of deals, and might take it up again someday.)

Calculating from our WAGs,

- +25% chance of right-siding the major-suit contract.
- 5% chance of wrong-siding the major-suit contract.
- +15% chance of benefit from the invitational sequence.
- 1% chance of liability from a lead-directing double.

These events are not exclusive – we can, for example, right-side a contract that benefits from an invitational sequence. Such an intersection gets counted twice, if we just add them up; so, the total of 34% is high. We might estimate that intersections amount to 4%, reducing the total to 30%. A method that produces a system win every third or fourth session (on average) is excellent. Of course, other folks may play this method, so the effects on those scores may cancel out. Nevertheless, we have a great many methods, and some portion of those methods will probably benefit us in any given session. Good methods, well played, make a difference.

## Fit-Showing Jump (FSJ) – Default

□ Our *default* meaning, for any jump shift response, is fit-showing – when partner opens or overcalls, whether or not an opponent bids or doubles in the middle. This plan applies unless we have agreed on a specific exception. A fit-showing jump shift (FSJ) typically provides:

- support for partner’s suit,
- at least five cards in a suit containing *secondary honors*, and
- game-invitational or slam-invitational (not game-only).

Exceptions: a jump shift into a suit shown by an opponent is a splinter, showing a singleton or void in the suit, with at least 4-card support. ♦<sup>1</sup> Also, our three-level jump shift (in clubs or more suits) in an uncontested auction is invitational with a good single suit.

Responder may have slam interest for the FSJ when the opponents are silent and responder is an unpassed hand; this FSJ is forcing. ♦<sup>2</sup> If responder is a passed hand or an opponent is in the bidding, the FSJ is strictly invitational and opener may pass.

### □ FSJ only by a passed hand, or in competition.

Over a minor suit, the FSJ promises at least 4-card support. When partner has bid a major suit, 3-card support is sufficient. ♦<sup>3</sup>

A fit for the jump suit makes game likely, while a misfit suggests staying low. (A-x-x-x-x is a terrible FSJ suit, because that ace is working in any contract.) Hand [A] is a FSJ to 2 ♠ over 1 ♦:

*Responder [A]*

♠ K Q J 9 4

♥ 9 8

♦ K J 9 2

♣ 7 2

*Opener [1]*

♠ A 10 7

♥ 10 6 4

♦ A Q 8 7 3

♣ K 6

*Opener [2]*

♠ A 7

♥ 10 6 4

♦ A Q 7 3

♣ K 6 4 3

*Opener [3]*

♠ 10

♥ A J 10 3

♦ A Q 7 3

♣ K Q 10 9



With hand [1], opener jumps to 4 ♠. We might need a spade finesse, but if so, responder should have a side ace or king. On the actual cards, we have 10 tricks, once we get in. We only go down when the ♣ A is behind the king and they take their four tricks immediately.

With hand [2], we can choose to pass 2 ♠, when it is not forcing. Otherwise, we bid 3 ♦. Opener will always have either three cards in the major or four in the minor – check it out! Hand [3] is a misfit, but has enough strength to bash out 3 NT.

❑ **FSNJ.** We also play a fit-showing non-jump at the three level, when free-bid strength is logically impossible.

## Backstory

A great reference on the fit-showing jump shift, plus the fit-showing non-jump, is *Partnership Bidding at Bridge* by Robson & Segal.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **FSJ vs. Splinter.** Once an opponent names a suit, it's less important to show shortness in an unbid suit. For example, we play standard, natural game tries in these situations. In competition, pairs often play that responder's jump shift into an unbid suit is a splinter. We don't. The FSJ is our default, and we play it in unbid suits after an overcall, for example:

West	North	East	South
	1 ♠	2 ♥	?
♠ A 9 7 6 5 4 ♥ – ♦ Q J 8 5 4 ♣ 6 3			

In competition, we can get frisky with the FSJ; this deal, from “It's Your Call” (4), March 2023 *Bulletin*, is a great time for a 4 ♦ FSJ.

BWS (after our minor-suit opening): *A jump-shift to the two-level is ... five-plus spades, four-plus hearts.* Study of this “reverse Flannery” is strongly advised, before adopting it.

<sup>2</sup> **Slam invitation vs. non-forcing.** When the strong FSJ comes up, it can be a winner. However, it does not happen often. If this option is removed, making the FSJ always invitational, then we can benefit when opener would rather stop at two of responder's major, instead of three of either opener's or responder's suit. The major suit is the preferred target, of course.

<sup>3</sup> **3- vs. 4-card support.** Some partnerships require 4-card support in opener's major suit for an FSJ.

## Unusual over Unusual

□ The unusual over unusual convention applies when an opponent makes a 2-suited overcall, and both suits are known. ♦<sup>1</sup> A prominent case for this is the unusual notrump overcall of a major suit. Let's consider this auction:

1 ♥ – (2 NT) – ?

Dble Penalty oriented, able to double at least one suit.

3 ♣ Invitational or better in spades, the fourth suit.

3 ♦ Invitational or better in hearts, partner's suit.

3 ♥ Competitive in hearts.

3 ♠ Competitive in spades (decent suit of 6+ cards).

*The cheaper cue-bid shows the fourth suit.*

Over 3 ♣, opener may be in a quandary, with five hearts and two spades. Bid 3 ♦! Kick the decision back to partner, who will pick spades with six, or a chunky five.

If playing the common “lower for lower” plan, there is no bid between 3 ♦ (for spades) and 3 ♥ (opener's suit).

The same methods are used after a Michaels cue-bid of our minor suit. The opponent has both majors; bidding hearts is invitational or better in the fourth suit, leaving spades for opener to waffle, etc.

When only one of overcaller's suits is known, the cue-bid of that suit is a limit raise or better of opener's suit.

**Double.** Whether playing U/U or not, a double of the 2-suited bid shows values and the ability to penalize at least one of their suits. I suggest that when only one suit is known, the double means to penalize either that suit or both of the possible second suits.

### ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Without U/U.** This is not an important convention; but when played, it's important to play the cheaper cue for the 4<sup>th</sup> suit. Without U/U, both cue-bids are limit raise or better; we bid the better honor holding.

## 2. Major-Suit Openings

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## After the Forcing One Notrump Response

Playing a 2/1 response forcing to game is easier than other methods. The 1 NT forcing response to one of a major suit,  $\diamond^1$  which includes invitational hands as well as weaker ones, is trickier.

### Opener Rebids a Lower-Ranking Suit

Opener's rebid of a new, lower-ranking suit promises four cards in hearts, but only three cards in a minor (or two clubs with exactly 4=5=2=2 shape). This new suit is not forcing, but opener could have 17 points or so – anything not good enough for 2 NT or a game-forcing jump shift – so responder tries to keep the bidding open. Responder routinely bids two of opener's first suit with a weak hand and a doubleton (or more) in support of opener's major suit.

*Raise opener's second suit with 8 HCP and 5-card support, or (when unsuitable for 2 NT) 10 HCP and 4-card support.*

Responder's non-jump bid of a new suit shows a long suit in a weak hand; opener usually passes. If that suit is between opener's suits, life is good; the bid is cheap, and a jump to three of the suit is available to show a decent long suit in an invitational hand.

When responder's weak bid is at the three level, the only invitational bids available are 2 NT, 3 M and a raise of the second suit. This situation is the case only when:

- Responder has long clubs; or
- Responder has diamonds and the 1  $\spadesuit$  opener bids 2  $\heartsuit$ , a less likely rebid than 2  $\clubsuit$ .

### Opener Rebids a Long Major Suit

Opener's rebid of their initial major suit over 1 NT promises at least a 6-bagger. Without interest in game, responder passes.  $\diamond^2$

If we have two cards in opener's suit, we have an 8-card fit. If we also have an invitational hand, we are in business. We can try for game with 3  $\spadesuit$ , or jump to 4  $\spadesuit$  with a 3-card limit raise. 2 NT would be a rare game try with a singleton spade.

□ Over opener's 6-card rebid, a new suit is invitational, 6+ cards.

## Responder Has a Long, Decent Suit

Consider these hands for responder, after an opening 1♥ bid:

- a. ♠ A 7 3 ♥ 9 ♦ K 10 3 ♣ A Q 10 8 3 2 (game force)
- b. ♠ A 7 3 ♥ 9 ♦ 10 5 3 ♣ A Q 10 8 3 2 (invitational)
- c. ♠ Q 7 3 ♥ 9 ♦ 10 5 3 ♣ K J 10 8 3 2 (weak)

With hand [a], respond 2♣, forcing to game.

With hand [c], respond 1NT, planning to rebid cheaply in clubs (3♣), implying a hand with little value unless clubs are trump.

With hand [b], respond 3♣, an invitational jump shift. ♦<sup>3</sup> Opener may pass; any bid below game is forcing. ♦<sup>4</sup> A new suit shows a stopper and asks responder to bid 3NT with the fourth suit stopped.

### □ Plan A – Invitational 3-Level Jump Shifts, Multiple Suits

Sometimes known as “jump shifts under,” because they are lower-ranking than opener’s suit, 3-level jump shifts handle responder’s long-suit invitations. BWS plays them in all suits at the three level.

### □ Plan B – Invitational Jump Shift, Only in Clubs

Responder’s suit is clubs in the examples, because once opener bids over the forcing 1NT, responder can never bid 2♣. This invitational jump shift gives the most bang for the buck.

When responder’s suit is diamonds, opener’s most likely rebid is 2♣, which lets responder bid at both the two and three level – an invitational jump shift is substantially less valuable in diamonds and unnecessary in hearts.

Furthermore, over a 3♣ jump, both unbid suits are available at the three level to show a stopper. Not so, with 3♦, where the clubs are gone. If you insist on playing the invitational 3♦ jump, you’ll want to see the discussion of this somewhat equivalent auction, when we get to opener’s jump rebid in a minor:

1♦ – 1M; 3♦

Board 12, from an online matchpoint pairs game, demonstrates this weakness of responder’s invitational jump to 3♦.

**Board 12**

East Deals

N-S Vul

♠ 4 3  
 ♥ 6 4 3  
 ♦ A K Q 9 7 3  
 ♣ 5 4

♠ K 10 9 5  
 ♥ K 9 7  
 ♦ J 8 2  
 ♣ J 9 6



♠ 8 7  
 ♥ A Q 10 8 2  
 ♦ 6 5  
 ♣ 10 8 3 2

♠ A Q J 6 2  
 ♥ J 5  
 ♦ 10 4  
 ♣ A K Q 7

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 ♠
Pass	3 ♦ <sup>1</sup>	?	

1. Good 6+ card suit, invitational.

Our general agreement is that a bid of 3 ♥ would show a secure stopper, because two suits (hearts and clubs) are in doubt. Experts sometimes ignore clubs, so their bid of 3 ♥ would ask for a stopper. We did not have that agreement. Still, if partner has ♥ Q-3-2, 3 NT should have play. That's what I bid. Good news – the opening lead was a “safe” diamond! I took 10 tricks, eschewing the spade hook.

Not playing the invitational jump, North would respond 1 NT, and we would rebid 2 ♣. North would choose the invitational 3 ♦. Partner could have bid 2 NT with a secure heart stop, but maybe not with Q-3-2. We could pass, or bid 3 ♥, asking (since we have bid clubs on this auction, hearts is the only suit in doubt). Either way, we play a diamond partial, making 10 tricks.

Responding 1 NT with this hand, North would have limited options over opener's 2 ♥ rebid. That is less common than 2 ♣, a possible 3-card suit. The invitational jump in clubs is by far the most useful.

We got a great score on board 12, as played, while “better” methods produce a ho-hum diamond partial. Luck trumps science, as usual. However, playing for luck elevates the chances of weaker players.

## Opener's Jump to 3 NT over the Forcing 1 NT

“The Bidding Box” (4), January 2023 *Bulletin*:

1 ♠ – 1 NT; 3 NT

♠ A K 9 8 7 6 ♡ A 5 4 ♢ Q J ♣ A 7

□ “A typical expert treatment for this bid is a balanced game force with a six-card major.”

### The 1 NT Response Is Overcalled

The literature did not help, so I asked Gary what doubles by opener and responder should mean, when a forcing 1 NT is overcalled: ♠<sup>5</sup>

*Opener's double should be for takeout with a good hand, and if opener passes, responder's double is for takeout with the unbid suits, which opener can convert.*

*No matter how many of overcaller's suit are held by responder, they are unfavorably located, which to my mind makes the second part of the above paragraph an excellent plan. With that as a given, there is a fair chance that opener will be able to convert a takeout double, and does not have to make a penalty double to get the penalty. Thus, by making opener's double for takeout, you gain on all the hands where takeout is what was needed, and also gain on some of the hands where a penalty double would have been ideal.*

We agreed on Gary's method, which I have come to understand is the way experts mostly play now. ♠<sup>6</sup>

### Key Features

- **Lower-ranking suit.** Over the forcing 1 NT response, opener's rebid in a lower-ranking suit is made with a wide range of strength. Responder tries to keep the bidding open, routinely preferring opener's major on a doubleton. Responder raises opener's second suit with 5-card support and 8 HCP, or 4-card support and 10 HCP. Responder's non-jump bid in a new suit is weak; a jump is invitational.
- **Repeats own suit.** Opener rebids their major suit over 1 NT with at least six cards in it. With a misfit, responder usually



passes, but may bid 2 NT to invite game with a singleton.  
Does a new suit show a long-suit invitation?

- Decision: over the opening bid, does responder's jump shift into clubs (recommended), or into any lower-ranking suit, show a long-suit invitation?
- Over the forcing 1 NT response, opener's jump to 3 NT shows a balanced game force with a 6-card major.
- When the forcing 1 NT response is overcalled, opener's double is for takeout with a good hand; responder's double is for takeout and may be converted to penalties. Discuss this with partner.

## Backstory

Long ago, I decided to raise opener's second suit with 8 HCP and 5-card support, or (unsuitable for 2 NT) 10 HCP and 4-card support, as the 1 NT responder. This plan has stood the test of time, so I recommend it to all.

In the Appendix to *2/1 Game Force*, Grant and Rodwell suggest, but discount, the idea of playing Almost 2/1 in clubs only, over a 1  $\diamond$ , 1  $\heartsuit$  or 1  $\spadesuit$  opening. This inspired me to investigate the invitational jump shift in detail, concluding it should probably be played only in clubs. This allows all the other jump shifts to be dedicated to other meanings, or employed with the partnership default.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

In the Precision system and others, an opening bid of 1  $\clubsuit$  shows a strong hand; other opening bids are limited. Our methods can still be used, but this book does not take the limits into account.

<sup>1</sup> **1 NT semi-forcing.** After an opening bid in a major suit, many top pairs allow opener to pass the 1 NT response on a 5–3–3–2 hand that is too weak to accept any game invitation.

It's certainly nice to stay low, but playing this way undermines the utility of the slow-down raise (bidding 1 NT on a bad hand with 3-card support, as discussed later in this chapter). If opener passes 1 NT, we risk getting a bad board by missing an 8-card major-suit fit. Since the slow-down raise is weak, it can be particularly important to play in the major, where ruffs may keep declarer in control to get eight tricks. The slow-down raise is crucial to our game-try and raise methods, so I advise against 1 NT semi-forcing.

When responder has a weak, unbalanced hand and nothing to respond but 1 NT, opener's pass may work out poorly. Some pairs play semi-forcing only when not vulnerable, to avoid going down by hundreds in 1 NT.

Semi-forcing may gain by playing 1 NT when 2 NT or 3 M would fail (after an invitation), or because opener will be less likely to bid a new suit on only three cards.

The ACBL Open convention chart now permits responder to use a 2 ♣ response as a combination 3-card limit raise and artificial game force. This approach is beyond the scope of this book.

<sup>2</sup> **Over opener's rebid of their suit.** Applying Simon's rule, except to invite game, responder passes with fewer than two cards in the suit. Paul Thurston concurs it would be silly to do take such a bid. Even when we are void, opener may be able to bring the contract home; bidding on risks a large penalty. Perhaps this plan is obvious, but the only example I found was in Kaplan-Sheinwold (1962), a mediocre example of using a new suit as a non-forcing, long-suit invitation.

*Kaplan-Sheinwold Updated* includes an exception: when opener's major is spades, 3 ♡ shows "Long hearts (7 cards), weak hand."

<sup>3</sup> **Weak jump shifts**, across the board, are simple – one phrase with a new partner, and move on – but not so fast! Discuss the consequence that, after 1 NT forcing, responder's new suit at the three level becomes invitational. Unfortunately, compared with a 1 NT response, a weak jump shift can get in the way of opener bidding out a strong hand, especially a two-suiter. The weak jump shift to the three level should promise the values for a normal response, but not enough to invite game. The breadth of the 5- to a bad 9-HCP range may be a problem, and I've seen opponents play lots of hopeless weak-jump-shift contracts at the three level.

<sup>4</sup> **After the invitational jump shift**, some partnerships play that opener's return to three of the original suit is non-forcing; it can either require responder to pass, or permit a raise. A Bridge Winners poll showed a clear preference for this bid to be forcing.

<sup>5</sup> **Penalty over 1 NT forcing.** The old way was penalty, for both doubles, when they overcall our forcing 1 NT. Discuss this matter with partner, before making any assumptions.

<sup>6</sup> **1 NT response overcalled.** Board 26 raised the issue:

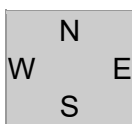
**Board 26**

South Deals

Both Vul

♠ 10 5 3  
♥ A 6 2  
♦ J 3  
♣ A 10 8 3 2

♠ 4  
♥ K 10 9 4  
♦ A 6 5 2  
♣ Q 7 5 4



♠ A 9 7 2  
♥ Q J 8 7 5 3  
♦ K 7  
♣ 6

♠ K Q J 8 6  
♥ —  
♦ Q 10 9 8 4  
♣ K J 9

NS 4♦; EW 2♥; NS 1♠; NS 1♣; Par +130: NS 3♦+1

West	North	East	South
			1♠
Pass	1 NT <sup>1</sup>	2♥	All pass

1. Forcing.

2♥ by East

Made 2 — EW +110

Partner and I had no understandings about this situation, which could turn a double by opener into a disaster. If a double is takeout, partner may decide to leave it in, and we then have no trump to lead. This is not an easy situation.

As expected, North has too many hearts to reopen — it's amazing that West did not raise, as it is.

The winning action is to bid 3♦ over 2♥. The result could have been a disaster, but our second 5-card suit beckons. As it turns out, we have a fine fit. Partner should not raise 3♦ with a misfit for spades and an effective 6-count — cut pard some slack.

## General Two-over-One Issues

### Forcing to Game

What does it really mean, that a two-over-one response is forcing to game? The practical answer is a contract of 3 NT or higher. The values required to make a contract of 3 NT are about the same as those required to make four of a suit (with a fit). Those values may not extend to five of a minor, so the auction should be permitted to stop at four when both partners are minimum.

Stopping in four of a minor is an extreme measure, reserved for when neither partner bids 3 NT. In particular, a player who removes 3 NT to four of a minor is *slamming*, not weak.

### After a 2/1, Opener's Rebid of 2 M, 2 NT or 3 NT

Opener's rebid of 2 NT is natural, either a small hand (about 13 HCP) or a large hand (about 19 HCP). Opener wants to have stoppers in both unbid suits, but whether that is always the case depends on what a 2 M rebid would mean.

There should be no "fast arrival" in notrump, for any partnership. (We'll discuss the customary but slam-killing fast arrival method in a later topic.) Opener's jump to 3 NT shows a medium balanced hand (about 16 HCP). This important announcement lets a medium-strength responder go slamming. Slams are relatively easy to investigate when one partner has a strong hand. Good slams are often missed when both partners have medium values – or the partnership gets too high when one hand turns up small.

### □ Plan A – Opener's 2 M Rebid Shows Extra Length

Many partnerships play that opener's rebid in the original major (2 M) shows extra length, at least a 6-bagger. When this comes up, it does simplify the auction. However, if the 1 ♠ opener holds:

♠ K J 8 7 3   ♡ A Q 9   ♦ K 3   ♣ 8 3 2

and gets a 2 ♦ response, opener must rebid 2 NT, without a club stopper. Now there is no way to protect responder's possible club stopper from the opening lead; and responder will continue to 3 NT,

club stopper or no, on a relatively balanced hand. Lots of pairs play this way, ignoring the occasional silly 3 NT contract – or profiting when the opponents do not set the contract with a suit wide open – playing for good luck, instead of with skill.

### □ Plan B – Opener’s Rebid Is a Catch-All

It is more sensible, but not as simple, to play opener’s rebid in the original major as a *catch-all*, meaning that no other bid is suitable. Playing this way, opener’s 2 NT rebid promises stoppers in the two unbid suits.

While this method seems superior, lots of players prefer “extra length,” and may assume that you do, too. *Be sure to discuss this issue when starting up with a new partner – people may assume you play their way.*

### Key Features

- “Forcing to game” means a contract of 3 NT or higher, although it is unusual to stop in four of a minor suit. Removing 3 NT to four of a minor is a forcing slam try.
- Decision: is opener’s rebid of their major a catch-all (recommended) or does it show extra length?
- Opener’s rebid of 2 NT is made with a small or large balanced hand. Only if 2 M shows extra length, opener might have an unstopped suit for a rebid of 2 NT. The jump to 3 NT shows a medium balanced hand – *no fast arrival in notrump*.

## Major-Suit Game Tries

Let's consider continuations after responder raises opener's major suit:

1 ♡ - 2 ♡      or      1 ♠ - 2 ♠

Once responder raises, opener re-evaluates the hand, counting distribution. It's common to add these points to the high cards:

doubleton=1, singleton=3, void=5

We have tools to decide whether or not to try for game. If the points come to 15 or more, we have a candidate. We try to visualize likely holdings for partner that would let us make a game. If we are not sure, then we turn to the losing trick count.

## Losing Trick Count and Cover Cards

If we have trouble deciding whether or how to try for game, the *losing trick count* (LTC) can help. ♠<sup>1</sup> Using this method, each of the first three cards actually held in a suit is a *loser*, if it is not an ace, king or queen. If a suit has fewer than three cards, the missing cards are not losers, but droppable honors are. Strictly speaking, *the losing trick count applies only when an 8-card trump fit has been found*, but players often make a preliminary evaluation of an unbalanced hand in losers. A small (normal) opening bid in a major suit typically has seven losers.

It's important to understand that LTC is counting distribution. LTC treats cards beyond three in a suit as non-losers – the literature does not focus on this. Any method of hand evaluation can produce disappointing results when values do not fit well between the two hands of the partnership. Secondary honors held in a suit where partner is short are often worthless, while they should be “working” in suits where partner is long.

Examples are coming, but we need more first.

## Game Try Principles

At this point, we are going to assume that a single raise of a major-suit opening will actually cover two to three of opener's losers, no

more, and no less. The next topic, on major-suit raises, will help us to make this assumption a reality.

If opener makes a game try, we evaluate how many of opener's losers our hand will cover. We need to cover three losers (a maximum) to accept the game invitation. Opener should have six losers; our three winners reduce the total losers to three. We should be able to take 10 tricks (game in a major), with three total losers.

If opener has five losers, responder should cover at least two of them. Opener jumps to game, expecting at most three total losers. If responder happens to cover three losers, opener will likely take eleven tricks, so we should not miss a good slam.

However, we need a slam plan, for when opener has four losers and responder might cover three of them. Opener makes a game try, and if responder accepts, opener expects to have only one loser. Opener could ask for keycards and bid slam if we have enough of them. If responder refuses the game try, the slamming opener signs off in game: two losers are likely.

In summary, here is opener's plan after a single raise of the major-suit opening:

Opener Losers	Total Losers	Expected Tricks	Opener's Action
7	4-5	8-9	Pass
6	3-4	9-10	Game Try
5	2-3	10-11	Jump to Game
4	1-2	11-12	Slam Try

Accurate bidding with this method depends on responder covering two to three losers, no more and no less. Too few, and bad games will be bid. Too many, and good slams will be missed. Again, the topic on major-suit raises will help us to assure this is true.

### **Examples:**

Our 1 ♠ opening has been raised to 2 ♠. Consider this hand:

1. ♠ A Q 8 5 2   ♥ K 6   ♦ Q 6   ♣ K 8 3 2

Is this 14 HCP hand worth an aggressive game try? Visualization can

help. If partner has the excellent ♠ K, ♦ K and ♣ Q J 4, we would still need both black suits to split and ♥ K to win. No way. Filling in the spades and clubs makes the hand more robust:

2. ♠ A Q J 5 2 ♥ K 6 ♦ Q 6 ♣ K 10 9 2

Hand [2] looks like a possible game try. LTC applies when our 1 ♠ opening is raised, so we count up our losers:

♠ = 1 (K)

♥ = 1 (A)

♦ = 2 (AK, Q is droppable)

♣ = 2 (AQ)

1 + 1 + 2 + 2 = 6 total losers, so we make a game try. With hand [2], the ♦ Q helps us to consider a game try, but is not obviously useful. Move it into the club suit, and the resulting five loser hand [3] is worth a jump to game!

3. ♠ A Q J 5 2 ♥ K 6 ♦ 9 6 ♣ K Q 10 2

Now we lay down the game opposite ♠ K, ♥ A and ♣ J, even with 4-3-3-3 shape and moderately bad splits.

If we move a club into the heart suit of hand [2], with a total of seven losers, hand [4] is clearly a pass:

4. ♠ A Q J 5 2 ♥ K 9 6 ♦ Q 6 ♣ K 10 2

## Game and Slam Try Specifics

To accept an invitation, responder must provide three *winners*, covering three of opener's actual losers. With only two winners, responder signs off at three of the major. Opener would have jumped to game with a 5-loser hand.

Unfortunately, the opponents are listening; anything we say may be taken down and used against us. A game try must trade off accuracy against disclosure of declarer's hand.

**Nondescript game try.** Our usual game try is the next available bid, 2 ♠ over 2 ♥, or 2 NT over 2 ♠. This is a *nondescript game try*. ♦<sup>2</sup> With scattered values, responder bids game with a maximum, or signs off with a minimum, deciding the issue immediately. The



scattered maximum is likely to cover the necessary three of opener's losers. If opener happens to have a singleton, only the values in one suit should be wasted, leaving a working minimum in the other three suits. All this, and the opponents get little information.

Responder may have two sure cover cards, but not know if a third card is working. Responder's bid of a new suit shows a *secondary* value in that suit. This is usually a holding of at least three cards containing a king or queen. Opener bids game with a fit; with no fit (often shortness), opener signs off.

Here is that game try hand again:

2. ♠ A Q J 5 2 ♥ K 6 ♦ Q 6 ♣ K 10 9 2

Check out these hands that would accept the game try immediately:

a. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ Q 9 7 2 ♦ J 10 8 2 ♣ A 6

b. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ A 9 7 2 ♦ J 10 8 2 ♣ Q 6

c. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ Q 9 7 2 ♦ K 10 8 2 ♣ Q 6

d. ♠ 10 4 3 ♥ A 9 7 2 ♦ A 10 8 5 2 ♣ 6

With hand [d], notice how the duplication of values is disappointing. Game is not horrible, but the singleton club is not as good as ♣ Q 6 would be. No system does it all.

Responder would bid 3♥ holding hand [e], and opener would sign off in 3♠, not finding the ♥ Q particularly useful:

e. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ Q 10 2 ♦ 10 8 5 2 ♣ A 6 4

Responder would bid 3♣ holding hand [f], [g] or [h], and opener would leap to game:

f. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ 10 6 2 ♦ 10 8 5 2 ♣ A Q 4

g. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ A 10 2 ♦ 10 8 5 2 ♣ Q 8 4

h. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ 10 6 2 ♦ A 10 5 2 ♣ Q 8 4

The most difficult situation is when we have key secondary values in two side suits. Inquiring about one suit passes the decision immediately to opener, based on that one suit, ignoring the other. Therefore, we just do the best we can, based on what we can see.

i. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ 7 5 3 ♦ Q 9 5 3 ♣ Q J 3

We assume one side suit is dead. When that's hearts, the minor-suit honors are all working, and we want to be in game. When either minor suit is dead, we want to stop short. Faced with this decision, definitely stop short at matchpoints, an apparent 2:1 favorite. Only when vulnerable at IMPs does game have any appeal; we reflect that partner has already strained to invite, so, per rule, we make the normal refusal. More points or better spots would make bidding on more attractive.

**Short-suit game try (SSGT).** The most accurate way to try for game after the single raise is the short-suit game try. ♦<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, it may tip a forcing defense. Accordingly, we have this guideline:

*Declarer should make a short-suit bid only when the partnership has at least nine trumps, or when trying for slam.*

In the current context, this means a short-suit game try is usually made with six or more trumps. Since we intend that the opponents will lead at most twice against a slam, the forcing defense is less of a threat when slamming.

After the single raise, a new suit above the nondescript bid shows a singleton or void in the bid suit. (Over 2♥, 2 NT shows short spades.) Responder's job is easy: bid game when expecting to cover three losers, or sign off otherwise. Count everything, except the K, Q, J or shortness in the short suit. The ace in the short suit counts, but it would probably combine better with opener's hand, if it were in some other suit.

An exception would be a hand with 10 total HCP including a soft double stopper such as K-Q-10 or Q-J-9-7 in the short suit. Experience has shown such a hand can often make 3 NT.

Opener [5] is a 16-point, 6-loser hand that is clearly worth a short-suit game try:

5. ♠ A K J 6 5 2 ♥ K 8 6 ♦ 6 ♣ K 10 6

Holding responder hand [i], the ♦ Q is wasted, so we sign off in 3♠.

i. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ 7 5 3 ♦ Q 9 5 3 ♣ Q J 3 (repeated)

Swapping the clubs and diamonds in [i], we get [j]:

j. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ 7 5 3 ♦ Q J 3 ♣ Q 9 5 3

Now the ♦ Q-J-3 is wasted, so we again sign off. Finally, swap the diamonds and hearts in [i] to get [k]:

k. ♠ Q 4 3 ♥ Q J 3 ♦ 7 5 3 ♣ Q 9 5 3

Now we are cooking! All our honors are working, so we bid 4 ♠. We do need to find the ♣ J, but our chances are good.

Opposite a nondescript game try from hand [5], hands [i], [j] and [k] all sign off in 3 ♠. This is the right choice two times out of three – not bad odds. The SSGT gets it right all three times.

### The Re-Raise.

**Trump-Suit Game Try.** The re-raise asks for help in trumps. Consider trump honors and aces as winners. Secondary honors in side suits are likely to be wasted. Unlike other game tries, this non-standard re-raise shows *five* losers and desperate need of trump help. (We cannot expect responder to provide two aces plus a trump honor; two top trump honors plus an ace would be rare.)

Hand [6] has five losers: two missing aces and three in trumps.

6. ♠ J 10 8 7 5 3 ♥ 2 ♦ K Q J 7 ♣ A K

This is a particularly nasty situation where partner's secondary values in both clubs and hearts will be wasted. In this situation, responder may not actually cover two of our losers, so we re-raise to 3 ♠, instead of jumping to game. This situation is rare, so we can probably do without this trump suit game try – just bid game.

**1-2-3-stop.** Many pairs play that the re-raise is preemptive, not forward-going.

**Combination re-raise:** A-K-Q-x-x or a topless game try. Responder bids game with the ace, king or queen of trump, plus:

a maximum, or

either a second top trump or an ace.

**Jump Shift Slam Try.**  $\diamond^4$  A strong major one-suiter with four losers would usually be opened  $2\clubsuit$ , so opener probably does not hold that hand. A two-suiter with four losers is too weak to open  $2\clubsuit$ , because each new suit by opener is forcing. Such a hand is opened at the one level. After a raise, opener can make a short-suit slam try, and proceed to slam when responder accepts (promising three winners).

However, when opener has no secondary side losers, a short-suit slam try does not work properly. Responder would count the  $\clubsuit$  Q on:

7.  $\spadesuit$  A Q J 9 7 3  $\heartsuit$  2  $\diamond$  K J 10 7  $\clubsuit$  A K

Instead, after responder raises to  $2\spadesuit$ , opener jumps to  $4\diamond$  on hand [7]. This non-standard jump shift to the four level shows a 1.5- or two-suiter with four total losers, and no secondary losers outside of the bid suits.

Responder counts only aces, plus secondary honors in trumps and the bid suit. With two or fewer winners, responder signs off. With three winners, responder should move toward slam.

With hand [7], we have a slam opposite any three of  $\spadesuit$  K,  $\heartsuit$  A,  $\diamond$  A and  $\diamond$  Q. Responder may have  $\spadesuit$  K and an ace for two sure winners;  $4\diamond$  is hoping for the  $\diamond$  Q as well. Yes, this is trying for perfect cards, but if we don't find them, we just play in  $4\spadesuit$ .

On slightly different hand [8], the king or queen of clubs would be useful, so a  $4\diamond$  slam try would be the wrong bid:

8.  $\spadesuit$  A Q J 9 7 3  $\heartsuit$  2  $\diamond$  K Q J 9  $\clubsuit$  A J

Responder would need both black kings and an ace (likely a limit raise) to lay down a slam. Still, the  $\clubsuit$  Q would help, so a  $3\heartsuit$  short-suit game/slam try is acceptable.

**Magic Slams.** If responder has a strong side suit, we might have a magic slam, for example, responder hand [1]:

1.  $\spadesuit$  K 4 3  $\heartsuit$  10 8 2  $\diamond$  K Q 10 8 2  $\clubsuit$  6 4

If opener bids 2 NT over our minimum  $2\spadesuit$  raise, we want to be in game when partner likes diamonds; so, we bid  $3\diamond$ . If opener moves toward slam, our repeat of diamonds shows this hand.

If opener instead makes a short-suit game/slam try in clubs or hearts, we bid 4  $\diamond$  to show this hand. In either case, a super-fit may even produce a grand slam.

## The Nondescript Game Try in Action

*Dummy [A]*

$\spadesuit$  Q 6 2

$\heartsuit$  9 5 2

$\diamondsuit$  K 10 6 2

$\clubsuit$  Q 10 7

*Declarer [1]*

$\spadesuit$  K J 10 7 5

$\heartsuit$  A Q 8

$\diamondsuit$  4

$\clubsuit$  A J 4 3

*Declarer [2]*

$\spadesuit$  K J 10 7 5

$\heartsuit$  4

$\diamondsuit$  A Q 8

$\clubsuit$  A J 4 3

*Declarer [3]*

$\spadesuit$  K J 10 7 5

$\heartsuit$  A J 4 3

$\diamondsuit$  A Q 8

$\clubsuit$  4

All three declarers hold the same cards, in different suits. Each has 15 HCP and a singleton; a game try is appropriate with six losers.

Holding only five spades, declarer chooses the nondescript game try of 2 NT. For all three declarers, minimum dummy [A] will sign off. Declarer [2] will miss a desirable game – a short-suit game try (3  $\heartsuit$  in this case) really can reach better contracts – but the 3  $\spadesuit$  contract will be reasonable in all cases. The opponents will be given no tip on the defense.

If we replace a low heart with the missing queen or king of hearts, dummy [B] will accept the game try:

*Dummy [B]*

$\spadesuit$  Q 6 2

$\heartsuit$  (QK) 9 2

$\diamondsuit$  K 10 6 2

$\clubsuit$  Q 10 7

The 4  $\spadesuit$  contract will be fine in all three cases. The heart honor is mostly wasted for declarer [2], who does not care; the heart honor is working for declarers [1] & [3]. In all these cases, we reach our obvious games, and stay out of bad ones.

## Game Tries – Summary

O2	R2	O2	R2	Game Tries after { 1 M – 2 M }	
1 <sup>st</sup> step	[2 ♠ or 2 NT] Asks responder to place the contract when holding scattered values; otherwise:				
1 <sup>st</sup> –3 <sup>rd</sup> step	Responder has a secondary value in the bid suit (2 NT = ♠), typically at least three cards including a king or queen.				
		3 M	To play.		
		3 NT	Maximum, double stopper in secondary value suit.		
		3 NT	Choice of games.		
		4 M	To play.		
		Other	Control cue-bid (slam try).		
			Value suit	Rebid secondary value suit = source of tricks.	
		3 M	<i>Minimum</i> , scattered values.		
		3 NT	Flat hand with nine or 10 distributed HCP.		
		4 M	<i>Maximum</i> , scattered values.		
2 <sup>nd</sup> –4 <sup>th</sup> step	Short-suit game try: singleton or void in the suit bid (2 NT = ♠). Use with 6+ trumps or for slam.				
	3 M	To play: wasted or insufficient values.			
	4 M	To play.			
	3 NT	Non-forcing, about 10 points, soft double stopper.			
	Other	Source of tricks.			
3 M	<input type="checkbox"/> 1–2–3–stop: preemptive. <input type="checkbox"/> Trump-suit game try: asks for two top trumps or aces. <input type="checkbox"/> Combination: A-K-Q-x-x-x preempt; raise with top trump and <input type="checkbox"/> a max, or <input type="checkbox"/> either a second top trump or an ace.				
3 NT	18–19 balanced, non-forcing.				
JS	The jump shift is a natural slam try with <i>four losers</i> . Responder goes for slam with three winners in aces and bid suits.				

**Competition:** These game tries are *off*, if either opponent overcalls, or if the opening bid is doubled. They are *on*, if 1 M is doubled.

**Example** – “The Bidding Box” (2), August 2022 *Bulletin*:

West

♠ K Q J 4  
♥ J 9 8 7 2  
♦ 6 5  
♣ 8 7

–

2 ♥ [semi-constructive]  
2 NT [secondary spade value]

East

♠ 10 6  
♥ K Q 10 6 3  
♦ K Q 7  
♣ A J 4

1 ♥

2 ♠ [nondescript GT, 6 LTC]  
3 ♥ [sorry I asked]

As West, we cannot evaluate our hand well. An extreme pessimist responds 1 NT and then prefers hearts, a *slow-down raise*.

However, we raise immediately; over the game try, we get to ask if our secondary spade cards are useful.

## Game Tries in Other Situations

**After Drury.** A modern Drury bid promises a fit, and is therefore a raise at the two level. In this situation, our game tries are available to both partners, starting just above two of the major. We discuss this in detail under “Passed Hand Raises” on page 234.

## Competition

Competition messes things up, whether they bid over us, or we overcall. The principles of jumping to game with five losers and accepting an invitation with three winners remain in effect, but we need to be flexible. “Support with support” applies!

Our nondescript and short-suit game tries are *off*. Natural (long/help) suit game tries apply in these cases:

- The opponents have named a suit.
- Our opening bid is doubled.

If the only interference is a double of the raise, our game tries are *on*, with a redouble suggesting penalty doubles.

## Key Features

- A single raise of opener’s major suit should provide 2 to 3 winners (sure cover cards).
- If opener has the strength to consider bidding over the raise,

they pass with 7 losers, try for game with 6, jump to game with 5, or try for slam with 4.

- The usual game try is the next available bid, a nondescript game try. Usually, responder decides the issue immediately, either bidding game with 3 winners (or 9+ scattered HCP), or signing off with 2. With secondary values that must be working to have 3 winners – in only one suit – responder bids that suit.
- Decision: the re-raise is a game try with bad trumps, asking for *two* winners in aces or trumps; preemptive; or a combination, where the preempt has A-K-Q-x-x-x.
- Other non-jump bids are short-suit game tries, which we tend to avoid unless we have nine total trumps or are slamming. Responder accepts with three winners (ignoring the K-Q-J of the short suit), or bids 3 NT with 10 HCP and a soft double stopper in the short suit.
- A jump shift is a natural slam try, asking for 3 winners in aces and bid suits. *Discuss this with partner.*

## Backstory

The reader may recognize the basis of the game-try scheme as Kokish or Nagy game tries. Their asking bid is replaced with the superior nondescript game try, and we may avoid the short-suit game try with a 5–3 trump fit. (In another context, a 4–4 fit may not be so bad – we might take ruffs in our own hand, and reverse the dummy.)

My idea of structuring raises with the primary goal of shrinking the range of the single raise developed over time, with lots of study. In essence, the point is for *responder* to enable the game try, as often as possible. Responder will be dummy. One of the last coins to drop was the understanding that there was no need for opener to inquire anything of responder who has answered the nondescript game try with a secondary value – in the context of the 2- to 3-winner raise. We started playing this scheme in November 2018.

Readers of Jeff Rubens will recognize his *in-and-out valuation* at work. For example, when partner opens 1 ♠, secondary honors in spades with aces outside are better than the ♠ A with secondary honors outside.



## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Losing trick count.** Losing trick count does not appeal to me as a primary method, because it counts all three top honors in a long suit as having the same valuation. Both these hands have five losers: one in each major, plus three in the minors.

9. ♠ K Q 8 6 2 ♥ K Q 7 5 3 ♦ 9 ♣ 10 3

10. ♠ A K 8 6 2 ♥ A K 7 5 3 ♦ 9 ♣ 10 3

After a raise to 2 ♠, hand [9] has a decent chance of making game only opposite the two major-suit aces, or a better hand. Hand [10] only requires two queens, or an ace and a queen, or ....

The best approach is to first use points and visualization to see if we are within range of game, and only then apply the losing trick count. Counting the singleton as 3 points, after partner raises, hand [9] counts about 13, clearly too weak, and hand [10] counts about 17, clearly in range of game; with 5 losers, this is a jump to game over a single raise. 4 ♠ still has a chance with this horrible dummy:

♠ Q 10 5 ♥ 6 4 ♦ K 8 6 4 ♣ Q 9 8 7

Various modifications attempt to improve LTC. For example, New Losing Trick Count (NLTC) tallies a missing ace as 1½ losers and a missing queen as ½ loser. Counting these new losers takes effort, is error-prone, and we don't really need it. Most LTC systems require us to count our losers, estimate partner's losers, add them up, and subtract from 24 (or 25 for NLTC). We seldom need that either, with our methods: declarer (or the strong hand) counts losers, and dummy (or the weak hand) counts winners (cards that cover partner's losers).

<sup>2</sup> **Nondescript Game Try.** Richard Pavlicek calls our nondescript game try a *relay game try*. The only time opener reveals his holding would be by implication: opener's reaction to responder's secondary-value bid.

With one exception (purposely omitted here), Pavlicek recommends playing all other bids as natural slam tries, instead of our short-suit game/slam tries. His system applies in all potential situations, not just { 1 M – 2 M }.

We modified Pavlicek's methods for use with the 2- to 3-winner single raise; he has more situations to cover. We'll learn about fragment spiral, which we play when minor-suit opener raises a major suit to the two level.

<sup>3</sup> **Old game tries.** In the old days, the game try was usually the re-raise (3 ♠). Responder would bid 4 ♠ with a maximum raise, and pass with a minimum. If both hands are relatively balanced, this method is reasonable. High card

points work best for bidding balanced hands. However, if a wide-ranged responder has a middling hand, after the re-raise, they have no way to kick the problem back to opener.

Our partnership intends to play this hand in spades. Pairs started using other bids as game tries, to help responder resolve a close decision. The *trial bid* in a new suit, with variants called a *long-suit* or *help-suit game try*, was born. It's still standard, as described by William Root in 1986:

- Bid three of the raised suit with good trumps. For example, after { 1 ♠ – 2 ♠ }, bid 3 ♠ on:

♠ A K 9 8 3 2   ♡ 7 6   ◇ A 10   ♣ K 4 2,

asking responder to bid game with a maximum hand.

- Bid a new suit, for example, after { 1 ♡ – 2 ♡ }, bid 3 ♣ on:

♠ A K Q   ♡ J 10 8 7 5   ◇ 4   ♣ A J 4 3

Responder must not pass; to refuse the invitation, he bids 3 ♡. Responder is asked to take his club holding into consideration.

- Bid 2 NT with a balanced or semi-balanced hand and stoppers on the side. Root's example for this bid is a minor-suit auction, { 1 ◇ – 2 ◇; 2 NT } on:

♠ K T 8 2   ♡ K 5   ◇ A Q J 7 4   ♣ A 10

The trial bid tells responder to especially value cards in the bid suit, as well as in trumps. However, the trial bid says nothing about the other two suits; and the fit in the side suits may be crucial, especially if opener is short in one of those suits. Repeating the example, here is why this method is poor:

*Dummy [A]*

♠ Q 6 2  
 ♡ 9 5 2  
 ◇ K 10 6 2  
 ♣ Q 10 7

*Declarer [1]*

♠ K J 10 7 5  
 ♡ A Q 8  
 ◇ 4  
 ♣ A J 4 3

*Declarer [2]*

♠ K J 10 7 5  
 ♡ 4  
 ◇ A Q 8  
 ♣ A J 4 3

*Declarer [3]*

♠ K J 10 7 5  
 ♡ A J 4 3  
 ◇ A Q 8  
 ♣ 4

With either hand [1] or [2], declarer is supposed to make a trial bid of 3 ♣. With sure values in both trumps and the trial suit, plus a king on the side, dummy should accept the game try. Opposite declarer hand [1], 4 ♠ is ugly. If

we can establish the  $\diamond$  K, we may not have an entry to cash it. If we don't have that entry, we cannot take the club finesse. Only if the club finesse fails (or we yield a club), might we have a chance to take the heart finesse. Good luck avoiding a club ruff. The  $\diamond$  K will be useful under half the time.

Opposite declarer hand [2], 4  $\spadesuit$  is likely to make, losing a trump, a heart and perhaps a club. There is no trouble reaching dummy. In addition to being a sure entry, the  $\diamond$  K is worth  $1\frac{1}{2}$  tricks, increasing the combined diamond holdings to three tricks, and the fourth diamond may prove useful, too. The most important card in dummy's hand may be the  $\diamond$  K, and how it fits into declarer's hand, which the 3  $\clubsuit$  trial bid does not address.

If we say declarer should have bid their  $\diamond$  A-Q-8 on hand [2] or [3], then, similarly, dummy cannot tell the value of the  $\clubsuit$  Q-10-7. All three declarer hands have the same cards, just in different locations.

**Stronger example:** for most practitioners, dummy [C], with one red king, is required to sign off, with no help at all in clubs, the trial bid suit for declarer [1] or [2]. Yet if the side king fits, we want to be in game. Our nondescript game try easily handles dummy [C]:

*Dummy [C]*

$\spadesuit$  A Q 2

$\heartsuit$  ? 5 2

$\diamond$  ? T 6 2

$\clubsuit$  7 5 2

Max Hardy's help-suit game try is significantly different from what is described above. His game try promises "some honor holding" in the bid suit, and denies interest in values in the suits that could have been shown more cheaply. That is, declarer and dummy bid features up the line, until either decides to bid game or sign off. My investigations indicate this approach to be inferior to the standard trial bid! Also, a doubleton honor is a problem; skipping over one appears slightly superior.

<sup>4</sup> **Jump-Shift Slam Try.** Eddie Kantar recommends that opener's jump shift over a raise should be a slam try with a void in the bid suit. In my decades of playing that way, it probably came up once. Since we play short-suit game and slam tries at the three level, it's redundant to play the jump shift as also showing shortness. Our admittedly rare natural jump-shift slam try addresses a problem with no other solution.

## Raising Opener's Suit

In the previous topic, we saw that when responder raises opener's major suit, opener will count on responder to provide two to three winners, no more and no less. We need a new concept to make this a reality.

### Sure Cover Cards = Winners

A *sure cover card* or *winner* will cover a loser in declarer's hand, even if declarer has a singleton in the worst possible location:

- The king or queen of trump, or any ace, is a sure cover card.
- Assume declarer has a singleton in the side suit containing the most HCP in kings, queens and jacks. Each king or queen in either of the other two side suits is a winner. Conservatively count our own shortness in those side suits as well.

For example, if partner opens 1 ♠, hand [a] contains two sure cover cards (the trump king and the ace), plus a doubleton:

$$\text{a. } \spadesuit K x x \quad \heartsuit A x x \quad \diamondsuit x x x x x \quad \clubsuit x x \quad 1+1+0+0 = 2$$

However, if the opening bid is 1 ♥, assume opener has a singleton spade, the worst possible location. Then hand [a] has only one sure cover card, ♥ A. Raising 1 ♥ to 2 ♥ would be a bet that either the ♠ K or the doubleton will actually cover a loser for opener. I'd raise on this hand; but move a small diamond into the club suit, erasing the doubleton, and I would not. Remember that opener will jump to game over our single raise on a five-loser hand, counting on us for two actual winners.

For a given number of cover cards or sure cover cards, a hand may be good or bad. Uncounted values make the hand a little better. Each counted queen, especially if unsupported, is a little worse.

Remember that *losers and cover cards apply only to a suit contract, and only when a fit of eight or more cards has been found*. HCP are the best way of evaluating balanced hands, especially for notrump. LTC is more relevant when either partner has a distributional hand.

Here are the sure cover cards for some sample dummy hands, after a 1 ♠ opening:

- b. ♠ Q x x ♡ K x x x x ♦ Q x x ♣ x x    1+0+1+0 = 2
- c. ♠ A x x x ♡ K x x x ♦ x x x ♣ x x    1+0+0+1(4♠) = 2
- d. ♠ Q x x ♡ A Q x x ♦ x x x x ♣ x x    1+1+0+0 = 2
- e. ♠ Q x x ♡ K Q x x ♦ x x x x ♣ x x    1+0+0+0 = 1
- f. ♠ Q x x ♡ K Q x ♦ x x x x ♣ x x x    1+0+0+0 = 1
- g. ♠ x x x ♡ K Q x x ♦ K Q x x ♣ x x    0+0+2+0 = 2

Example hands [b] thru [d] are all single raises. Hand [e] is borderline with all those extras (I'd raise), [f] is too weak, and [g] is almost too strong.

Look back at “The Nondescript Game Try in Action” (page 219), where dummy [A] is a minimum raise to two spades:

A. ♠ Q 6 2 ♡ 9 5 2 ♦ K 10 6 2 ♣ Q 10 7

It has two sure cover cards, both queens (assuming the ♦ K is wasted). Add the ♡ K, and we have three sure cover cards, with boring 4-3-3-3 shape, an absolute maximum single raise:

h. ♠ Q 6 2 ♡ K 9 2 ♦ K 10 6 2 ♣ Q 10 7

## Single Raises

**Single raise.** The direct single raise is expected to provide two to three winners, no more and no less. It is *semi-constructive*, either:

- The *3-card semi-constructive raise* provides 6–10 HCP, 3-card support, and either two sure cover cards, or 9–10 support points.
- The *minimum 4-card raise* provides about 5–7 HCP, 4-card support, and either a doubleton with one sure cover card, or a flat hand with up to two cover cards. The extra trump should give this hand the playing strength of the minimum 3-card constructive raise.

These hands are single 4-card raises of a 1 ♠ opening:

- i. ♠ A x x x ♡ Q x x x ♦ x x x ♣ x x    1+0+0+1 = 2
- j. ♠ Q x x x ♡ A x x ♦ x x x ♣ x x x    1+1+0+0 = 2

**Slow-down raise.** A foundation of the “forcing notrump” approach is that a 5-2 major-suit fit is generally a safe haven. The methods recommended here frequently require responding 1 NT when holding *three* cards in opener’s major.

One of my favorite tools I call the *slow-down raise*. Consider this auction:

1 ♠	(Pass)	1 NT [forcing]	(Pass)
2 ♦	(Pass)	2 ♠	?

Responder’s bid is often a suit preference, with a doubleton. As a result, opener is less likely to be interested in game, and more likely to pass. On the flip side, since we have not announced an 8-card fit, the Law of Total Tricks says the opponents should be cautious about competing to the three level. Everybody tends to slow down.

The slow-down (bad) raise hides within this preference mechanism. We respond 1 NT and then try to play in partner’s major at the two level. Use this with any hand that is too good to pass, but not good enough for a single raise.

**Important:** when opener rebids 2 NT over our 1 NT response, showing a balanced hand of about 18 HCP, our return to opener’s major shows a slow-down raise, and is non-forcing. Our bid of a lower-ranking suit is also non-forcing.

*Everyone who plays the 1 NT response as forcing should employ the slow-down raise.*

The slow-down raise is usually made with 3-card support. Hand [f], repeated here, is a maximum slow-down raise:

f. ♠ Q x x   ♥ K Q x   ♦ x x x   ♣ x x x

With a really bad hand including 4-card support (at most one sure cover card and usually less than seven HCP), also use the slow-down raise. Remember, we want something like two sure cover cards for a single raise. Hand [k] would be a maximum for a 4-card slow-down raise of a 1 ♠ opening:

k. ♠ A x x x   ♥ Q x x   ♦ x x x   ♣ x x x

We will still get to game, if opener gives us the jump shaft.

We have assured that the single raise is strong enough. We'll use other raises to assure that the single raise is not too strong.

**Single raise in competition.** When the next opponent overcalls our major-suit opening – or when we overcall their opening – there is no slow-down raise. We raise on both types of hand, with about six or more points.  $\diamond^1$

In competition, there is more guesswork. With good shape, opener should still bid game on a 5-loser hand, applying maximum pressure. When bidding more on high cards, a game try is advisable. Responder should bid game with three winners and sign off with fewer than two. With two winners, if possible, make a counter-try of the most descriptive intervening bid, or bid game with extras.

## The Mixed Raise

Our jump raise is a *mixed raise*, a 4-card constructive raise. It typically provides two sure cover cards and a doubleton, such these jump raises to 3  $\spadesuit$ :

$\spadesuit$  Q 10 x x    $\heartsuit$  x x x    $\diamond$  x x    $\clubsuit$  A x x x   [minimum]

$\spadesuit$  Q x x x    $\heartsuit$  K x x    $\diamond$  x x    $\clubsuit$  K x x x   [common]

We also bid this mini-splinter as a mixed raise, possibly providing two ruffs in addition to the two honor winners:

$\spadesuit$  Q x x x    $\heartsuit$  x x x x    $\diamond$  x    $\clubsuit$  A x x x

This mixed raise is particularly difficult to defend against. Opener should be able to bid game when it is there. The opponents may have a makeable contract, but any action they take could be perilous.

- Jump raise of major mixed only without competition.
- Jump raise of major mixed in all cases.
- Jump raise of major mixed, except weak when jump cue is mixed.

## Limit Raises

**4-Card limit raise.** Our Swedish Jacoby 2 NT response includes the limit raise. If not playing that, play 3  $\clubsuit$  as the only long-suit invitational jump and use 3  $\diamond$  as an artificial limit raise.  $\diamond^2$

**3-Card limit raise.** The 3-card limit raise is sometimes called a  $2\frac{1}{2}$  raise: bid 1 NT (forcing) and then plan to raise to three of the major. This promises 11–12 support points, three sure cover cards with a doubleton, or 2+ with a singleton: too strong for a single raise, but not a game force. Also bid 4–3–3–3 with four small trumps this way.

When opener rebids 2 NT over our 1 NT response, showing a balanced hand of about 18 HCP, we usually bid game in the major, or perhaps 3 NT, with the 3-card limit raise. (Three of the major is non-forcing, a slow-down raise.) Slam is unlikely to be solid on balanced hands with at most 31 combined HCP.

## Hand Strength Definitions

Now that we are coming to stronger responding hands, we need to review the definitions for the strength of hands that would open the bidding, whether opener or responder:

- small* a hand of about 13 points and about 7 losers: one that that would open one of a suit, but would not invite a game after a single raise. It might accept a game invitation – in other words, a normal opening bid.
- medium* a hand of about 16 points and 5 or 6 losers, worthy of a stronger auction than a small hand.
- large* a hand of about 19 points and 4 or 5 losers.

## The Game-Splinter

The *game-splinter* is a double jump shift (3 ♠, 4 ♣ or 4 ♦ over 1 ♥), showing four or more trumps, a singleton or void in the bid suit, and about 12 to 14 HCP usually located in all three long suits.

## The 3-Card Game Force

### □ Plan A – 2/1 with 3-Card Support = Any Game Force

With this plan, a Jacoby 2 NT response promises 4-card support.

With 3-card support and game values, we usually bid a lower-ranking suit at the two level, and then raise opener's major (forcing to game). Responder also does this with 4-card support and a good, long side suit, a hand unsuitable for a game-splinter, even containing a



singleton. (In “Spades after a Heart Opening” on page 241, we’ll see that, with game values, the 1 ♠ response requires a 5-card suit.) The 2/1 responder’s rebid in opener’s suit could be any game force.

### ❑ Plan B – 2/1 with 3-Card Support = Medium+ Hand

With this plan, a Jacoby 2 NT response could provide 3-card support, but only in a small hand.

If a 2/1 responder raises opener at the second bid, that shows a medium or large hand, a boon for slam bidding.

## Standard (Enhanced) and Swedish Jacoby 2 NT

O2	R2	O3	After <i>Standard Jacoby 2 NT (Enhanced)</i>
3 ♣			Any small hand (about 13 HCP).
	3 ♦		Slam interest, asks with NLMH steps:
		3 ♥	No shortness.
		3 ♠	Short in clubs.
		3 NT	Short in diamonds.
		4 ♣	Short in other major.
		4 M	Terrible hand, 5-3-3-2.
		Other	5-card suit with 2 of the top 3 honors.
	3 ♥		Slam splinter in clubs.
	3 ♠		Slam splinter in diamonds.
	3 NT		Slam splinter in other major.
	4 M		No slam interest.
	Other		Slam interest, 5-card suit, 2 of the top 3 honors.
3 ♦			Medium or large hand, no shortness.
3 ♥			Medium or large hand, short clubs.
3 ♠			Medium or large hand, short diamonds.
3 NT			Medium or large hand, short other major.
Other			Medium or large hand, 5-card suit, 2 of the top 3 honors.

The 2 NT response is a forcing raise. The standard Jacoby 2 NT is forcing to game, while the Swedish version might be a limit raise. We have highly similar, non-standard response plans for the two. ♦<sup>3</sup>

Serious 3 NT (page 245) applies when opener shows a medium or large hand, or when responder shows slam interest over 3 ♣.

## □ Plan A – Standard Jacoby 2 NT (Enhanced Rebids)

With this plan, as mentioned earlier, we play that 3 ♣ is the only invitational jump response that is natural, and 3 ♦ is a limit raise.

## □ Plan B – Swedish Jacoby 2 NT

The limit raise is included in the 2 NT response. The rebids are more complicated: responder's 3 M bid over opener's 3 ♣ shows a limit raise, and that bumps the higher rebids up a step.

O2	R2	O3	After Swedish Jacoby 2 NT	
3 ♣	Any small hand (about 13 HCP).			
3 ♦	3 ♠	Slam interest, asks with NLMH steps:		
		3 ♥	No shortness.	
		3 ♠	Short in clubs.	
		3 NT	Short in diamonds.	
		4 ♣	Short in other major.	
		4 M	Terrible hand, 5-3-3-2.	
		Other	5-card suit with 2 of the top 3 honors.	
		3 M	Limit raise (opener passes or accepts).	
		4 M	Game values with no slam interest.	
		3 oM	Slam splinter in clubs.	
		3 NT	Slam splinter in diamonds.	
		4 ♣	Slam splinter in other major.	
		Other	Slam interest, 5-card suit, 2 of the top 3 honors.	
3 ♦	Medium or large hand, no shortness.			
3 ♥	Medium or large hand, short clubs.			
3 ♠	Medium or large hand, short diamonds.			
3 NT	Medium or large hand, short other major.			
Other	Medium or large hand, 5-card suit, 2 of the top 3 honors.			

## Defensive Methods

**Principles:** The opponents must not play undoubled. We angle for penalties on modest shape with six, or perhaps five, combined cards in the enemy suit. However, if either partner has a singleton or void in the enemy suit, we do not play for penalties at the three level.

At any time, either partner's bid of 3 M or 4 M states a personal perspective: that contract is the limit of the hand. RKB is still on, at the four level. Our slam zone must be flexible.

**An opponent doubles 2 NT.** *We ignore a double of 2 NT.*

**An opponent bids over 2 NT, below 3 M.**

- Double      *Opener:* any hand with four or more cards in the enemy suit, except opener may bid with the ace. Responder passes with two or more.  
*Responder:*  three or more, or  four or more cards in the enemy suit. Opener passes with two or more.
- Pass        Opener must pass with any other hand lacking a control in the enemy suit; responder must not pass that out.
- 3 M        Non-forcing. Only opener promises some control in the enemy suit.
- 4 M        Non-forcing, minimum game values; based on extra shape, not high cards. Only opener promises some control in the enemy suit.
- 3 NT        Forcing, short in the enemy suit, below the slam zone.
- Cue-bid    In the slam zone, with shortness in the enemy suit.
- New suit    Shows some control in the bid suit, and ace or king in the enemy suit.
- Jump cue    Exclusion keycard Blackwood.
- Jump new    Slam zone, 5-card suit headed by 2 of the top 3 honors.

**An opponent bids over 2 NT, at 3 M or higher.**

We fall back on standard agreements, such as:

- Pass        forcing, ostensibly shows doubt. However, passing, and then pulling partner's double, is the strongest action.
- Double     looks correct to defend.
- M          non-forcing, looks correct to declare.

Suit bid      first- or second-round control in the bid suit, plus the ace or king in the enemy suit.

Cue-bid      shortness in the enemy suit.

## Preemptive Game Raises – 4 M & 3 NT

The immediate raise to game in opener's major suit promises five or more trumps, a singleton or void, and no side ace or protected king. The jump response of 3 NT shows the same hand, but with a side ace or king. This use of 3 NT is *off in competition*.

## Passed Hand Raises

Except for 2  $\diamond$ , our passed hand raises are mostly the same.

R1	O2	R2	O3	Passed Hand Responses
1 NT	[intended as forcing] May be a slow-down raise.			
2 $\clubsuit$ , 2 $\heartsuit$	[new suit] Natural invitation, denies 3-card support.			
2 $\diamond$	Diamond Drury: 3- or bad 4-card limit raise.			
	2 $\heartsuit$	Natural and encouraging, but non-forcing.		
	2 M	No interest in game. Game tries apply.		
	Higher	Game try.		
2 M	Semi-constructive raise; game tries apply.			
2 NT	Limit raise, same continuations, but use 4 M, not 3 $\clubsuit$ .			
JS	Fit-showing (LR strength).			
3 M	Mixed raise.			

**Diamond Drury.** Because the passed-hand 1 NT response is only intended as forcing, it is inappropriate for a 3-card limit raise. A bid of 2  $\diamond$  shows a game invitation, with 3-card support (occasionally with four small trumps, usually 4-3-3-3). Our methods are easily employed over any kind of Drury that promises a fit.

Diamond Drury.

Two-way Drury.

With sufficient values, opener jumps to game (or sometimes makes a slam try). With no interest in game (possibly a light opening bid), opener rebids two trumps (or possibly 2  $\heartsuit$  with spades and hearts). Since 2  $\diamond$  is a raise, our game/slam tries are on for opener, starting at the first step over two trumps. Responder might also make a game try over opener's rebid at or below two of the major.

## Raises of a Major-Suit Opening – Summary

R1	O2	R2	O3	Raises of Major-Suit Opening
1 NT				[forcing] May contain slow-down raise (suit preference next), or 3-card limit raise (raise to three level next).
2/1				GF, follow with raise: 3+ trumps, small+ or medium+.
2 M				3+ trumps; 2 to 3 winners (no more, no less): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4-Card support; 5-7 HCP, 1 winner and a doubleton, or two winners with 4-3-3-3, or</li> <li>• 3-Card support; 2 to 3 winners or 9-10 HCP.</li> </ul> With points to consider game, opener counts losers: 7 = pass, ~6 = game try, ~5 = bid game, 4 = slam try.
2 NT				Jacoby – Swedish (4-card LR+), or Enhanced Standard.
JS				<i>Default:</i> fit-showing jump shift: support for partner’s suit, plus 5+ cards & secondary honors in the bid suit. 3 ♣: Good club suit of at least six cards, invitational. 3 ♦: Limit raise or as 3 ♣ with diamonds.
3 M				Mixed raise: 4+ trumps; two sure honor winners and a doubleton, or 10 support points. Could be a minimum minisplinter. Opener bids game with 6 or fewer losers.
3 NT				Preempt to 4M with a side ace or king; off in comp.
DJS				Game splinter (double-jump shift): 4+ trumps; about 12-14 HCP; singleton or void in bid suit.
4 M				Preemptive raise: both 5+ trumps and a singleton or void – denies a side A or K, except in competition.

**Competition.** Our raise structure is *off* whenever the opponents act over our opening bid. However, Drury is on, in selected situations:

- Opponent overcalls below 2 ♦.
- Opponent doubles (not with suit-lead transfers, see Appendix).

**Example** – “The Bidding Box” (1), January 2023 *Bulletin*:

*Opener*

♠ K 10 7

♥ K Q 10 9 8 5

♦ A K 2

♣ 10

*Responder*

♠ Q

♥ A 6 4 2

♦ Q J 6

♣ A K Q 7 2

1 ♡	2 NT [delayed slam splinter]
3 ♡ [medium+, short ♣]	4 NT [trusting opener for ♠ H]
5 ♠ [2 with ♡ Q]	6 NT [matchpoints, ... for ♠ H]

## Key Features

- A sure cover card (winner) in responder's hand is expected to remove an actual loser from opener's hand.
- The single raise is semi-constructive, with 2 to 3 winners.
- We use a slow-down raise, with strength to respond (or a little less!), but fewer than two winners: respond 1 NT before preferring opener's major.
- Other raises include the jump mixed raise, 3- and 4-card limit raises, the 3+ card game force (via 2/1), the game-splinter, Jacoby 2 NT, preemptive game raises (3 NT and 4 M), and perhaps fit-showing jumps.
- Decision: regular Jacoby 2 NT or Swedish (includes 4-card limit raise, recommended).
- The special raise structure, including semi-constructive raises, is *off* when an opponent acts over our opening bid. Support with support!

## Backstory

*Slow-down raise* is my term, expressing my long-term understanding of how it works. The 2- to 3-winner single raise and our game try system grew from seven versions of my article on game tries. Marty Bergen first used the term *mixed raise* in his second volume, page 108.

**Jacoby.** Most tournament bridge players use the 2 NT response to a major-suit opening bid to show a forcing raise with at least four trumps, a convention invented by Oswald Jacoby over fifty years ago.

Swedish Jacoby is called Stenberg in Sweden and by other names in other countries. My research into this topic, including plans, opinions, and references, is with the superseded article "Swedish Jacoby 2 NT."

**Drury.** We play diamond Drury. Our 2 ♠ opening bid is weak; because a passed responder chose not to do that, a natural 2 ♠ response is less likely – a largely idle bid for a significant need! Twice we played in the last makeable contract, after this auction: { Pass – 1 M; 2 ♣ – Pass }. Another time I argued for diamond Drury with an occasional partner, who rejected it for two-way Drury. The above auction was best for the first deal!

If you do settle on two-way Drury, I recommend flipping the responses: use 2 ♠ as the 3-card raise. With 2 ♣ as the 4-card raise, opener can rebid 2 ♠ with modest interest in game, letting responder take charge – with the full range of game tries both available and appropriate to a known 9-card fit.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup>**Semi-Constructive in Competition.** It just does not work to apply the semi-constructive plan to raising when partner has either opened or overcalled in a major suit. I pushed the concept hard, and it failed, because there is no slow-down raise in competition. Board 10, played at matchpoints, was the final straw:

### Support with Support

<b>Board 10</b>	♠ —										
West Deals	♥ K 10 6 4										
Both Vul	♦ A Q 8 7 2										
	♣ J 10 7 5										
♠ Q 5 4	<table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ K 10 9 7 3 2
		N									
W			E								
		S									
♥ 9 8 5 3	♥ —										
♦ K J 9 4	♦ 10 6 5										
♣ 3 2	♣ A K Q 8										
	♠ A J 8 6										
	♥ A Q J 7 2										
	♦ 3										
	♣ 9 6 4										

NS 4♥; NS 2N; EW 2♠; NS 2♣; N 1♦; Par +500; EW 4♠x-2

West	North	East	South
<i>Pete</i>		<i>Andrew</i>	
Pass	1 ♦	1 ♠	2 ♥
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥
All pass			

4 ♥ by South; Lead: ♠ 4; Made 4 — NS +620

The old adage "support with support" is true. After an overcall, there is no 1 NT forcing. Thinking my diamonds were poorly positioned, I decided to pass over 2 ♥. This handcuffed partner, and the opponents scored up a 78% board. (Although declarer took the diamond finesse and dumped a club, they played cautiously afterward, and did not make five.)

Had I raised, Andrew said he would have bid 4 ♠ over 4 ♥. He had a 5-loser hand. My diamonds do combine with his 10 to provide a third-round winner. Unfortunately, we probably lose three trump tricks, due to bad splits: two

down. All the stuff that makes the game for the opponents sets us, turning 4 ♠ doubled into a good save, losing three trumps and two diamonds for -500.

A raise includes partner in the rest of the auction, while passing leaves us both out. Clearly, my hand was good enough to raise.

## <sup>2</sup> Other Raise Structures and Variations

**Bergen Raises.** Marty Bergen's 4-card major-suit raises have been around for four decades, are in common use, and have inspired countless variants:

- |      |                             |
|------|-----------------------------|
| 2 NT | Game forcing (Jacoby 2 NT). |
| 3 ♣  | Constructive (mixed) raise. |
| 3 ♦  | Invitational (limit) raise. |
| 3 M  | Weak jump raise (0–6 HCP).  |

The mixed raise at 3 ♣ leaves at least one intervening bid to use as a game try. Because its strength is more loosely defined than we have in our system, having a game try can be important. Folks who swap the 3 ♣ and 3 ♦ bids may gain a tad of preemption, but it comes at the cost of having no game try over 3 ♦, when hearts are trump.

Bergen raises are compatible with the 2- to 3-winner single raise, but are redundant with Swedish Jacoby and mixed raises.

**Eichenbaum 4-Card Major-Suit Raises and Cover Cards.** In his book, Ken Eichenbaum presents his major-suit raises in detail. From his inspiring work, I took the mixed jump raise of the opening bid. Eichenbaum also recommends mixed jump raises in competition (in other words, all the time); however, Gary and I agreed at the time that weak raises were too automatic in competition. Eichenbaum's framework is highly compatible with the 2- to 3-winner single raise.

Many years ago, George Rosenkranz defined cover cards. Eichenbaum offers modifications to cover card values. For more information, see their books or my article on major-suit raises.

**Mini-splinter.** *We played the mini-splinter jump shift response for a couple of years, but it did not come up often. We went back to fit-showing. We now bid a mini-splinter hand with the most suitable other response.*

Responder's jump shift is a *mini-splinter*, promising:

- At least 4-card trump support,
- A singleton or void in the bid suit,
- At least two sure honor cover cards, and
- Either weaker or stronger than a game-splinter.



**Attack the medium-medium problem.** As we have mentioned, exploring for slam with a medium hand can be tricky. We don't have enough strength to drive toward slam, yet if partner is also medium, we could well have one. It's much better, if one partner can either show or deny medium strength.

The Jacoby 2 NT response has traditionally promised at least 4-card trump support. Now that we have opener's small-hand 3 ♣ response, we have basically licked the medium-medium problem for Jacoby 2 NT auctions. By including responder's small 3-card raise in Jacoby 2 NT, we solve the problem for medium and large 3-card raises as well. We should respond 2 NT over 1 ♠ with all of these, for example:

♠ A Q 7 ♥ 7 5 3 2 ♦ K 6 ♣ K J 9 2

♠ Q 7 3 ♥ K Q 3 2 ♦ 6 ♣ K Q 9 6 2

♠ A Q 7 ♥ Q J 3 2 ♦ K 6 ♣ 10 9 6 2

Most of the time, partner bids 3 ♣, and we stick it in 4 ♠. No harm, no foul – that's where we thought we were going. If partner goes slamming over 2 NT, they will know that we might have such a hand, which is still better than a possible limit raise. After a 2/1 response, responder's second-round raise of opener's suit promises at least medium values.

**2 ♠ as Jacoby.** When the opening bid is 1 ♥, bidding space can be used more efficiently by swapping the meanings of the 2 ♠ and 2 NT responses – if the autopilot does not bid Jacoby 2 NT by mistake.

### **3 Rebids after Jacoby 2 NT**

The reader should already know opener's standard rebids that include bidding a short suit at the three level and a long suit at the four level. Problems with this plan include:

- Opener leaks information to the opponents on hands where responder plans to bid game (or show a limit raise).
- Opener's feature-showing bids place no limits on hand strength.
- The bid of the short suit allows the opponents to use a double for nefarious purposes.

The most important part of our Jacoby 2 NT methods is opener's 3 ♣ rebid. Limiting opener's hand immediately solves the small–medium–large problem for these deals. When opener has a medium or large hand, responder goes serious with a medium or large hand, solving the problem for most of these deals – including the slam-splinter. Our plans are consistent, which provide an easy upgrade path. However, if Swedish will not be an option, see Larry Cohen's modified Jacoby.

Mixing in the limit raise can give pause to a feisty opponent, who won't want to go for a number against a partscore. The mixed jump raise, which we can have with either form of Jacoby 2 NT, can be highly effective; the opponents have no wiggle room.

**More powerful responses to Swedish Jacoby.** We practiced a more complicated plan where opener's rebid at three of the major refused game opposite a limit raise; the limiting 3 ♣ rebid showed a better hand. We played it in one tournament, with at least one error. We switched back while I was writing about the topic for this book. In our next tournament, we made no errors with Jacoby.

## Spades after a Heart Opening

{ 1♥ - 1♠ } sequences can be tricky. The final strain is wide open, as is the strength of each hand. The problems include: ♦<sup>1</sup>

- A. Opener has a small hand with precisely 4=5=2=2 distribution.
- B. Should opener raise to 2♠ on a small hand with only 3-card support?
- C. What does opener do with a medium or large hand containing three spades and six hearts? [major nightmare hand]
- D. How does responder sort out a sensible contract when holding minimal, invitational or game values?

### Forcing to Game with Exactly Four Spades

*With a game-forcing hand containing four spades, make a two-over-one in a minor suit, over partner's 1♥ opening bid.*

Once the game force has been established, bidding will be much easier. However, we need this additional rule:

*The 1♥ opener must rebid 2♠ when holding four spades, after a two-over-one in a minor suit.*

Opener's shape-showing reverse does not show extra values and promises four or more spades; it won't interfere with anything responder had planned to do over a 2♥ rebid. This is the last chance to guarantee finding a spade fit; a subsequent spade bid shows a stopper for notrump or control for slam.

### The 1♠ Response

*Over 1♥, the 1♠ response promises Q-10-x-x or better, or any five or more spades.*

This lets opener better judge when to raise (or jump raise) on 3-card support. Not having bid two of a minor,

*With a game-forcing hand, only respond 1♠ with five or more spades.*

Yup, it's possible to miss a 4-4 spade fit on a partscore hand. My analysis indicates the value outweighs the risk.

Holding three or more hearts and a less than invitational hand, responder only bids spades for the lead, with bad hearts. Otherwise, with two to three winners, raise hearts. With fewer winners, start a slow-down raise with 1 NT. In either case, hearts should play just fine. What the opponents don't know can only hurt them.

**Opener's 1 NT rebid.** Opener's 1 NT denies a singleton (often 2=5=3=3) and is non-forcing.

R2	<b>Opener Rebids 1 NT { 1 ♥ - 1 ♠; 1 NT - ? }</b>
2 ♣	New minor forcing (NMF) - see the next chapter.
2 ♦	To play - but see two-way NMF in the next chapter.
2 ♥	To play.
2 ♠	To play.
2 NT	Natural invitation, 4 spades and 1-2 hearts.
3 ♣	To play.
3 ♦	[undefined]
3 ♥	Natural invitation, 4 spades and 3 hearts.
3 ♠	Natural invitation, 6+ cards.
3 NT	Choice of games, 5+ spades (per rule, being a game force).

**Opener's minor-suit rebid.** Opener should have four or more cards in the suit, for a minor-suit rebid. (Rarely, opener has only three cards, marking time to show extra values on the next bid.)

R2	<b>Opener Rebids 2 ♣ { 1 ♥ - 1 ♠; 2 ♣ - ? }</b>
2 ♦	Fourth suit forcing (4SF) - see the next chapter.
2 ♥	To play.
2 ♠	To play, 6+ cards, likely 0-1 hearts.
2 NT	Natural invitation, 4-5 spades and 1-2 hearts.
3 ♣	Natural invitation.
3 ♦	To play!
3 ♥	Natural invitation, 4 spades and 3 hearts.
3 ♠	Natural invitation, 6+ cards.
3 NT	Choice of games, 5+ spades (per rule, being a game force).

Only minor-suit bids (grayed) are different, when opener rebids 2 ♦:

R2	<b>Opener Rebids 2 ♠ { 1 ♥ - 1 ♠; 2 ♠ - ? }</b>
2 ♥	To play.
2 ♠	To play, 6+ cards, likely 0-1 hearts.
2 NT	Natural invitation, 4-5 spades and 1-2 hearts.
3 ♣	Fourth suit forcing to game - responder cannot play 3 ♣.
3 ♠	Natural invitation.
3 ♥	Natural invitation, 4 spades and 3 hearts.
3 ♠	Natural invitation, 6+ cards.
3 NT	Choice of games, 5+ spades (per rule, being a game force).

## Key Features

- With only four spades in a game-forcing hand, respond to 1 ♥ with two of a minor. Opener must rebid 2 ♠ whenever holding four spades. (With game values, a 1 ♠ response promises at least five spades.)
- Responding in spades with three or more hearts requires invitational values or better.
- Over 1 ♥, the 1 ♠ response promises Q-10-x-x or better, or any five or more spades.

## Backstory

Early in our partnership, Gary Schwartz said to have ♠ Q-10-x-x, any five, or better, for the 1 ♠ response to 1 ♥. The requirement to have five spades, to respond 1 ♠ on a game-going hand, came to me from the late Lynn Deas, via Richard Lee.

**4=5=2=2.** With nobody vulnerable, I picked up this hand:

♠ K Q 5 2 ♥ A 9 6 3 2 ♦ K 6 ♣ 6 4

After RHO passed, I felt obligated to open 1 ♥. LHO rescued me with a takeout double, the opponents played 2 ♣, and we got 57% on the board by holding them to two.

*Rescued*, you ask? Indeed: suppose LHO had passed, and partner had bid 1 NT forcing. My hand was way too weak for a reverse to 2 ♠, and the hearts were far too anemic to rebid. The approved choice is 2 ♣ on ♣ 6-4. Passing 1 NT is the alternative, but that would disappoint if responder has a heart raise. (Since we routinely rebid in a 3-card minor, it is only the 4=5=2=2 shape that causes such a problem.)

**Open 1 ♠.** Long ago, I was told that Edgar Kaplan advocated opening 1 ♠ on such a hand, and I experimented with it for a while. After a series of, at best, mediocre results, we had the auction { 1 ♠ – 1 NT; 2 ♥ – Pass }. We missed a game in hearts. Never again!

In *Five Weeks to Winning Bridge*, where a major-suit opening could be four cards and possibly 4–4 majors at 1 ♠, Alfred Sheinwold said to open 1 ♠ on:

♠ A K 6 3   ♥ K Q 5 3 2   ♦ 5 2   ♣ 8 4

but open 1 ♥ and rebid 2 ♥ on:

♠ K J 6 3   ♥ A K J 6 3   ♦ 5 2   ♣ 8 4

## ♦ Alternative Methods

### <sup>1</sup> Evaluation of prominent alternatives

Playing Q-10-x-x or better, with the other features as described above, is sensible, easy to learn, and significantly improves the less-structured methods typically played. This is the way to go, for many partnerships. It addresses issues [B], [C] and [D] above.

**Flannery 2 ♦.** The mildly popular Flannery 2 ♦ opening shows a small hand with four spades and five hearts (perhaps 11 to 15 HCP). My analysis shows Flannery to provide about twice the benefits of the recommended method, *when learned thoroughly*. However, we start out at the two level, so any exploration takes us to the three level – everything tends to be a little high to work well. Flannery adherents tend to tout this preemption, not as a weakness, but as a strength – which I have not assessed. In its way, it addresses all four problems [A-D] above. Flannery is work; and it gives up the much-maligned weak 2 ♦ bid, which we like very much.

**Tucker.** My analysis indicates Tucker to be the technically best solution, providing about twice the benefits of Flannery, for no more work. It addresses issues [B], [C] and [D] above very well. It is described in the Appendix, “Tucker over One Heart” on page 814. These and other alternatives are described in my article “Flannery and Major Nightmare Solutions,” which is posted with the test deals.

**The Kaplan Interchange.** Edgar Kaplan’s interchange or inversion of the 1 ♠ and 1 NT responses may hit the sweet spot, providing useful value for far less complexity than Flannery and Tucker. It addresses all the problems above, except 4–3 fits for [B] and [C]. For more information, see “Kaplan Interchange over One Heart” on page 820.

## Serious Three Notrump

Serious 3 NT allows us to systematically decide between game or slam in a major suit. This is a system that is easier to play than to describe. Here are the rules:

1. Serious 3 NT applies when a fit in a major suit of at least eight cards is confirmed at the three level in a game-forcing auction.  $\diamond^{1\ 2\ 3}$
2. Before moving past game, we want (1) the partnership to have serious intent to bid a slam, and (2) a first- or second-round control in every side suit. Either partner, upon discovering that both conditions are true, immediately asks for keycards; similarly, upon discovering that either is false, sign off in game. No practice control-bids!
3. Control-bidding commences, bidding the cheapest first- or second-round control: the cheapest ace, king, singleton or void. This method is known as *Italian control-bids*.  $\diamond^4$
4. A control-bid in a suit previously bid by the control-bidder promises two of the top three honors – holding at least the ace or king is loosely assumed – try to make it so!
5. A control bid in a suit bid by partner promises the ace or king, not shortness. The honor can be valuable in visualizing tricks to be taken.  $\diamond^5$
6. Bypassing a suit denies a control-bid in that suit. Partner's further control-bid promises control of the bypassed suit.
7. A bid of 3 NT shows serious slam interest  $\diamond^6$  and is forcing. We cannot play in 3 NT.
8. A control-bid that bypasses 3 NT is a courtesy, denying serious slam interest. If partner then control-bids over that, it shows serious slam interest.
9. With a spade control, a control-bid of 3  $\spadesuit$  is required. It neither shows nor denies serious slam interest.  $\diamond^7$
10. With a bad hand, at most an unprotected king to show, responder bids trumps (game, if not a jump).

11. We extend these methods to cover a Jacoby 2 NT raise.
12. Serious 3 NT is *off in competition*. We may need to play 3 NT to avoid a potential ruff.

Serious 3 NT is most effective when one partner has a small (normal) opening bid, and the other has a serious (large) hand. The difficult slams to diagnose are when each partner has (or may have) a medium hand of 16 or so points. If one partner has a bid available to show a medium hand, this situation is greatly relieved, whether it is used or not. A sometimes hit or miss approach is to show serious intent with a medium hand, but drag our feet after that.

### Last Train

With control-bidding in full swing, the control-bid just below game is *last train*. It does not necessarily promise (or deny) a control in the bid suit; it says: there is a problem, I'm still interested in slam, but I cannot ask for keycards. Usually, the problem will be obvious. For example, if spades are trump, and partner just bid 4 ♣, then a 4 ♥ control-bid should provide a heart control after all; the problem is clearly diamonds. With neither red suit controlled, just bid 4 ♠. Sometimes Last Train is used when the bidder is looking for extra general strength; in other words, the issue is the ability to actually take 12 tricks. We hope to avoid this situation.

Last train does not apply when 3 NT could have been bid instead. That is, a courtesy control-bid is never last train. With nothing to control-bid, either sign off in game or make a picture bid earlier in the auction.

### Picture Bids

The jump to game shows unexpectedly good values in bid suits, especially trumps, while denying a control in any other suit. It paints a picture. My recommendation is to hold *exactly four of the top six honors, across two bid suits*. If three suits have been bid, it's the two that the picture-bidder has bid, for example, {1 ♠ - 2 ♦; 2 ♥ - 4 ♥} on:

♠ 6 2 ♥ K Q 9 3 ♦ A K 9 6 4 ♣ 7 6



## No Fast Arrival

Early practitioners of Two-over-One Game Force found it useful to distinguish between small hands (say, 12–14 HCP) and those with slam interest. It was attractive to use the space-wasting jump to game to show the weaker hand, and a lower (but forcing) raise to preserve the space to investigate a slam. This made sense at the time, and some texts still teach it this way.  $\diamond^8$  Experts now know better. We'll see why.

### Examples

#### *Example 1 – no fast arrival:*

♠ A K J 8 6 5   ♡ 5   ◇ A Q 5   ♣ Q 9 5

We open 1 ♠, partner bids 2 ◇, we rebid our spades, and partner raises to 4 ♠, fast arrival, showing a small opening bid. We are in a pickle. We have a laydown slam if partner holds:

♠ Q 7 4   ♡ A 6 3   ◇ K J 6 4   ♣ K 3 2

However, we would not be safe at the five level opposite partner's:

♠ Q 7 4   ♡ A Q J   ◇ K J 6 4   ♣ 8 3 2

In our methods, responder bids 3 ♠ on both those hands.

We bid 3 NT (serious), and we hear about partner's cheaper minor-suit control. When that's 4 ◇, we have no club control, so it's easy to sign off in game. When the control-bid is 4 ♣, all suits are controlled, so we ask for keycards. Depending on responder's actual holding, slam may or may not be a favorite, but at least we won't get to the five level opposite the second hand.

*Fast arrival is losing bridge.* Some misguided souls play fast arrival in notrump, wiping out our medium-strength bid.

#### *Example 2 – no control-bid with a terrible hand:*

♠ Q 8   ♡ K Q 5 4 3   ◇ K 5 4   ♣ Q J 2

After { 1 ♠ – 2 ♡; 3 ♡ – ? }, just bid 4 ♡. The only permitted control-bid would be 4 ◇. Purists would not permit even the ◇ K for the 4 ♡ sign-off, so that they can infer points are elsewhere. That inference is bogus, since we could hold ◇ Q-J-x.

### Example 3 – picture bid:

♠ A Q 6 4 3   ♡ K Q 9 5   ♦ 9 7   ♣ Q 4

We open 1 ♠, and partner responds 2 ♡. Our picture bid jump to 4 ♡ (even without the ♣ Q) shows great values in both suits we have bid, but no side first- or second-round control. Of the six top honors in both suits, we need four of them, plus four trumps.

### Example 4 – a super-picture: “The Bidding Box” (7), January 2023.

*Opener*

♠ A 4 2

♡ A J 9 3 2

♦ J 6

♣ A 9 4

*Responder*

♠ J 8 5

♡ K Q 7

♦ A K Q 3 2

♣ 8 5

1 ♡

2 NT

Pass

2 ♦    [natural game force]

4 ♡    [picture bid]

The moderator did not pick up on 4 ♡ being a picture bid. Responder cannot drive to slam, and opener cannot see a slam either. According to our methods, responder is too strong for a picture bid. After the 2 ♦ response, responder’s best shot is to bid 3 ♡, and then control-bid in diamonds, hopefully, twice. Here’s another way:

1 ♡

4 ♡    [accepts game try]

6 ♡    [getting the picture]

3 ♦    [FSJ, inv or slam]

5 ♦    [no black suit control]

### Example 5 – a grand picture:

*Opener*

♠ Q 10 7 6 5 4

♡ A J 4

♦ A 4

♣ A 3

*Responder*

♠ A K 9 3

♡ K Q 8 7 2

♦ 6 2

♣ 5 4

1 ♠

3 ♡    [forcing]

7 NT    [count 13 tricks]

2 ♡    [5+ cards]

4 ♠    [picture bid]

The 4 ♠ jump in partner's suit only works this way when opener does not think it is a splinter, exclusion keycard Blackwood or asking for keycards (kickback). We've given up waiting for this deal – we play kickback, once hearts are raised.

### Example 6 – a serious slam:

Opener

♠ K 10 3  
 ♥ A K 10 9 5 4  
 ♦ 10 9 2  
 ♣ A

Responder

♠ A Q J 9 6 2  
 ♥ Q 7  
 ♦ A 8 6 4  
 ♣ 9

1 ♥  
 3 ♠ [forcing]  
 4 ♣ [a club control]  
 4 NT [RKB ♠]  
 6 ♥ [third-round ♥ control?]  
 7 ♠ or 7 NT [count = 13 tricks]

2 ♠ [Tucker: 5+ spades, GF]  
 3 NT [Serious (aggressive)]  
 4 ♦ [♦ likely no ♥ control]  
 5 ♠ [two with the ♠ Q]  
 6 NT [yes, the queen]

## Key Features

- We do not play fast arrival in any circumstance.
- Any control-bid shows the cheapest suit in which a first- or second-round control is held.
- Serious 3 NT applies when we are at the three level and forced to game in a major suit. Bidding 3 NT shows serious slam interest; a control-bid bypassing 3 NT is only a courtesy.
- The control-bid below 4 M is last train, indicating slam interest, but a problem with asking for keycards. A courtesy control-bid is never last train.
- A partner who knows we have both serious intent and controls in all suits immediately asks for keycards. A partner who knows one requirement is lacking immediately signs off in game.
- In competition, serious 3 NT is off, but our control-bidding methods still apply.

## Backstory

Serious 3 NT was invented by Eric Rodwell, multiple world champion, renowned bridge theorist and Precision player. His partner, Jeff Meckstroth, suggested the now-shortened *Last Train to Clarksville* name and feature. After earlier online publication, Serious 3 NT is now in *Eric Rodwell's Bidding Topics*. A brief article by Eddie Wold also appears in Hardy's *Advanced* book. The late Eric Schwartz and I learned Serious 3 NT from materials that I can no longer find online.

With permission, I have reassembled and repaired the three parts of "Improving 2/1 Game Force" by Fred Gitelman, which are on 3NT.XYZ. Gitelman presents Serious 3 NT in the first article. In the second, he goes into detail about last train. He also includes *lackwood*, using five of the major to ask for keycards while denying a control in the last train suit. Rodwell's book does not include lackwood, perhaps because it is seldom necessary and should be avoided.

**Standard and Precision ranges.** Playing Precision, a regular opening bid is typically made with 11 to 16 points. That breaks easily into two ranges, bad (~12) and good (~15). This is a particularly good fit for serious 3 NT.

In modern standard bidding, the opening bid of one of a suit is typically made with 12 to 20 points. We break this into three ranges, small (~13), medium (~16) and large (~19). Serious 3 NT handles small–large combinations well, but medium–medium hands, not so much. (Playing fast arrival would eliminate small hands, but it destroys small–large auctions.) We need to be alert to opportunities to show or deny medium strength, to resolve the medium–medium problem in advance.

## ◆ Alternative Methods

Over the years, Serious 3 NT has been a huge winner for us. Except as noted, *I would be reluctant to apply any of the methods below to major-suit openings.*

**<sup>1</sup> Trumps confirmed at the two level.** It is possible to take excellent advantage of a trump fit confirmed at the two level in a game-forcing auction. For information about that, and lots more, see Ken Rexford's *Cuebidding*. That's well beyond the scope of this book.

**<sup>2</sup> After a limit raise.** We are not playing the jump raise as invitational, but many pairs do. Since a limit raise is not forcing, Serious 3 NT should not apply then, but some people do extend it to 3- and 4-card limit raise situations. Since any control-bid by opener is serious, some people play that this 3 NT denies a club control, which opener would otherwise bid. However, opener can make a serious 4 ♦ control-bid when lacking a club control. Instead, I

recommend letting opener offer to play at 3 NT with a balanced 18-count or so, seeking safety or a matchpoint top.

<sup>3</sup> **Control Ask.** GLM Steve Gladyszak does not play serious 3 NT. He says we don't need it, with his methods and good judgment: when a major-suit fit is confirmed, whether in a forcing or non-forcing auction, the cheapest notrump bid asks partner for controls (A=2, K=1). We need 10 of the 12 controls to make a slam. He also applies his methods when a major-suit fit has been confirmed after a minor-suit opening. This plan may work swimmingly, but as with serious 3 NT, we need to believe there is sufficient overall strength for slam.

<sup>4</sup> **Old-fashioned cue-bidding.** In the bad old days, first-round controls were bid first. A second-round control would only be shown after first-round controls had been exhausted. This wasted space. Italian control-bids (often called cue-bids) are much more efficient, keeping the auction low enough to check for keycards.

<sup>5</sup> **Partner's suit.** Shortness in partner's A-x-x-x-x suit can be highly valuable, but these methods have no way to distinguish the more generally valuable honor from shortness. Fred Gitelman recommended playing that the control-bid in partner's suit promises one top honor: A, K or Q. This is worth considering, as the queen of partner's suit can be a superb card, but requiring at least the king seems more reliable.

<sup>6</sup> **Non-serious 3 NT.** A number of partnerships prefer *non-serious 3 NT*, sometimes called *frivolous 3 NT*. In this method, a control-bid beyond 3 NT shows serious slam interest, and 3 NT is non-serious, preserving the bidding space for partner. This gives the opponents less information on game-only hands. However, my investigations indicate that serious 3 NT bids slams better: the stronger hand marks time, and the weaker hand tells first. In an online remark, Rodwell confirmed that he prefers serious.

<sup>7</sup> **Spade interchange.** Some pairs flip the meaning of 3 ♠ and 3 NT when hearts are trump: 3 ♠ becomes artificial, showing serious slam interest, and 3 NT becomes a courtesy control-bid in *spades*. This is a slight advantage, if we remember it.

<sup>8</sup> **Fast arrival.** The standard 2/1 treatment is fast arrival, which I bashed above. The flip side of it: when a major-suit fit is found in a game-forcing auction, not bidding game immediately promises extra values, addressing the medium–medium problem, but creating a small–large problem.



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## Finding Major-Suit Fits: NMF, XYZ & 4SF

Let's start with some core features of our minor-suit system.

**Walsh Responses** to a 1 ♣ opening require game-forcing values to respond 1 ♦ to a 1 ♣ opening, when holding a four-card major. ♦<sup>1</sup> Opener only bids a major over the 1 ♦ response with an unbalanced hand or concentrated values, otherwise preferring to rebid 1 NT. The 1 ♦ responder carries responsibility for finding an undisclosed major-suit fit, usually by reversing into the major. This plan works well.

We respond 1 ♠ to 1 ♣ with either of these:

♠ K 8 7 3   ♡ 7   ♦ Q 9 7 5 3 2   ♣ 8 2

♠ K Q 7 3   ♡ 7   ♦ K Q 9 7 2   ♣ 8 3 2

but bid 1 ♦ with a full opening bid:

♠ K Q 7 3   ♡ 7   ♦ A K 9 7 2   ♣ 8 3 2

**Opener's 1 NT rebid.** We rely heavily on this rule, which provides major advantages to partnerships who play “better minor” openings:

*Opener's 1 NT bid absolutely, unconditionally guarantees at least two cards in responder's suit.* ♦<sup>2</sup>

For example, responder will routinely rebid 2 ♠ over opener's 1 NT rebid with:

♠ 8 6 5 4 3   ♡ A 8 3   ♦ K 9 5   ♣ 6 4

We are not going to enjoy it if opener produces:

♠ K   ♡ K Q 6 4   ♦ A 8 2   ♣ Q J 9 5 2

Yes, this is a revolting 2 ♣ rebid. At least the ♠ K is an extra value. I would not open the bidding without it – why buy a problem on a minimum hand? Let somebody else open, and act over that.

### New Minor Forcing (NMF)

New minor forcing, now a generic term, has been a mainstay of tournament players in North America, when opener rebids 1 NT. It has two main approaches, with multiple variations. ♦<sup>3 4</sup> (See also “Spades after a Heart Opening” on page 241.)

## □ Plan A – Two-Way NMF with 2 ♣ Relay

Responder's bid of 2 ♣ is a relay to 2 ♦, includes *all* invitational hands, plus weak hands with diamonds; responder's 2 ♦ is an artificial game force; responder's 2 NT may also be artificial. This plan is also called modified two-way Stayman, xyNT, etc.

R2	O3	R3	<b>Two-Way NMF: 1 m – 1M; 1NT – ?</b>		
2 ♣	Relay to 2 ♦.				
	2 ♦	Required relay.			
		Pass	To play.		
		Suit	Natural invitation.		
		2 NT	Natural invitation:	[a] with 4-card support for opener's minor.	[b] 2- to 4-card support.
		3 NT	Choice of games, with a 5-card major.		
		Higher	Splinter for <i>responder's</i> suit.		
2 ♦	Artificial game force.				
2 ♥	Natural, to play.				
2 ♠	Natural; to play. (If a reverse, 4-4 invitational.)				
2 NT	[a] Natural invitation, denies 4-card support.				
2 NT	[b] Relay to 3 ♣: to play, or GF with opener's minor.				
	3 ♣	Required relay – pass, to play there.			
		3 ♦	5 M, 4 m, low shortness.		
		3 ♥	5 M, 4 m, high shortness.		
		3 ♠	4 M, 5 m, low shortness.		
		3 NT	4 M, 5 m, high shortness.		
3 ♣	[a] Natural, to play.		[b] Natural slam try.		
3 ♦, 3 ♥	Natural slam try.				
3 ♠	Same, but a splinter if 2 ♠ is a reverse.				
3 NT	To play, usually without a 5-card major.				
Higher	Splinter for <i>opener's</i> suit.				

### Responder's 2 NT over opener's 1 NT is:

- [a] a natural invitation (default); or
- [b] artificial, relay to 3 ♣ – expert, but can we remember?

**Two-way NMF** applies whenever opener's second bid is 1 NT.

Variation [a] updates a response structure that I played for quite a while in the past. Some play the jumps as good-suit invitations, instead of slam tries. Splinters are optional. { 1 m - 1 ♡; 1 NT - 2 ♠ } shows the less usual 4-4, invitational; with 4=5, go through 2 ♣.

### ❑ Plan B – Standard One-Way NMF

Responder's bid of two of the new (unbid) minor is artificial, promises at least invitational strength, and asks opener for clarification. Responder's subsequent bid at the three level is forcing to game, except three of opener's minor with [b]. This method could be called standard, original, or one-way NMF.

R2	O3	R3	<b>One-Way NMF: 1 m - 1M; 1NT - ?</b>	
2 m	Natural, to play in opener's suit.			
2 om	Artificial game try, often with 5 cards in M.			
	2 M	3-card support, minimum.		Non-forcing; oM is priority.
	2 oM	4 cards, minimum.		
	2 NT	Minimum, neither major (non-forcing).		
	After any	3 m	[a] GF (default).	[b] Invitational.
	3 om	❑ <i>Artificial game force: both majors.</i>		
	3 M, 3 oM, 3NT	Natural, maximum values.		
2 m	[2 ♢] Priority: minimum values, neither major.			
2 ♡	Natural, to play (or correct to spades).			
2 ♠	Natural, to play. (If a reverse, game force, longer ♡.)			
2 NT	Natural invitation, usually without a 5-card major.			
3 om	Natural, to play, 6+ cards (only way to play in om).			
3 m	Natural:	[a] invitational (default).	[b] forcing.	
3 M	Natural, invitational, 6+ cards.			
3 oM	Natural, invitational. (Splinter if 2 ♠ is a reverse.)			
3 NT	To play, usually without a 5-card major.			
DJS	Splinter for <i>opener's</i> suit.			

### Responder's two ways to 3 m:

- ❑ [a] after NMF = GF; direct = invitational (default).
- ❑ [b] after NMF = inv; direct = GF (expert, less intuitive).

**One-way NMF** applies when the opening bid is a minor suit, the response is a major suit, and opener rebids 1 NT. As we have seen, we extend this to two major suits, { 1 ♥ - 1 ♠; 1 NT - ? }, where 2 ♣ is NMF.

### 1 ♣ - 1 ♦; 1 NT - ?

This auction is a time bomb for one-way NMF pairs. Playing Walsh style, responder's bid of a major suit is natural and forcing to game. This part works fine. What if responder has an unbalanced game-going hand, without a 4-card major suit? Both minor suits have been bid, and we play all jumps into bid suits are invitational. Choose one:

- Exception: responder's jump to 3 ♣ is forcing (Max Hardy, *Advanced Bidding*).
- Exception: a jump to 3 ♦ over 1 NT is forcing. To enable this, a 2 ♦ jump response to 1 ♣ shows a good, long-suit invitation, denying a 4-card major - analogous to { 1 ♦ - 3 ♣ }.
- Responder's bid of a major suit over 1 NT may be a suit, but may be just a stopper. To make this work, we need a bidding trick: opener's raise of that major shows 4-card support *without* a secure stopper in the other major. Opener's jump to 3 NT shows 4-card support *with* a stopper in the other major. This approach may only appeal to a pair already using this trick with 2 ♣ over 1 ♦ being almost forcing to game.

With any of these methods, responder's jump to three of a major should be an *auto-splinter*: a singleton or void in the bid suit, with at least six good diamonds in a game- or slam-going hand.

## Polls on Bridge Winners (2023)

### *New Minor Forcing (NMF) + 3 m: Invitational or Forcing?*

1 ♦	1 ♠
1 NT	2 ♣ [NMF]
2 ♥	3 ♦

Is 3 ♦ invitational or forcing?

In *Standard Bridge Bidding for the 21st Century*, it is fundamental to Max Hardy's NMF that 3 ♦ is forcing. However, in his

first book of *Bidding Topics*, Eric Rodwell flags this as a matter for partnership agreement. He continues to say that his preference is for it to be invitational, playing that 3  $\diamond$  would be forcing on the auction { 1  $\diamond$  - 1  $\spadesuit$ ; 1 NT - 3  $\diamond$  }.

When I play one-way NMF, on the NMF auction at the top of this poll:

11	17%	3 $\diamond$ is always invitational (or assumed inv)
1	2%	I play both ways, prefer invitational
1	2%	I play both ways, no preference
1	2%	I play both ways, prefer forcing
50	78%	3 $\diamond$ is always forcing (or assumed forcing)
20		Abstentions

**Poll conclusions.** The comments on Bridge Winners are generally advanced or expert, yet a large majority never plays the expert modification. Those who find this problem frequent enough to be worth a change probably tend to switch to two-way NMF. Boston-area expert Joe Cappannelli prefers two-way, but also plays the modification to one-way.

***After Opener's 1 NT Rebid (New Minor Forcing, Checkback, etc.)***

After an opening bid at one of a minor suit, and a major-suit response, opener rebids 1 NT. What are your preferred methods over this?

4	3%	Two-way NMF with 2 $\clubsuit$ Checkback
91	75%	Two-way NMF with 2 $\clubsuit$ relay to 2 $\diamond$
6	5%	2 $\clubsuit$ checkback Stayman
13	11%	NMF (one-way)
1	1%	Natural bids
7	6%	Other methods
3		Abstentions

**Poll conclusions.** A large majority plays two-way NMF with a 2  $\clubsuit$  relay to 2  $\diamond$ . Second choice is the long-time standard of one-way NMF – surely in widespread use by club players who have played it for years and no longer study the game. Whether or not other methods

have a meaningful technical advantage, it does not make much sense to put effort into any but these two plans.

## One-Way vs. Two-Way NMF

The main advantage of one-way over two-way NMF is to be able to bid a natural preference to two of opener's club suit. Proponents of two-way counter, the opponents won't let us play there, anyhow. I have found that assertion to be partially true, but sometimes 2 ♣ is the last – or only – safe haven. If the opponents let us play there, our score may still be negative. One-way NMF is attractive at matchpoints, where all boards count the same.

Two-way NMF provides many advantages – the top-rated plan for good reason. It should be better for slam bidding and therefore makes sense for pairs that often play in events with IMP scoring.

## Recommendations

Don't be in a hurry to change a comfortable NMF system. Neither of the methods [b], gray in charts (pages 304–305), come up that often.

### *Examples – after { 1 ♣ – 1 ♠; 1 NT }:*

Both the up- and down-side of the preference to clubs occur here: opener has no negative bid below 2 NT after a one-way 2 ♦ NMF.

1. ♠ K 8 7 3 ♥ 7 ♦ Q 9 7 5 3 2 ♣ 8 2

*One-way auction:*

We leap to 3 ♦; opener passes.

*Two-way auction:*

We bid 2 ♣, and pass 2 ♦.

2. ♠ K 10 8 7 3 ♥ 7 ♦ A J 9 7 3 ♣ Q 2

*One-way auction:*

We bid 2 ♦. Over opener's 2 ♥, we bid 2 ♠, invitational. Over opener's 2 ♠, we show a good invitation by bidding 3 ♠. Over opener's 2 NT, we must pass, as 3 ♦ would force to game.

*Two-way auction:*

We bid 2 ♣. Over opener's 2 ♦ relay, we bid 2 ♠, invitational, denying four hearts and concealing opener's heart holding. Opener may pass, but if they raise, we bid 4 ♠.

3. ♠ K 10 8 7 3 ♥ A J 7 5 ♦ 9 3 ♣ Q 2

*One-way auction:*

We bid 2 ♦. Over opener's 2 ♥, we bid 3 ♥, invitational. Over opener's 2 ♠ or 2 NT, we pass.

*Two-way auction:*

Responder bids 2 ♣. Over opener's 2 ♦ relay, we bid 2 ♥, invitational. Opener may pass or bid 2 ♠ – we pass, since that could be 2-card support; if they raise hearts, we bid 4 ♥.

4. ♠ K 10 8 7 3 ♥ A J 7 ♦ 9 3 ♣ Q 8 2

*One-way auction:*

We bid 2 ♦. Over opener's 2 ♥, we bid 2 ♠, invitational. Over opener's 2 ♠ or 2 NT, we pass.

*Two-way auction:*

Responder bids 2 ♣. Over opener's 2 ♦ relay, responder bids 2 ♠, invitational. We only play game if opener bids it.

See “Four Deals” on page 314 for examples from actual play.

## XYZ

The XYZ system extends the methods of two-way NMF to auctions where opener rebids a *suit* at the one level. It's called X-Y-Z or XYZ for the three bids at the one level. Most pairs who play XYZ also play two-way NMF with the same structure, so folks often call the whole package XYZ.

Two-way NMF works smoothly with the basis that opener has a limited hand with balanced distribution. There are additional complexities with XYZ, because opener may have an unbalanced hand and/or extra values, and therefore may refuse to relay from 2 ♣ to 2 ♦. Marshall Miles recommended:

*Opener may break the relay, when they would not have passed a natural 2 ♦ bid.*

With XYZ, fourth suit forcing is no longer used when opener rebids 1 ♥ or 1 ♠, but 4SF is still needed when opener makes a normal rebid in a suit at a higher level.

## Fourth Suit Forcing (4SF)

Whichever system we use to sort out our major suits, *when neither NMF nor XYZ applies*, responder may need an artificial, forcing rebid. The fourth suit is artificial and forcing when we bid three suits in a row in a non-competitive and non-forcing auction.

- a. Fourth suit at the one level:

1 ♣ - 1 ♦; 1 ♥ - 1 ♠

- b. Third suit at the one level, fourth at the two level:

1 ♣ - 1 ♦; 1 ♠ - 2 ♥

1 ♣ - 1 ♥; 1 ♠ - 2 ♦

1 ♦ - 1 ♥; 1 ♠ - 2 ♣

- c. Third suit at the two level, fourth at the two level:

1 ♦ - 1 ♥; 2 ♣ - 2 ♠

1 ♦ - 1 ♠; 2 ♣ - 2 ♥

1 ♥ - 1 ♠; 2 ♣ - 2 ♦

- d. Third suit at the two level, fourth at the three level:

1 ♥ - 1 ♠; 2 ♦ - 3 ♣

Playing XYZ, only cases [c] and [d] are fourth-suit forcing auctions. Not playing XYZ, all four cases are 4SF auctions.

**One round or to game.** The ACBL convention card has boxes to indicate whether 4SF is forcing for one round or to game. The latter is unambiguous, and most play it that way. That's inferior – some hands just cannot be bid correctly if the fourth suit is unconditionally forcing to game. For example, after:

1 ♦ - 1 ♠; 2 ♣                      or                      1 ♣ - 1 ♥; 1 ♠

what is responder supposed to bid with a relatively balanced invitational hand and no stopper in the fourth suit?

### ☐ Plan A – Fourth Suit Forcing to Game

In the auctions above, responder's bid of the fourth suit is an artificial



game force. As XYZ makes 4SF comparatively rare, this plan is a good fit for XYZ.

## □ Plan B – Fourth Suit Forcing One Round

The fourth suit is forcing for one round, with Kantar's rule:

*After responder bids the artificial fourth suit, responder's bid at the three level is forcing to game.*

Responder's two-level bids after 4SF are non-forcing. As bidding 2 NT promises a stopper in the fourth suit, opener may be stuck for a bid in some circumstances, having to bid two of responder's major with only a doubleton. Opener must jump with 3-card support and game values, since responder may have little to do but pass the minimum preference. This plan is highly recommended with one-way NMF, which needs it more and operates similarly.

### Examples:

5. 1 ♣ – 1 ♥; 1 ♠ – ?

♠ K 10 7 ♥ A J 9 7 3 ♦ 9 3 ♣ Q 8 2

Playing XYZ, bid 2 ♣, and over opener's expected 2 ♦, invite game with 2 ♥. Without XYZ, when the fourth suit is forcing one round, we bid 2 ♦ (4SF) and pass opener's non-jump bid. Without XYZ, with 2 ♦ forcing to game, we have no reasonable bid.

6. 1 ♦ – 1 ♠; 2 ♣ – ?

♠ K 10 7 4 2 ♥ 9 7 3 ♦ K 3 ♣ K Q 8

Here, XYZ does not apply. We bid 2 ♥, if forcing one round, but we are stuck when it forces to game. This is not a common case: with another club or diamond – likely if we have only four spades – we could raise a minor suit.

## Fourth Suit at the One Level { 1 ♣ – 1 ♦; 1 ♥ – 1 ♠ }

Responder will have game-forcing values, if holding four spades, having bid a Walsh 1 ♦. 1 ♠ is natural, playing XYZ.

Without XYZ, the 1 ♠ bid is forcing, but ambiguous about spades. A jump to 2 ♠ is natural, with five spades and six diamonds. ♦<sup>5</sup>

## Opener Rebids Two of the Minor

Consider this auction:

1  $\diamond$  - 1  $\spadesuit$ ; 2  $\clubsuit$

Responder's hand is unlimited. Fortunately, we have 4SF when responder has a good hand. Now consider these auctions:

1  $\clubsuit$  - 1  $\heartsuit$ ; 2  $\clubsuit$

1  $\clubsuit$  - 1  $\spadesuit$ ; 2  $\clubsuit$

Only two suits have been bid. In this case, we treat 2  $\diamond$  as if it were 4SF. This is a comfortable use of the other minor. Finally, consider these auctions:

1  $\diamond$  - 1  $\heartsuit$ ; 2  $\diamond$

1  $\diamond$  - 1  $\spadesuit$ ; 2  $\diamond$

Here, we use the other major as if it were 4SF. Not so comfortable, but we need all the bidding space we can get.

**Why?** Opener's rebid of the minor is not frivolous. It promises a 6-card suit, or a chunky 5-carder under duress. When opener rebids that minor, and game is not possible, we usually pass. A new suit is forcing. As responder, repeating our major suit promises a good 6-bagger and close to invitational values.

Suppose we hold:

$\spadesuit$  K Q 8 7 3    $\heartsuit$  Q 5 3 2    $\diamond$  9    $\clubsuit$  8 5 2

Partner opens 1  $\diamond$ , and we bid 1  $\spadesuit$ . If partner bids 1 NT, our weak bid of 2  $\heartsuit$  is automatic. Opener has promised two spades, so we have a playable spade fit, and may have 4-4 hearts.

After 1  $\diamond$  - 1  $\spadesuit$ ; 2  $\diamond$ , a bid of 2  $\heartsuit$  would be suicidal, even if we played it as weak: opener may have one spade and two hearts.

## Key Features

- Holding a 4-card major after a 1 ♣ opening, responder bypasses 1 ♦ with less than opening strength. The 1 ♦ responder assumes responsibility for major-suit fits. Opener only bids a major with an unbalanced hand or concentrated values.
- Opener's 1 NT rebid guarantees two or three cards in responder's major suit.
- Decision: one-way NMF vs. two-way NMF with 2 ♣ relay?

### One-way NMF:

- Responder's bid of the unbid minor is an artificial one-round force. Opener's artificial "raise" of the new minor shows a maximum with three cards in responder's major, and four in the other major.
- Responder's jump into the new minor is weak.
- Decision:
  - Slow: { 1 m – 1 M; 1 NT – 2 om [NMF]; something – 3 m }
  - Fast: { 1 m – 1 M; 1 NT – 3 m }
  - Standard: slow auction is forcing, fast is invitational, or
  - Expert: slow auction is invitational, fast is forcing.
- Decision: { 1 ♣ – 1 ♦; 1 NT – ? } is a time bomb with one-way.

### Two-way NMF with 2 ♣ relay:

- 2 ♣ is a relay to 2 ♦. Responder passes to play, invites game, or bids 3 NT to offer a choice between 3 NT and 4 M.
- 2 ♦ is an artificial game force.
- Two of either major suit is to play.
- Decision: 2 NT is a relay to 3 ♣ vs. 2 NT is natural and 3 ♣ is to play – big ripples here.
- A higher suit is slamming.

### Fourth suit forcing:

- Decision: Is responder's bid of the fourth suit forcing to game, or one round? (With one round, responder's subsequent three-level bid would be game-forcing.) One round is similar to and fits well with one-way NMF. To game is simpler and much less frequent with XYZ, making that a good fit.
- After opener rebids their minor over responder's major, the cheaper unbid suit is treated as 4SF.

## Four Deals

**Board 2.** Tim Hill and I played this deal. Over the 1 NT rebid, I chose to remove to Tim's club suit. Double dummy defense can hold this to two, but Tim made an extra.

West was shut out by our bidding his two better suits. East had the shape to enter with an unusual 2 NT bid, but chose not to, at unfavorable vulnerability with ratty suits.

<b>Board 2</b>	♠ J 10 5 4										
South Deals	♥ 8										
E-W Vul	♦ A 9 6 5										
	♣ QJ 6 3										
♠ A Q 9 6	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; text-align: center; font-size: 2em;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 3 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ J 6 5 2		♥ K 9 7 4 3									
♦ 10		♦ KJ 8 7 2									
♣ A 10 7 5		♣ 4									
	♠ K 8 7										
	♥ A Q 10										
	♦ Q 4 3										
	♣ K 9 8 2										

E 4♥; S 2N; W 2♥; NS 2♣; NS 1♠; Par -300: S 4N×-2

West	North	East	South
	<i>Pete</i>		<i>Tim</i>
			1 ♣
Pass	1 ♠	Pass	1 NT
Pass	2 ♣	All Pass	

2 ♣ by South; Made 3 — NS +110

Even though, this time, opener has hearts well-stopped, it can indeed be useful to offer to play in 2 ♣, even if the opponents bid over it. Often, North would have a weaker hand for the 2 ♣ bid.

**Board 4.** My partner and I are silent. Join my opponent for this deal, in a matchpoint pairs game. It's your system and your call with the hand below:

♠ 7 2	♥ K Q J 7	♦ 5 4 3	♣ 9 6 5 2
1 ♣	1 ♥		
1 ♠	?		

Make your choice before reading on.

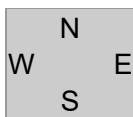
**Board 4**

West Deals

Both Vul

♠ Q 6 4  
 ♥ A 9 3 2  
 ♦ Q 9 7 2  
 ♣ J 7

♠ A 9 5 3  
 ♥ 10 5  
 ♦ A K  
 ♣ A K 8 4 3



♠ K J 10 8  
 ♥ 8 6 4  
 ♦ J 10 8 6  
 ♣ Q 10

♠ 7 2  
 ♥ K Q J 7  
 ♦ 5 4 3  
 ♣ 9 6 5 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♥
Pass	1 ♠	Pass	2 ♣
Pass	3 NT	All pass	

3 NT by North

Lead: ♥ 8

Made 5 – NS +660

Playing XYZ, South's only reasonable action over partner's 1 ♠ rebid is to bid 1 NT. South must not pass partner in a 4–2 spade fit, and 2 ♣ would be inviting game (or escaping into diamonds). Over 1 NT, North can visualize the possibility of taking as few as the five top tricks in a notrump contract. A gentle 2 NT seems plenty. With only six points, and not knowing about partner's clubs, South passes.

However, our opponent was playing standard NMF. 2 ♣ appealed to responder more than 1 NT. North visualized clubs running, for eight tricks – surely South will provide another. Suddenly optimistic, North leaped to game. To add insult to injury, even though I took the second heart trick, declarer had entries in clubs to enjoy two more hearts – making five for an 85% board. This was a system win for traditional methods.

Would you have led a spade (the fourth-best ♠ 8 is likely best, in a bid suit) and held them to three? Maybe at IMPs, but not at matchpoints. No other lead makes a difference.

**Board 8, none vul.** This is a problem deal for one-way NMF – let’s check the three methods after { 1 ♣ – 1 ♦; 1 NT }. Notice that responder’s diamond suit quality is not sufficient for an auto-splinter.

*Opener*

♠ K J 9  
♥ A Q 7  
♦ Q 6  
♣ Q 9 7 5 3

*Responder*

♠ 3  
♥ K 10  
♦ K 10 9 8 7 2  
♣ A K 4 2

*Method 1 – 3 ♣ is forcing:*

1 ♣  
1 NT  
3 NT [all suits stopped]  
== OR ==  
4 ♦ [crosswood, RKB clubs]

1 ♦  
3 ♣ [forcing]  
Pass (or 4 ♦ [RKB clubs])  
4 NT [2 without ♣ Q]

*Method 2 – 3 ♦ is forcing:*

1 ♣  
1 NT  
3 NT [all suits stopped]

1 ♦  
3 ♦ [forcing]  
Pass

*Method 3 – Stopper-reverse:*

1 ♣  
1 NT  
2 NT [black suits stopped]  
... as in auction 1

1 ♦  
2 ♥ [GF, hearts stopped]  
3 ♣ [club fit]

At the table, the cards lay so that 3 NT always made five. However, on some other layout, leaking information could have hurt. If responder has 6–3–2–2 shape, a jump to 3 NT makes more sense.

**Exercise:** Consider other possible hands for opener and responder.

**Board 17.** This online matchpoint-pairs deal raises issues with both NMF systems.

*Opener*

♠ A 8  
♥ A 5 4 3  
♦ K 8 6 2  
♣ Q 5 3

*Responder*

♠ Q J 10 9 4  
♥ J 7 2  
♦ Q 10 9 5  
♣ A

<i>Auction 1 – One-way NMF:</i>		1 ♠	
1 ♦			
1 NT	[small & balanced]	2 ♣	[NMF]
2 ♥	[may also have spades]	3 ♦	[natural & <i>it depends</i> ]
3 NT		Pass	

<i>Auction 2 – Fit-showing jump:</i>			
1 ♦		2 ♠	[5+ ♠, 4+ ♦, inv]
3 ♦	[Pass if 2 ♠ NF]	Pass	

<i>Auction 3 – Two-way NMF:</i>			
1 ♦		1 ♠	
1 NT	[small & balanced]	2 ♣	[♦/weak or any invite]
2 ♦	[required relay]	2 ♠	[5+ ♠, inv, NF]
Pass			

Auction [1] was what happened at the table. Playing method [a], NMF is our only possible way to force in diamonds below the four level (perhaps with four spades and five diamonds), so an aggressive 3 NT was reached. (On the lead of the ♥ K, declarer played RHO for the ♦ J, and came in with two tricks in each suit, plus a third diamond – lucky indeed.)

Responder's non-forcing third bids are 2 ♠ and 2 NT, both implying five spades. There is no way that responder can further the invitation in diamonds, or play there. A jump rebid of 3 ♦ (not NMF) is how we invite in diamonds.

Responder had assumed method [b] NMF, with the direct 3 ♦ forcing (and 3 ♦ after 2 om invitational). This case, which I never recognized in many decades of playing NMF, is the reason for method [b].

On this specific deal, our auction [2] is perfect: responder has five spades containing only secondary honors (plus the 9), ♦ Q-10-9-5, and mostly an ace outside. However, make the hand:

♠ Q 9 6 5 4   ♥ Q 7 2   ♦ Q 10 9 5   ♣ A

and the values are rather scattered for an FSJ, so it's not a general solution.

Two-way auction [3] is clear sailing to the expected top contract of 2 ♠. However, on the alternative hand, we still sail into 2 ♠, the only way to try for game in spades. Responder never gets to mention diamonds. Two-way NMF method [b] applies only to game-forcing hands.

## Backstory

The two-way NMF chart is largely as proposed by Brian Duran when we played this way. The expert 2 NT relay system is Gavin Wolpert's from 2007, which he reposted (plus a paragraph) on Bridge Winners in 2010.

Eddie Kantar recommended the "forcing one round" 4SF methods. Marshall Miles described similar methods in *Modern Constructive Bidding*.

In his MIT days, Jon Weinstein played the cheaper unbid suit as an artificial force over opener's rebid of their minor. I have recharacterized it as a variation of 4SF.

My survey and comparison of 11 methods is "Bridge Bidding Systems for Finding Major Suit Fits."

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Diamonds with major, invitational.** BWS includes a compromise between responding up-the-line and Walsh, where a 1 ♦ response requires only invitational values when holding a 4-card major.

<sup>2</sup> **Singleton spade permitted.** BWS includes:

*A one-notrump rebid may include a singleton in responder's [spade] suit.*

Many statements like this are often not as well thought out as well as they might be. With a singleton heart, opener will always have four spades or nine cards in the minors and thus a better rebid than 1 NT; so, 1 NT over 1 ♥ should provide two hearts – therefore I inserted [spade] above. The two examples with a singleton spade show the difficulty with requiring at least a doubleton in responder's suit. Playing this way, responder should have a six-card suit, or a chunky five, to rebid their spades over 1 NT.

<sup>3</sup> **Further NMF alternatives.** Novice and intermediate players may play natural continuations, but any of the systems with artificial bids work better than that. Some strong players from yesteryear preferred to play a single artificial continuation of 2 ♣: checkback Stayman. Two-way is also played with 2 ♣ checkback. Sometimes transfers are in the mix.

Because I want to be able simply to bid two of opener's minor, especially clubs, I strongly prefer standard NMF – see Boards 2 & 4, above.

<sup>4</sup> **Transfer responses to 1 ♣** change the picture substantially. People play multiple variations. The 1 ♦ opening shows an unbalanced hand with at least four diamonds; 5–3–3–2 hands with five diamonds are either included or opened 1 ♣.



Over the 1 ♣ opening, which includes all balanced opening bids weaker than 1 NT, 1 ♦ and 1 ♥ are each a transfer to the major suit above. In Ron Beall's Toucan Club system, opener completes the transfer with exactly 3-card support; otherwise, 1 NT is available with a balanced hand.

In a superior plan, opener completes the transfer with a balanced minimum, showing 2- or 3-card support. Opener's break to 1 NT shows 17 to 19 HCP, avoiding a jump to 2 NT. Opener may have bid a 2-card club suit; this plan lets responder rescue opener with a 5-card major in a bad hand.

The 1 ♠ response shows a balanced hand, either minor suit or both, usually with less than invitational values. These methods provide substantial value, and we are still below 1 NT.

A quick grab for more value is to play that 1 NT shows an invitational balanced hand, about 11 to 12 HCP. Then 2 NT is forcing with 13 to 15 or 19+ (planning 4 NT next), and 3 NT is 16 to 18. With this, 2 ♣ and 2 ♦ are natural, forcing responses showing at least invitational values.

A more complex approach uses 1 NT through 2 ♥ as transfers to the suit above, and 2 ♠ as a mixed club raise with 6-card support. In either plan, a jump response of 3 ♣ is weak with 6-card support. Stewart Rubenstein and I have played this superior plan, with opener's break to 1 NT as 17 to 19.

<sup>5</sup> **4SF in spades.** A common agreement, after { 1 ♣ – 1 ♦; 1 ♥ – ? } is that 1 ♠ is natural, and 2 ♠ is 4SF. This does not make sense when playing Walsh, but might when bidding suits up the line.

## Fragment Spiral

Consider these hands, on which we open the bidding with 1  $\diamond$ :

- a.  $\spadesuit$  K J 3    $\heartsuit$  9 4    $\diamond$  A 10 9 7 5    $\clubsuit$  K Q 4
- b.  $\spadesuit$  K J 3    $\heartsuit$  9    $\diamond$  A 10 9 7 5 4    $\clubsuit$  K Q 4
- c.  $\spadesuit$  K J 3    $\heartsuit$  9    $\diamond$  A 10 9 7 5    $\clubsuit$  K Q 8 4
- d.  $\spadesuit$  K J 3    $\heartsuit$  9 4    $\diamond$  A K 10 9 7 5    $\clubsuit$  J 4

We are ready for a 1  $\heartsuit$  response with 1 NT, 2  $\diamond$ , 2  $\clubsuit$ , and 2  $\diamond$ , respectively; but partner surprises us with 1  $\spadesuit$ . If our partnership insists that a raise to 2  $\spadesuit$  promises 4-card support, we can be in a bad place, especially on hand [a].

Most advanced partnerships would raise to 2  $\spadesuit$  on the first three of these hands. Playing in spades, partner can ruff a heart in the short-trump hand (ours), controlling the play and likely producing an extra trick.

On hand [a], a 1 NT rebid and contract will probably catch a heart lead through partner's meager holding there. A rebid of 2  $\diamond$  should provide a six-card suit; sometimes a chunky five has to suffice, but this suit does not cut it.

On hands [b] and [c], the natural 2  $\diamond$  or 2  $\clubsuit$  rebid may well end the auction with a 5-3 spade fit available. Those rebids by opener may be made with a singleton or void in spades, so responder needs at least a six-card suit to repeat spades, and a decent hand, too.

On hand [d], rebid 2  $\diamond$  not 2  $\spadesuit$ . This will assure that we get to enjoy the length of this fine suit. We'll see that a raise could be a problem.

**Basic spiral raises.** When opener raises responder's major, in many partnerships, responder bids 2 NT to inquire, and opener responds in steps, easily described as 3-3-4-4:

- |                |                                |         |
|----------------|--------------------------------|---------|
| 3 $\clubsuit$  | 3-card support, minimum values | [3-min] |
| 3 $\diamond$   | 3-card support, maximum values | [3-max] |
| 3 $\heartsuit$ | 4-card support, minimum values | [4-min] |
| 3 $\spadesuit$ | 4-card support, maximum values | [4-max] |

This useful scheme has defects that we'll explore later.

## Fragment Spiral Overview

Fragment spiral applies when minor-suit opener may have raised responder's major suit with only 3-card support:

1 m – 1 M; 2 M – ?

When holding a hand worth moving forward, responder needs tools to sort out the eventual level and strain.

Opener should have a weak shortness to make a 3-card raise: a singleton, void or weak doubleton. The best permissible holding in the short suit should be J-x.  $\diamond^1$  Q-x or three small is deemed suitable for a rebid of 1 NT.

When holding *exactly 4-card support*, responder uses one of these three bids:

- 2 M+1 The *fragment spiral* inquiry is the next bid, made with a hand not suitable for either 2 NT (over 2  $\heartsuit$ ) or 3 NT.
- 2 NT [hearts raised] A one-round force, responder shows four spades and four hearts. (Only when slamming, should responder have more hearts.)
- 3 NT [or more NT] Responder has game values with both unbid suits securely stopped. Opener converts to four of the major when appropriate. We'll see it can be crucial *not* to use the fragment spiral inquiry on this hand. 4 NT is not RKB – set trump first!

**Other bids.** All other bids by responder promise *five cards in the major*. All except three of the major suit are forcing. Continuations after these are standard.

**Competition.** Fragment spiral does not apply in competition. If an opponent intervenes after opener's raise, responder's double or redouble shows interest in game with a 4-card major. A new suit is a forcing game try, somewhat natural if possible, showing at least five cards in the major. Three of opener's minor or the major is competitive, with four or five cards, respectively, in the major.

If they bid over our spiral inquiry, opener doubles with three of our major and shortness in an unbid suit, which suggests defending.

## Fragment Spiral Inquiry

The next step is the spiral inquiry (2 ♠ over hearts, 2 NT over spades), and the next *five* bids are the primary responses.

Starting at the top, 3 M+1 (or higher) shows a 4-max, clearly forcing to game. 3 M shows a 4-min, and 3 m shows a 3-min, either of which may be passed. The other two bids show a 3-max, again non-forcing, with a *fragment* in the bid suit (2 NT = spades): A-x, K-x, or any three or more cards in the suit.

O3	R3	<b>Spiral Inquiry: 1 m – 1 M; 2 M – 2 M+1; ?</b>
3 m	[3-min]	Responder's choices:
	Pass	With 4-card support, likely best to play here.
	3 ♦	Over 3 ♣, an offer to play with 5+ cards. Opener passes or bids 3 M.
	3 M	To play.
	3 oM	The other major is stopped. Asks for 3NT with the other minor stopped. [Principle: with two suits in doubt, bid what you have.]
	3 NT	The other minor is stopped, but not oM. Disaster looms if you forgot to jump to 3 NT, instead of bidding 2 M+1.
3 M	[4-min]	Bidding the major is non-forcing. Otherwise, both partners continue as after 3 M+1.
3 M+1	[4-max]	The next step after three of the major (3 ♠ or 3 NT) forces to game. Both partners continue:
	4 M	No slam interest.
	3 NT	Control-bid, first- or second-round control in the other major, usually spades.
	Other	The cheapest first- or second-round control.
3 om	[3-max]	The other minor shows a fragment in the bid suit (weak shortness in the other major). Over 3 ♦, 4 ♣ is to play!
2 NT or 3 ♥	[3-max]	The other bid below 3 M shows a fragment in the other major: when hearts were raised, 2 NT shows a fragment in spades. When spades were raised, 3 ♥ shows a fragment in hearts.
Higher	[4-max]	singleton/void (splinter) or 5-4-2-2.

**6-3-2-2 (no fragment).** With 6-3-2-2 and no ace or king in a side suit, opener should rebid the minor, not raise. It is unlikely that responder can draw trump in a 4-3 fit, and then enjoy the long minor. If opener forgets with a maximum, the best chance is to bid 3 m, showing a 3-min instead. If responder bids over that, we must not play in notrump, because one suit is unstopped (responder did not jump to 3 NT).

## 2 NT Shows Spades over 2 ♥

Consider this auction:

1 m – 1 ♥; 1 ♠ – 1 NT; 2 ♥

Clearly, opener has four spades, three hearts, at least four in the minor, and shortness in the other minor. We play that this sequence by opener shows extra strength. ♦<sup>2</sup> With a modest opening hand, we skip spades and make the 3-card raise to 2 ♥ immediately.

Accordingly, on this auction:

1 m – 1 ♥; 2 ♥

responder needs to check for spades, when trying for game. Since 2 ♠ is the spiral inquiry, we use 2 NT as a one-round force showing four spades. Responder may have more hearts when trying for slam, but otherwise should be exactly 4-4. With five hearts, we either have nine, or eight with a ruffing value in the short hand – let's not tell the opponents about our spades!

After responder's spade-showing 2 NT, we bid as naturally as possible. With 4-card support for either major, opener bids it at the three or four level. Opener's only forcing bid is three of the other minor, which denies a stopper in the suit.

### Examples – for { 1 ♣ – 1 ♥; 2 ♥ – ? }:

1. ♠ A 8 ♥ KJ 9 6 4 ♦ 10 5 ♣ Q 8 4

Bid 3 ♣, forcing, promising both clubs and five hearts.

2. ♠ A 9 8 ♥ KJ 9 4 ♦ Q 10 5 ♣ QJ 4

Bid 3 NT – both side suits are stopped!

3. ♠ A 9 8 3 ♥ K J 9 4 ♦ 10 5 ♣ Q 8 4

Bid 2 NT, showing four spades!

4. ♠ A 8 ♥ K J 9 4 ♦ 10 5 3 ♣ Q 8 4 2

At last, a spiral inquiry – bid 2 ♠.

- Opener's 2 NT shows a 3-max with a spade fragment. Bid 3 ♥ at matchpoints; diamonds are wide open, but we can ruff one in the short hand. At IMPs, go for the safer 3 ♣ when not vulnerable; vulnerable, go for the brass ring at 4 ♥, perhaps a 40% game.
- Opener's 3 ♣ shows a 3-min. We have a clear pass.
- Opener's 3 ♦ shows a 3-max with a diamond fragment. (The opponents have at least nine spades.) Bid 3 ♥ and hope for the best.
- We pass opener's 3 ♥ [4-min] and bid 4 ♥ over 3 ♠ [4-max].

5. ♠ Q 8 ♥ K J 9 4 ♦ K Q 10 5 3 ♣ 8 4

Bid 2 ♠.

- Opener's 2 NT shows a 3-max with a spade fragment, so we do not have much of a diamond fit. Bid 3 NT, especially vulnerable at IMPs, or sign off in 3 ♥ at matchpoints – likely a good board, no need to bid game.
- Opener's 3 ♣ shows a 3-min. Offer to play 3 ♦. Opener may convert to 3 ♥.
- Opener's 3 ♦ shows a 3-max with a diamond fragment. Spades are wide open – pass!

6. ♠ K 8 ♥ A Q 10 4 ♦ A K 10 3 ♣ K 8 4

Bid 2 ♠.

- Opener's 2 NT shows a 3-max with a spade fragment. Our 19 HCP plus opener's 14 or so is enough for slam on power. Partner could have a singleton ♣ Q, but otherwise 6 NT by partner is at best 50%. Stick it in 6 ♥!

- b. Opener's 3 ♣ shows a 3-min. Bid 3 NT, which says diamonds are stopped. If opener's short suit is spades, opener will pull and we'll play 4 ♥, which should be fine.
- c. Opener's 3 ♦ shows a 3-max with a diamond fragment. Bid 6 NT on this deal, protecting the ♠ K. Maybe they will lead a club, and we might run the table without a spade trick; or the ace may be onside.
- d. Opener's 3 ♥ shows a 4-min. Bid 3 ♠ to show a spade control with interest in slam. If opener encourages, slam is possible.
- e. Opener's 3 ♠ shows a 4-max. Ask for keycards, and bid the slam. If we have them all, ask for kings, since opener may have a concealed source of tricks and bid a grand slam. Otherwise, at matchpoints, choose 6 ♥ because an overtrick is possible; with a keycard missing, or at IMPs, choose 6 NT.

## Key Features

After opener raises responder's major suit to the two level, when opener has an invitational hand or better with *four* cards in the major:

- With a 4-card major, game values, and stoppers in both unbid suits, responder *must* jump to 3 NT. Responder's 3 NT after getting a 3-min response denies a stopper in the other major.
- 2 NT over 2 ♥ shows spades, and must be bid with a hand containing 4-4 majors.
- The next step (2 ♠ or 2 NT) is the spiral inquiry: 3 M+1 and 3 M show 4-max and 4-min, respectively; 3 m shows a 3-min; the other two bids show a fragment in a 3-max.

All other bids below 3 NT are natural, forcing to 3 M, and promise five cards in the major.

## Backstory

The main problems with basic spiral are:

- Partners usually begin and end the discussion with "3-3-4-4," which is clearly insufficient.

- There are not always enough bids to sort out a 3-max below three of the major, let alone 3 NT.

Look at auctions for this responding hand:

♠ 8762 ♥ 65 ♦ K4 ♣ A Q J 7 5

<p>Basic Spiral</p> <p>1 ♣ – 1 ♠  2 ♠ – 2 NT  3 ♣ [3-min] – ?</p> <p>An easy, fortunate pass.</p> <p>1 ♣ – 1 ♠  2 ♠ – 2 NT  3 ♦ [3-max] – ?</p> <p>OOPS! Hope opener lets us play 4 ♣; guess 3 NT (are hearts stopped?); play three yucky spades; or don't try for game in the first place.</p>	<p>Fragment Spiral</p> <p>1 ♣ – 1 ♠  2 ♠ – 2 NT  3 ♣ [3-min] – ?</p> <p>Pass, to play.</p> <p>1 ♣ – 1 ♠  2 ♠ – 2 NT  3 ♦ [3-max, ♦ frag] – ?</p> <p>Bid 4 ♣, to play, with at least a 5–4 fit and hearts wide open.</p> <p>1 ♣ – 1 ♠  2 ♠ – 2 NT  3 ♥ [3-max, ♥ fragment] – ?</p> <p>Bid 3 NT and hope the ♦ K scores, or bid 4 ♣, to play.</p>
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For lots of details and a comparison of many methods, see my article “Fragment Spiral.”

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Small doubleton.** World Grand Master Steve Weinstein writes that a weak doubleton should be no better than 9-x. Go with the pro, but you won't get as many chances to test fragment spiral!

<sup>2</sup> **Always show spades.** Considering this auction again:

1 m – 1 ♥; 1 ♠ – 1 NT; 2 ♥

Some partnerships always bid spades, and the delayed 2 ♥ just gets responder out of 1 NT. That may be better when it comes up, but the big hand gets hard to bid.



## Inverted Minor Raises

The opening bid in a minor suit could be made on three cards: with 4-4 majors in either minor, or with 4-3-3-3 at 1 ♣.

We play inverted minor raises, which conserve bidding space when needed to explore for the correct contract, destroy bidding space for the opponents on weak hands, and use higher bids effectively. All these responses deny holding a 4-card major suit:

1. The single raise of a minor-suit opening bid by an unpassed hand is forcing. It shows values to at least invite game, described as limit raise or better (LR+). The 2 ♣ raise usually provides at least 5-card support, because we can respond 1 ♦, with only four clubs. The raise to 2 ♦ is sometimes made on four cards, but opener is likely to also have four.
2. The jump raise of a minor suit promises at least 5-card support and insufficient values for a single raise. Because opener will bid 3 NT on a balanced hand with 18–19 HCP, responder should have sufficient values for declarer to have a play for that contract (or possibly four of the minor).
3. The double-jump raise, to four of a minor, shows more shape and length, but insufficient values for a contract of 3 NT.
4. A double jump shift response (3 ♦, 3 ♥, 3 ♠ or 4 ♣) is a *slam* splinter: a singleton or void in the bid suit, 5+ card support, and 15+ HCP – slam values, with small cards opposite.
5. A jump into a suit above four of the minor suit is exclusion keycard Blackwood (EKB), which we'll learn about later.

Both of the plans below originally included opener's 3 ♣ being a splinter, after { 1 ♦ – 2 ♦ }. Plan A is shown with the splinter, and plan B with a useful, natural 3 ♣. While superior when it comes up, the non-jump 3 ♣ splinter might be messed up at the table.

With three unbid suits, a splinter pinpoints the main issue for notrump or slam immediately. Be alert to the possibility of playing in a 4-3 major-suit fit when 3 NT is unattractive. Specifically, if hearts have been bid, 4 ♥ becomes an offer to play, not a keycard ask.

## □ Plan A – Single Raise Forcing to 3 of the Minor

The objectives are to stop at three of the minor when both partners are minimum; declare 3 NT from the right side; avoid 3 NT when the opponents have five fast tricks; and get to good slams – all aided by showing shortness.

O2	Single Raise Forcing to 3 of the Minor
2 ♠, 2 ♥, 2 ♣	Natural, often the cheapest stopper. Over this, responder's new suit also shows a stopper.
2 NT	Natural, not a bare minimum. With a balanced hand, responder will usually raise to 3 NT or try to sign off at three of the minor suit.
3 ♣	[over 2 ♠] Splinter (0-1 clubs), 15+ HCP. ♠ <sup>1</sup>
3 m	No major-suit stopper, non-forcing.
3 ♠	[over 2 ♣] Splinter (0-1 diamonds), 15+ HCP.
3 ♥, 3 ♣	[JS] Splinter (0-1 cards in bid suit), 15+ HCP.
3 NT	Balanced, 18-19 HCP, only three cards in the minor.
4 om	Crosswood, asking for keycards in the minor.
4 ♠	[over 2 ♠] EKB, ♣ void [we have a splinter at 3 ♣].
4 ♣	[over 2 ♣] EKB, ♠ void [we have a splinter at 3 ♠].
4 ♥, 4 ♣	EKB, asks for keycards excluding the void suit (bid).

## □ Plan B – Single Raise Forcing to 2 NT or 3 of the Minor

O2	Single Raise Forcing to 2 NT or 3 m
2 ♠, 2 ♥, 2 ♣	Cheapest stopper. Could be a hand otherwise suitable for 2 NT, but with game values.
2 NT	Minimum balanced hand, both majors stopped, NF.
3 ♣	[over 2 ♠] Natural, forcing, maybe 5-4 either way. ♠ <sup>1</sup>
3 m	No major-suit stopper, non-forcing.
3 ♠	[over 2 ♣] Splinter (0-1 diamonds), 15+ HCP.
3 ♥, 3 ♣	[JS] Splinter (0-1 cards in bid suit), 15+ HCP.
3 NT	Balanced, 18-19 HCP, only three cards in the minor.
4 om	Crosswood, asking for keycards in the minor.
4 ♠	[over 2 ♠] Splinter in <i>clubs</i> , with 15+ HCP.
4 ♣	[over 2 ♣] EKB, ♠ void [we have a splinter at 3 ♠].
4 ♥, 4 ♣	EKB, asks for keycards excluding the void suit (bid).

With this plan, opener's rebid of 2 NT or three of the minor suit is not forcing, so with 14+ HCP or a good 13, opener must not make one of those bids. Even with both majors stopped, opener should bid a major suit when holding a balanced hand with game values.

Playing either plan, holding a singleton or void in a minimum opening hand, opener should try to bid the other three suits, thereby implying shortness in the fourth.

**Example – routine, when forced to 2 NT or 3 m:**

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ Q 10 7	♠ K 9 3
♥ A Q 4 2	♥ J 9
♦ A 9 8 7	♦ Q 10 6 4
♣ Q 5	♣ A J 10 2
1 ♦	2 ♦ <sup>1</sup>
2 ♥ <sup>2</sup>	2 NT <sup>3</sup>
3 NT <sup>4</sup>	Pass

1. Responder would prefer to have a fifth diamond for the LR+ raise; but 1 NT denies this strength, 2 ♣ requires more strength, and 2 NT is unacceptable without a heart stopper. Swap the minor-suit holdings in each hand, and the response to 1 ♣ would be 1 ♦, not 2 ♣.
2. Opener has game values and thus must not bid a non-forcing 2 NT. Opener marks time at 2 ♥, which does not deny a spade stopper.
3. Responder shows a minimum (LR) balanced hand with black stoppers.
4. Having catered to the possibility of responder's hand being unbalanced (possibly with slam interest), opener bids the obvious game.

Weaken opener's hand by removing the ♥ Q or ♣ Q, and opener would rebid 2 NT (non-forcing) instead of 2 ♥. Because responder has denied a major suit, and is likely to have club length, stopping both majors is more important to describe than the presence or lack of a club stopper.

Strengthen responder's hand by turning the ♡ J into the ♡ K, and the initial response would be 3 NT, avoiding the 4-card raise with stoppers all around. In modern standard bidding, this is an obnoxious but common bid with a balanced game-only hand, all suits stopped, and lacking a major suit.

Similarly, immediately respond 2 NT (invitational) to 1 ♢ on any of these hands:

♠ K 9 3  
 ♡ K 9  
 ♢ Q 10 6 4  
 ♣ Q J 10 2

♠ K 9 3  
 ♡ K 9  
 ♢ Q 10 6 4 2  
 ♣ Q J 10

♠ K 9 3  
 ♡ K 9  
 ♢ Q 10 6  
 ♣ Q J 10 4 2

**Exercise:** Bid the example deal above with Plan A (forcing to 3 m).

## Interference

If an opponent acts over the minor-suit opening bid, systems are off. We cue-bid the overcall suit to show a limit raise or better hand; we use the standard Jordan 2 NT (or equivalent) over a takeout double to show a LR+ hand.

If they double the LR+ single raise, redouble shows extras and suggests defending; otherwise, the systems are on. Pass with a balanced hand that might want to be dummy.

If they overcall our LR+, doubles are penalty; otherwise, we play natural bids, splinter jumps, etc. Opener's cue-bid shows shortness, but bidding may still stop at four of the minor suit.

## Poll Results

*Plan A – Forcing to three of the minor.* In a poll on Bridge Winners in 2014, 31% preferred this option. Overall bidding accuracy may be improved by having 2 NT be forcing. This method is better at IMP scoring, where having to play three of the minor instead of 2 NT may cost little or nothing. This plan is in BWS.

*Plan B – Forcing to 2 NT or three of the minor.* 48% responded that they prefer this option, which has a long history. This option may be better at matchpoints, where 2 NT will often score higher.

6% preferred plan A at IMPs and plan B at matchpoints; others prefer something else.  $\diamond^2$

## Backstory

This topic is a revision of my article, “Inverted Minor Raises.” Plan A has been produced from the “Inverted Minors” article on Bridge Winners by Steve Weinstein and Adam Parrish; the article has key details. Eric Rodwell lays out the same plan in his *Bidding Topics*; he says it’s easier to play, if 2 NT is forcing, and responder’s major suit over 2 NT should show shortness. Plan B is based on the writing of Max Hardy, originating in 1989 or earlier. It works well and is easy to describe.

## $\diamond$ Alternative Methods

$^1 3 \clubsuit$  splinter over 2  $\clubsuit$ . Hardy wrote to play 3  $\clubsuit$  as a splinter, as Weinstein/Parrish do, but we find it quite handy as a natural bid.

## $^2$ Options

**Single raise forcing to game.** Some play the jump shift in the other minor as a limit raise, known as criss-cross raises. After having multiple auctions founder, we stopped playing it. Also, when the auction { 1  $\diamond$  – 2  $\clubsuit$  } is forcing to game, we need { 1  $\diamond$  – 3  $\clubsuit$  } to be invitational with a good suit.

Rodwell suggests playing responder’s jump shift to 2  $\heartsuit$  as the limit raise. This makes sense, if you don’t want the bid for something else. Rodwell also suggests that responder’s jump 2  $\spadesuit$  response can be played as a mixed raise: not strong enough for a single raise, but enough values to support opener’s 3 NT bid on 18–19 balanced. When playing this way, the jump raise to three of the minor does not promise much of anything, and opener seldom moves toward game over that raise. Mel’s minors (below) expand these ideas.

**4-Card major.** Some pairs permit responder to have a 4-card major for the single raise, along with 6-card support and/or slam interest. This would be more controllable if the single raise were forcing to game. I am prepared to field this with Andrew, who plays this way, but I have never done this myself. I found a mention of such a scheme on Bridge Winners; Rodwell says Bob Hamman’s scheme for including a 4-card major was very complicated.

Also, responder may choose to suppress a weak 4-card major when determined to play, probably below game, in a long diamond suit.

**Mel's minors.** This alternative uses a standard single raise and the next four bids as raises, in steps, skipping over a natural 2 NT:

- 1 forcing
- 2 invitational
- 3 mixed
- 4 weak

**Passed hand.** Without discussion, inverted minors apply in all seats. However, Marshall Miles recommended that they not apply to a passed hand. He wrote that some hands are hard to bid when playing inverted minors; and many of the advantages of inverted raises disappear, but the problems remain, for a passed hand. From a poll on Bridge Winners, 80% of respondents play inverted minors as a passed hand, as do my other sources.

**Jump to 3 NT.** Some folks who play plan B reportedly require opener to jump to 3 NT with a 14-point balanced hand; with 18–19, opener bids 4 NT. Both bids waste an essential level of bidding, when responder has an unbalanced hand with slam interest. As we've seen, we don't play this way.

In contrast, Rodwell recommends that opener's jump to 3 NT be made with 18–19 balanced, but only with three cards in the raised minor, or a poor hand for slam. Steve Weinstein further restricts this jump to 18 HCP and three cards.

## Opener's Reverse: Lebensohl

Opener's reverse is a non-jump rebid at the two level in a suit higher than the original. Because responder's preference for opener's first suit would be at the three level, a reverse requires extra strength.

**Reverse over 1 NT.** When the response was 1 NT, responder's hand is limited. There are six possible such reverse sequences:

1 ♣ – 1 NT; 2 ♦	1 ♦ – 1 NT; 2 ♥	1 ♥ – 1 NT; 2 ♠
1 ♣ – 1 NT; 2 ♥	1 ♦ – 1 NT; 2 ♠	
1 ♣ – 1 NT; 2 ♠		

We have no exceptions – continuations after all six of these reverses follow the same rules, which are BWS:

- Opener's reverse is forcing, and
- Responder's bid of 2 NT, three of opener's first suit, or a bid in between is non-forcing. Anything else is forcing to game.

**Reverse over one of a suit.** When the response was one of a suit, responder's hand is unlimited, but could be very weak. Without agreements, these situations may work out poorly.

After a response in one of a suit, the four possible strong reverse sequences should be about equally likely:

<i>into diamonds</i>	<i>into hearts</i>
1 ♣ – 1 ♥; 2 ♦	1 ♣ – 1 ♠; 2 ♥
1 ♣ – 1 ♠; 2 ♦	1 ♦ – 1 ♠; 2 ♥

We'll tackle these in two groups, by opener's second bid. The methods within each group are highly similar, but methods differ across groups. First, a decision:

**Plan A – Opener's reverse promises a rebid below game.**

Without agreement to the contrary, this is BWS and definitely the default.

**Plan B – Opener may pass only two of responder's major.**

**Plan C – Opener may pass only lebensohl 2 NT.**

*The remainder of this topic assumes agreement to Plan B.*

## Opener's Reverse into Hearts

Let's consider this auction:

1 m	1 ♠
2 ♥	?

Opener's 2 ♥ is a reverse, showing at least five diamonds, fewer but at least four hearts, and 16 or more points. Responder's choices are:

R2	O3	R3	After the reverse: 1 m – 1 ♠; 2 ♥ – ?
Pass	A terrible hand. ♦ <sup>1</sup>		
2 ♠	Up to a bad 8 HCP, 5+ spades (non-forcing). ♦ <sup>2</sup>		
2 NT	Lebensohl: forcing, responder asks opener to bid 3 ♣.		
	3 ♣	Nothing more to say.	
		Pass	to play.
		3 ♦, 3 ♥	to play.
		3 ♠	natural game force.
	3 ♦	[♦ opened] Short clubs and chunky diamonds – to play 3 ♦, if responder intended to pass 3 ♣.	
	3 ♥	Five hearts and six in the minor, non-forcing.	
	Other	Natural and forcing to game.	
3 om	The 4 <sup>th</sup> suit is natural, constructive and game-forcing.		
3 m, 3 ♥	Natural game force, responder's strongest possible bid.		
3 NT	Natural, with both om and spades well-stopped.		
<i>A basis for discussion:</i>			
3 ♠	Natural and forcing, suit playable opposite a singleton.		
4 om	Splinter: singleton or void in the bid suit, with 4-card heart support (and therefore, more spades).		
4 m, 4 ♥	Natural and distributional.		
4 ♠	Natural and distributional.		

Never reverse into a 3-card major suit, which could turn partner into a third opponent.

### Examples 1–5:

We continue with this specific auction:

1 ♦ – 1 ♠;	2 ♥ – ?
------------	---------

Consider these hands for responder:



- a. ♠ K 9 8 7 ♥ 7 5 2 ♦ 3 ♣ Q J 7 3 2 [Pass, plus score?]
- b. ♠ K 9 8 7 2 ♥ 7 5 2 ♦ 3 ♣ Q J 3 2 [2 ♠, non-forcing]
- c. ♠ K 9 8 7 ♥ 7 5 2 ♦ 3 2 ♣ Q J 7 3 [2 NT, intend 3 ♦]
- d. ♠ K 9 8 7 ♥ 7 5 2 ♦ K 3 2 ♣ Q J 3 [2 NT, intend 3 NT]

Now consider these hands for opener, opposite the above:

- 1. ♠ Q 5 ♥ A K 6 3 ♦ A Q J 9 8 ♣ 10 5

Opener's hand [1] is too strong to open 1 ♦ and rebid 2 ♦, and too shapely to open 1 NT. ♦<sup>3</sup> When responder [a] passes the reverse, we are plenty high – what a terrible fit. We pass the 2 ♠ rebid of responder [b].

When responder bids 2 NT, we have nothing to add and thus bid 3 ♣. Responder [c] bids 3 ♦, to play, having kept the auction alive for a round. Responder [d] bids 3 NT, perhaps a difficult contract, since opener [1] has a minimum reverse.

- 2. ♠ 5 ♥ A K 6 3 ♦ A Q J 9 8 ♣ K 5 4

Hand [2] is a garden-variety reverse, with its 5-4-3-1 shape. When responder [a] passes, we are OK. Although a 3 ♣ contract would be safer, it's risky for responder to try for it, as opener could be short in the suit.

Over 2 ♠ by responder [b], we bid and play 2 NT.

When responder bids 2 NT, we have nothing to add and thus bid 3 ♣. On hand [c], responder bids 3 ♦, to play. On hand [d], responder bids 3 NT, a reasonable contract.

- 3. ♠ Q 5 4 ♥ A K 6 3 ♦ A Q J 9 8 ♣ 5

Hand [3] is identical to [2], with the black suits flipped. When responder passes on hand [a], this is the last chance for a decent score, which may not be plus. We cannot get to 2 ♠ because that bid by responder shows five cards. If responder were to try 2 NT on hand [a], we play 3 ♦ in a 5-1 fit, as noted below.

We bump the 2 ♠ of responder [b] to 3 ♠, but responder passes with wasted club values.

When responder bids 2 NT, we cannot stand clubs and bid 3  $\diamond$ ; we would prefer a 6-card suit for this. Opener is not strong enough to bid 3  $\spadesuit$ . Responder [c] passes 3  $\diamond$ . Warned of club shortness, responder [d] should pass 3  $\diamond$  as well; 3 NT goes down on a club lead.

4.  $\spadesuit$  A Q 4  $\heartsuit$  A K 6 3  $\diamond$  A Q J 9 8  $\clubsuit$  5

Hand [4] is the same hand as [3], but an ace better. A 4-3 major-suit fit will be no picnic in game, so we are still OK when responder passes on hand [a]. If we had all this, plus the  $\heartsuit$  Q, we might have missed a game.

Over the non-forcing 2  $\spadesuit$  of responder [b], we jump to 4  $\spadesuit$ , expecting a good play for game, but little chance for slam.

When responder bids 2 NT, we cannot stand clubs, but are now strong enough to bid 3  $\spadesuit$ . On hand [c], responder should pass 3  $\spadesuit$  – the clubs are wasted, and going plus should be fine. On hand [d], a single club stop should be enough, so responder bids 3 NT. Turn the  $\clubsuit$  Q into the  $\heartsuit$  Q, and responder instead pushes on to 4  $\spadesuit$ , planning to ruff clubs in the short hand.

5.  $\spadesuit$  4  $\heartsuit$  A K 7 6 3  $\diamond$  A Q J 9 8 6  $\clubsuit$  5

Opener [5] reverses on this ostensibly 4-loser hand, planning to bid hearts again. When responder passes on hand [a], we are still OK: 4  $\heartsuit$  would be worse than 50%. Change a black card into an ace (3 losers): after opening 2  $\clubsuit$ , bid 3  $\diamond$ , and then 4  $\heartsuit$ .

**Example 6** – “The Bidding Box” (2), May 2023 *Bulletin*:

1  $\clubsuit$       1  $\spadesuit$   
2  $\heartsuit$     ?

$\spadesuit$  J 9 4 3  $\heartsuit$  10 5 2  $\diamond$  10 9 7 3  $\clubsuit$  A 5

Bid 2 NT, lebensohl, planning to pass partner’s 3  $\clubsuit$ . That contract should be playable. Passing the reverse is an emergency action, when this might be the last available positive score. Save that for an aceless 6-count with  $\heartsuit$  x-x-x  $\clubsuit$  x, as in hand [a] above.

In the competition, responder passed; 4  $\heartsuit$  would be a fine contract:

$\spadesuit$  8  $\heartsuit$  A K J 9 6  $\diamond$  4  $\clubsuit$  K J 8 7 4 3

## Reverse into Diamonds – 4<sup>th</sup> Suit Lebensohl

Only after the reverse to 2 ♠ is the fourth suit available to responder at the two level. We use this as the waiting bid. ♠<sup>4</sup> This has the advantage that 2 NT by either partner shows a stopper in the fourth suit, likely right-siding the contract. Let's consider this auction:

1 ♣	1 M
2 ♠	?

Opener's 2 ♠ is a reverse, showing at least five clubs, fewer diamonds (could be a chunky three), and 16 or more points. Responder's bids:

R2	O3	R3	<b>After the reverse: 1 ♣ – 1 M; 2 ♠ – ?</b>
Pass	We don't pass this reverse – it might not be a suit!		
2 M	Up to a bad 8 HCP, 5+ cards (non-forcing). ♠ <sup>2</sup>		
2 oM	Lebensohl: responder asks opener to bid 3 ♣.		
	2 ♠	(2 ♥ is 4 <sup>th</sup> ) 3-card spade support, non-forcing.	
		2 NT	Natural, non-forcing, bad spades.
	2 NT	Natural, non-forcing.	
	3 ♣	Nothing more to say.	
		Pass	to play.
		3 ♠	to play.
		Other	natural, constructive and game-forcing.
		3 ♠	Five diamonds and six clubs, non-forcing.
	Other	Natural and forcing to game.	
2 NT	Natural, forcing to game.		
3 ♣, 3 ♠	Natural game force, responder's strongest possible bid.		
3 NT	Natural, with both om and spades well-stopped.		
<i>A basis for discussion:</i>			
3 M	Natural & forcing, a suit playable opposite a singleton.		
4 ♣, 4 ♠	Natural and distributional.		
4 M	Natural and distributional.		

After opening 1 ♣, opener's reverse to 2 ♠ might be a chunky fragment, so we don't pass this reverse. 2 ♠ might be opener's best route to 3 NT, for example, with eight tricks in hand:

♠ 9 5   ♥ 7 2   ♦ A K 3   ♣ A K Q J 7 2

**Example 7** – “The Bidding Box” (1), March 2023 *Bulletin*:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ K J	♠ 9 8 6
♥ 6 5	♥ Q 9 7 4 3
♦ K J 4 3	♦ A Q
♣ A K Q 9 4	♣ 6 3 2
1 ♣	1 ♥
2 ♦ [reverse]	2 ♥ [max for non-forcing]
2 NT [right shape to pass, but might be too strong]	3 NT [glad to accept]

As responder, our eight HCP are borderline game values, so a 3 ♣ rebid is inappropriate. If opener chooses to pass 2 ♥ with 16 HCP and a doubleton heart, we’ll be high enough. This works out to our advantage, because over 2 NT, we are proud to bid 3 NT on our max.

**Example 8** – “The Bidding Box” (5), January 2020 *Bulletin*:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ A K 5	♠ 10 8 3
♥ Q	♥ K J 10 8 5 2
♦ K Q 6 2	♦ A J 9
♣ A Q J 7 4	♣ 2
1 ♣	1 ♥
2 ♦ [reverse]	3 ♥ [plays opposite singleton]
3 ♠ [1 <sup>st</sup> or 2 <sup>nd</sup> round control]	4 ♦ [control, denies ♣ A or K]
4 NT [RKB ♥]	5 ♥ [2 without]
6 ♥	

Because responder’s 2 ♥ rebid might be passed, the choice is between an immediate 3 ♥ (offering to play opposite a small singleton) and 2 NT followed by 3 ♥ (forcing to game, but a lesser 5- or 6-card suit).

Hearts are trump here unless opener insists on a minor by bidding one (or an immediate 3 NT). Opener’s 3 ♠ cannot be an offer to play spades, so it’s a control-bid in support of hearts. Serious 3 NT applies – a major suit has been agreed at the three level in a game-forcing auction. While responder has a nice hand, it’s not worth a serious slam try over a reverse that might be as few as 16 HCP – so

responder's 4  $\diamond$  is a courtesy control-bid. Recognizing gold in the  $\heartsuit$  Q, opener drives to slam. There is no way to know about the  $\diamond$  J, which makes 6 NT by opener the top contract.

## Key Features

- Opener's reverse over a 1 NT response is forcing. Responder's bid of 2 NT, three of opener's first suit, or a bid in between is non-forcing. Anything else is forcing to game.
- Opener's reverse over one of a suit is into 2  $\heartsuit$  or 2  $\diamond$ .
- Decision: Does opener's reverse promise a rebid below game: always; except over responder's repeat of 2 M; or except over responder's lebensohl 2 NT?
- Responder's cheaper of the 4<sup>th</sup> suit or 2 NT implies weakness and asks opener to bid 3  $\clubsuit$ , unless they have more to say. After the 4<sup>th</sup> suit waiting bid, 2 NT by either partner is natural and non-forcing.
- Responder's other actions are natural, constructive and forcing to game.
- Responder's raise of either suit is the strongest possible bid.

## Backstory

Monroe Ingberman's method was probably the first popular use of an artificial 2 NT rebid over the reverse. It requested opener to rebid the *opening minor suit*. Blackout and lebensohl may have independent roots, but are highly similar, using the cheaper of the 4<sup>th</sup> suit and 2 NT to relay to *three clubs*. Ingberman is sometimes played using the 4<sup>th</sup> suit. For details, see my article "Ingberman, Blackout, Lebensohl – Roots." Which features go with which names is not completely resolved.

BWS on reverses:

*Opener's reverse after a one-level suit response is forcing and promises a rebid below game.... Any rebid by responder is forcing to game except two of his original suit and the cheaper of a fourth-suit bid and two notrump.*

*Opener's reverse after a one-notrump response is forcing.... Responder's rebids of two notrump, three of opener's first-bid suit, and three of a suit ranking below opener's original suit are nonforcing.*

Our methods mostly conform to BWS; however, responder may pass the reverse, and opener may pass two of the major.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Reverse is forcing.** Most experts insist that opener's reverse is forcing. The chance is small that opener has a 20+ HCP moose when we are xxx-x in opener's suits. For the past two or more decades, we have not passed often, but when we have, it has been right every time. Consider hand [a] this way: our minimum response got worse. My advice, if pard insists a reverse is forcing, agree, but "take a position" when you get the xxx-x stinker!

<sup>2</sup> **2 M forcing.** Most experts play that opener's reverse promises a rebid, so responder's repeat of their major suit is forcing. Here is a summary of a 2017 poll on Bridge Winners:

Jan 2017		Plan	1 m – 1 ♠; 2 ♥ Opener promises a rebid below game
150	76%	A	always.
31	16%	B	except after responder's 2 ♠.
17	9%	C	except after responder's 2 NT.
32			Abstain.

When 2 ♠ is forcing, we must use lebensohl to be able to sign off in 3 ♠, which in turn requires a 6-bagger. Hands that would pass responder's repeat at the two level definitely happen – they win on frequency. However, playing this way means we have to bid lebensohl with game values and five or more mediocre cards in our major, while the other folks get to force for one round at 2 M.

**Example 9** – With three local experts, matchpoints, we are vulnerable:

*Opener*

♠ A 8 3

♥ K 8 5 2

♦ A

♣ K Q 6 3 2

1 ♣

2 ♥ [reverse]

3 ♣ [as requested]

*Pete*

♠ K J 10 2

♥ A 4 3

♦ K 5 4 2

♣ 5 4

1 ♠

2 NT [saving space for pard?]

3 NT

It turns out that all three of the other folks at the table play that my 2 NT bid can be passed! I was told to jump to 3 NT. I added plan C for them.

As we have seen, we need 2 NT to be forcing, with responder's repeat of the major non-forcing. When responder's 2 M is forcing, there is some logic to permitting opener to pass 2 NT – but that is definitely not standard.

<sup>3</sup> **Avoid opening 1 NT on 5–4–2–2.** The concentrated values and weak black doubletons make it clear to open 1  $\diamond$  on hand [1]. We might also open 1  $\diamond$  on this hand:

♠ Q 5   ♡ A 10 6 3   ♢ A Q J 9 8   ♣ K 5

Such marginal reverses are better with the recommended tools. Pairs who play responder's 2 M forcing should tend to open such hands 1 NT; they should only use the reverse on hands that truly require it, such as 5–4–3–1 shape.

<sup>4</sup> **Always 2 NT.** For decades, we played that 2 NT was always the waiting bid. We changed, and the advantages are clear. As usual, however, having and knowing an agreement is most important.

## Minor–Major Nightmares: Jump Reverse

Suppose we open 1  $\diamond$ , partner responds 1  $\spadesuit$ , and we hold:

$\spadesuit$  A Q 3    $\heartsuit$  7 2    $\diamond$  A K J 9 4 3    $\clubsuit$  K 6

Assuming we have an 8-card fit, this is a 5-loser hand with 17 HCP, surely worth an immediate move toward game. Which move?

- 2 NT   Silly with no heart stopper.
- 3  $\clubsuit$    Marginal values for a contrived game force.
- 3  $\diamond$    A fine value bid, but we might play there with 4  $\spadesuit$  cold!
- 3  $\spadesuit$    Responder may have four small spades, with diamond tolerance or support.

None of those bids appeals. They call a strong “six of mine and three of yours” a nightmare or death hand, for good reason. We show such a hand with a jump reverse, when available:  $\diamond^1$

- 3  $\heartsuit$    An artificial bid promising good 3-card spade support and usually six diamonds.

There is a jump reverse available on any minor-major deal, except  $\{1\ \diamond - 1\ \heartsuit\}$ . Over  $1\ \clubsuit - 1\ \spadesuit$ , there are two: we jump into the stronger red suit holding. Too bad we cannot save one of those bids for  $\{1\ \diamond - 1\ \heartsuit\}$ !

At matchpoints, some pairs will play in the minor suit. Playing this jump reverse and having to choose between three and four of the major, lean toward three. Simply finding the correct strain should produce a good score.

### The Raise without a Name

While we are at it, let’s review a similar raise. Suppose we open 1  $\diamond$ , partner responds 1  $\spadesuit$ , and we hold:

$\spadesuit$  A Q 9 3    $\heartsuit$  2    $\diamond$  A K J 10 4 3    $\clubsuit$  K 6

With this hand, we jump to 4  $\diamond$ , promising four strong spades and a strong diamond suit. This is a forcing raise, and spades are trump. Responder should move toward slam with three winners, including



any ace and the king or queen of our suits:

- a. ♠ K 10 4 2 ♥ 10 8 6 4 ♦ Q 2 ♣ A 8 5 [4 NT: RKB]
- b. ♠ K 10 4 2 ♥ A 8 6 4 ♦ Q 2 ♣ 10 8 5 [4 NT: RKB]
- c. ♠ K 10 4 2 ♥ K 8 6 4 ♦ 7 2 ♣ A 8 5 [cue-bid 4 ♥]

Responder would pass an immediate jump to 4 ♠ with these hands, because there should be no slam opposite a balanced 19-count. Opposite opener's actual hand, slam is great on hand [a] and acceptable on [b]. Slamming on both provides success about 70% of the time.

## Key Features

- Opener's jump reverse shows strong 3-card support for responder's major and a strong minor (usually six cards).
- Opener's double-jump rebid shows strong 4-card support for responder's major and a strong 6+ card minor.

## Backstory

This jump reverse, attributed to GLM Lloyd Arvedon, is popular in the Boston area.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Mini-splinter.** Many pairs play the jump reverse as a mini-splinter, showing 4-card support, a singleton in the bid suit, and invitational values. This mini-splinter is great when it comes up. However, such a hand can be described acceptably with a jump raise, since there is never any doubt as to strain. Furthermore, it only works half the time on the two auctions with one jump reverse available: the other half of the time, opener will have the other shortness.

Our jump reverse works on more deals and is sometimes the only way to identify the correct strain.

Frequency	Nightmare	Mini-Splinter
1 ♣ – 1 ♥	100%	50%
1 ♦ – 1 ♠	100%	50%
1 ♣ – 1 ♠	100%	100%
<b>Average</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>67%</b>

BWS lists the jump reverse as a “game-forcing splinter raise” – neither of the options above – which does not make sense to me.

BWS includes the raise without a name:

*After a one-of-a-suit response, opener's double-jump rebid ... shows a game-forcing raise with strong four-card support and a long (typically six-card), strong suit.*

However, some commenters on Bridge Winners play the double-jump rebid as non-forcing with weakish spades.

## Opener's Jump Rebid

Opener's jump rebid is a serious game try, and 3 NT is the primary target. This hand is not quite good enough:

♠ Q 10 4   ♡ A 3   ♦ K 6   ♣ A Q 9 7 3 2

Counted aggressively, this hand has only five losers, but on a bad day would take only five or six tricks. Rebid 2 ♣ over any suit response. This rebid usually provides a 6-card suit, and should encourage a game try on a hand with a club honor and assorted junk. (We'll revisit this hand as a possible 1 NT opening.)

These hands are minimum for a jump rebid to three of a minor:

1. ♠ Q 10 4   ♡ A 3   ♦ K 6   ♣ A Q J 9 3 2
2. ♠ Q 10 4   ♡ 3   ♦ A K J 9 3 2   ♣ A Q 6

### Jump Rebid at 3 ♣

Continuations are straightforward after opener's jump rebid at 3 ♣, so we'll discuss this situation first. Consider this auction:

1 ♣ – 1 M  
3 ♣ – ?

- Pass   Most hands with a misfit pass. Any bid below game is forcing, and opener should have a good suit. With hand [1], opener will be glad to have the extra texture in trump, compared with the not-quite-good-enough hand above it.
- 3 M   This bid shows six decent cards in the major. Opener did not make a jump reverse, and is therefore not interested in some grungy 5-card suit. However, a 6-2 major-suit fit could be best: the plan would be to draw trump and use dummy's extra strength to establish and enjoy the clubs. The major may be far less useful when clubs are trump.
- 3 NT   Responder shows game values and both side suits stopped, for example, minimal stoppers for a 1 ♡ response, with the beautiful ♣ K:

♠ K 7 2   ♡ J 9 6 5 2   ♦ Q 10 2   ♣ K 6

- 3  $\diamond$  This bid shows game values with a diamond stopper, but no stopper in the other major.
- 3  $\circ M$  Bidding the other major shows game values with a stopper, but no diamond stopper.

Unfortunately, it's not as simple as that. The hope is that, after a stopper bid, opener will have a stopper in the fourth suit, and bid 3 NT. The opening lead will often be through the stopper announced by responder. If opener cannot help, the opponents may run the suit immediately; or third hand may win and lead through opener's stopper in the fourth suit. Here is my advice:

*For 3 NT, responder only needs a stopper in each suit that is likely to hold up to an incoming opening lead.*

*To show a single stopper, responder needs to prevent the opponents from running the suit with a single lead across it.*

- ♠ K-7-2 and  $\diamond$  Q-10-2 are both acceptable for 3 NT under this advice, but neither is acceptable as a single stopper. For that, we need at least
- ♠ K-10-2 or  $\diamond$  Q-J-2. Obviously, an ace is a great stopper.

This plan won't work perfectly, but we also shouldn't have the opponents setting us immediately in the suit of our stopper unless the opening leader has a side entry.

**One diamond response.** If we cannot play 3 NT, diamonds may play better than clubs, just as when responder has a 6-card major. Furthermore, 3  $\diamond$  is cheap – we can still bid stoppers over it.

**One notrump response.** Responder should have a balanced hand, a value in each side suit, and an indication that responder should declare 1 NT. Responder could have marked time with 1  $\diamond$ , so that opener would declare. With hand [1] above, bid 2 NT or 3 NT, not 3  $\clubsuit$ . Reserve the 3  $\clubsuit$  bid over 1 NT for a club-based hand similar to hand [2] – one with a defect in a major suit for declaring notrump. Responder then takes charge.

## Jump Rebid at 3 $\diamond$

Continuations after 3  $\diamond$  are messy.

1  $\diamond$  – 1 M

3  $\diamond$  – ?

Responder's two obvious paths to 3 NT are: bid it, or bid the other major. We have a rule! Two suits are in doubt, so bidding one (3  $\diamond$ M) shows a stopper in that suit. Otherwise, we guess to either pass or bid 3 NT. Without further discussion, this is better than no plan at all.

### My advice for an advanced method:

- ❑ *Responder's major is ambiguous, suggesting a single stopper in clubs. Responder's subsequent removal of 3 NT to either of our suits shows six cards in the major with no side stopper (neither weak nor necessarily slamming in this case).*

**One spade response.** Opener's jump reverse might find a fit.

**One heart response.** This situation is the worst, because opener had no jump reverse. There is nothing to do about it.

**Example** – “It's Your Call” (2), January 2023 *Bulletin*:

Matchpoints, both vulnerable:

$\spadesuit$  5 2    $\heartsuit$  A Q 9 6    $\diamondsuit$  9    $\clubsuit$  K 10 9 7 4 2

West	North	East	South
------	-------	------	-------

	1 $\diamond$	Pass	1 $\heartsuit$
--	--------------	------	----------------

Pass	3 $\diamond$	Pass	?
------	--------------	------	---

Playing by my advice, we can bid 3  $\heartsuit$ , suggesting a club stopper. This will take care of the stopper issues; however, it's not clear that we'll make 3 NT if opener bids it – our singleton diamond will be a disappointment. On the other hand, 3  $\heartsuit$  may produce a system win.

Playing instead by our rule, two (black) suits are in doubt, so our 3  $\spadesuit$  would be telling. We must guess between passing and bidding 3 NT on this hand. Even if we guess right and the stoppers are there, we may not make 3 NT – two ways to lose – so passing is best.  $\diamond^1$

This was a difficult problem for the panel. Panelists who do not have a rule should pass as well. Pass was as popular as 3  $\spadesuit$ , with 3 NT

right behind. As always, it's most important to have an agreement that both partners remember or can figure out.

**One notrump response.** Responder may have any hand with no major suit, 5 to 10 HCP, and either balanced, or unbalanced. With hand [2] above, bid 3  $\diamond$ . With a diamond-based hand similar to hand [1], bid 2 NT. It also makes sense to count on responder for a club stopper, for a rebid of 2 NT on:

$\spadesuit$  K 10 4    $\heartsuit$  A Q    $\diamond$  A K J 9 3 2    $\clubsuit$  10 6

Over 3  $\diamond$ , responder should assume there is a problem in a major suit, and act accordingly.

## Key Features

- Opener's jump rebid is a serious game try. Over a 1 NT response, one major suit will usually be unstopped.
- Responder's 3 NT shows a stopper in each side suit that should stand up to an incoming lead.
- Opener's stopper showing bid shows a stopper that should stand up to a single lead across it.
- Decision: Do we play the other major as ambiguous (either long, or shows a stopper in the other minor)?

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup>{1  $\diamond$  – 1  $\heartsuit$ ; 3  $\diamond$  – ?} **example.** Some experts essentially define the unbid major as the only suit in doubt; for them, 3  $\spadesuit$  asks for a stopper, and 3 NT shows one – ignoring clubs. (As a defender, ask about this, and consider leading a club!) The word “grope” was used. Because spades happens to be the problem suit, this plan works on this deal. However, responder is less likely to stop clubs after a major-suit response than after 1 NT.

Steve Weinstein: “It's best to specifically define 3  $\spadesuit$  as either showing or asking for a stopper (I prefer asking) rather than just giving partner a random guess each time. At least if they double 3  $\spadesuit$ , we might be able to untangle things.”

The two-suit rule lets us figure out what 3  $\spadesuit$  means, with nothing else to remember. The ambiguous major makes it better still.

## Opener Rebids Two Notrump: Wolff Sign-Off

After a response in a major suit at the one level, opener's rebid of two notrump usually shows a balanced hand of about 19 HCP: a hand between a strong 1 NT and a strong 2 NT opening. In standard methods, anything responder bids over 2 NT is forcing to game. That's a problem, and there are more.

Playing Walsh style (page 303), we respond 1 ♠ to 1 ♣ with:

♠ K 8 7 3   ♥ 7   ♦ Q 9 7 5 3 2   ♣ 8 2

If opener rebids 2 NT, we would like to sign off in 3 ♦, likely a much better contract. Similarly, without a weak jump shift available, we might respond 1 ♠ to partner's 1 ♣ opening bid on:

♠ K 10 8 7 4 3   ♥ 7 2   ♦ 9 5 3   ♣ 8 2

After opener rebids 2 NT, we would like to offer 3 ♠ as a better final contract. Pairs who respond “up the line” to 1 ♣ or who play weak jump shifts won't want to sign off over 2 NT as often.

On the same auction, we would want opener to choose between playing 3 ♥ and 3 ♠:

♠ K 10 8 7 4   ♥ Q 9 7 2   ♦ 5 3   ♣ 8 2

Finally, natural bidding does not distinguish between responder's 4=4 and 4=5 forcing major hands. A 4-4 spade fit or 5-3 heart fit could get lost, or we might unintentionally play in a 4-3 fit.

### Wolff Sign-Off with 3 ♦ Checkback ♦<sup>12</sup>

When the opening bid is one of a suit, the response is one of a major suit, and opener rebids 2 NT, we play Wolff sign-off with 3 ♦ checkback (even if they double 2 NT) – see the chart below.

### Wolff Sign-Off Does Not Apply after a 1 ♦ or 1 NT Response

When responder's 1 NT is raised to 2 NT, three of opener's suit or a lower-ranking suit is weak – to play. BWS seems silent on this situation; there is little need for these bids to be forcing.

When opener jumps to 2 NT over a 1 ♦ response, we play *standard*: all responder's bids are forcing. We could have game or slam in any

strain! We don't need a checkback, as responder's natural bid will point the way.

R2	O3	R3	<b>Wolff Sign-Off with 3 <math>\diamond</math> Checkback</b>	
3 $\clubsuit$	Relay to 3 $\diamond$ .			
	3 $\diamond$	Required relay.		
		Pass	Sign off in diamonds.	
		3 $\heartsuit$	Sign off in hearts; opener may correct to original spades.	
		3 $\spadesuit$	Sign off in spades.	
		3 NT	Mild slam try in opener's minor suit.	
		Other	Natural slam try; implies broken suit.	
3 $\diamond$	Major-suit checkback, with either 5+ cards in the bid major, or 4 cards in the other major. Opener's priorities: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The other major, holding four cards there.</li> <li>2. Responder's bid major, holding three cards there.</li> <li>3. 3 NT otherwise.</li> </ol>			
3 $\heartsuit$ , 3 $\spadesuit$	Natural slam try: a 6-card or longer good suit (two of the top three honors), or at least 5-5 majors.			
3 NT	Natural, to play.			
	<input type="checkbox"/> [a] Gerber/diamonds	<input type="checkbox"/> [b] slam/RKB opener's minor.		
4 $\clubsuit$	Gerber for aces (0 or 4, 1, 2, 3).	4 m	Natural slam try with good 5+ card support.	
4 $\diamond$	Natural slam try, good 6-card suit, or good 5-card support.	4 om	RKB in opener's minor (crosswood).	
4 $\heartsuit$ , 4 $\spadesuit$	Natural, to play: a 6-card suit or longer, or at least 5-5 majors; opener may correct to original spades.			
4 NT	Natural, quantitative.			

Four clubs is usually played as Gerber here. When we are not looking at the king and queen of our suit, it's inadequate. Assuming we can remember it, option [b] is a better plan. This gives up the unlikely natural slam try at 4  $\diamond$ , when the opening bid was 1  $\clubsuit$ , and gains the likely natural slam try at 4  $\clubsuit$ . It also replaces Gerber with crosswood!



## Key Features

After { 1 m – 1 M; 2 NT }:

- Responder's 3 ♣ is a relay to 3 ♦ for sign-off, a mild slam try in opener's minor, or a bad-suit slam try.
- Responder's 3 ♦ is a major-suit checkback.
- 3 ♥ or 3 ♠ is a natural slam try.
- Decision: Is four of a minor Gerber/diamonds, or opener's minor (natural/crosswood)?

After { 1 x – 1 NT; 2 NT }, responder's bid of 3 x or lower is non-forcing. Other bids are forcing.

After { 1 ♣ – 1 ♦; 2 NT }, any bid by responder is forcing.

## Backstory

My article, "Bridge Bidding Systems after Opener Rebids 2 NT," compares ten methods of handling opener's 2 NT rebid. The version of Wolff sign-off with 3 ♦ checkback that we play has been distilled from the version in that 2012 article. The systems described by Max Hardy and Marshall Miles differ, and more ideas are online.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Wolff sign-off with 3 ♦ raise.** The powerful version I recommended in 2012 can be described as "3 ♣ is a puppet to 3 ♦ for sign-off, 4–4 forcing, or slam try. 3 ♦ is an artificial raise of opener's minor." This system was attributed to George Rosenkranz on the web. We played this for a while, but the checkback version has won out.

<sup>2</sup> **Transfers** are a decent alternative to Wolff. Andy Bowles provided this summary: 3 ♣, 3 ♦, and 3 ♥ "are transfers, showing 4 cards if it's a new suit, 5 cards if it's responder's suit, 3 cards if it's opener's suit. 3 ♠ shows a good hand with clubs.... Transfers to a new, lower suit, to responder's first suit, or to opener's suit might be weak.... Any further move by responder after a transfer is game forcing." For more detail, see the References.

These transfers can also be played after our natural 2 NT overcall or when a 1 NT response is raised to 2 NT.

Andrew Hanes and I have played this way for years, without discovering any problems. However, I have not mapped out the sequences.



## 4. One Notrump Opening

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## Overview of Responses

The initial responses to 1 NT are:

2 ♣	Stayman (promises at least one major suit).
2 ♦	Transfer to a heart suit of at least five cards.
2 ♥	Transfer to a spade suit of at least five cards.
2 ♠	Size ask: a balanced invite, or 6+ clubs & any strength.
2 NT	Transfer to 6+ diamonds, any strength.
3 ♣	5-card-major Stayman with zero or one 4-card major.
3 ♦	Game-forcing, with at least 5-5 in the minor suits.
3 ♥	One spade, a 3-card heart fragment, and 5-4 minors.
3 ♠	One heart, a 3-card spade fragment, and 5-4 minors.
3 NT	To play.
4 ♣	Gerber: 0/4, 1, 2, 3 aces.
4 ♦	Transfer to a heart suit of at least six cards.
4 ♥	Transfer to a spade suit of at least six cards.
4 ♠	Slam try, 5-4 minors & 2-2 majors.
4 NT	Slam invitation (quantitative).
5 NT	Forcing, grand slam invitation.
Higher	To play.

## Key Features

- Modern 4-way transfer framework.
- 2 ♠ after Stayman is *the* invitation with 5 or more spades.
- 2 ♠ size ask: could be a balanced invitation or clubs.
- 3 ♣ 5-card-major Stayman with zero or one 4-card major.

## Backstory

The 2 ♠ response might be clubs, but it manifests as a size or range ask. This is how we bid a balanced invitation without a 4-card major, or a hand of any strength with long clubs. Formerly, we had to bid Stayman with an invitational balanced hand, just to get to bid 2 NT next, needlessly leaking opener's major-suit holdings to the opponents. Now, responder promises a major suit for a 2 ♣ Stayman bid.

See the Appendix for an approach where 2 NT is 5-card-major Stayman, to avoid a lead-directing double. Also see the Appendix for transfer continuations after responder's Jacoby transfer.

## Point Range and Shape

Our 1 NT opening is *strong*. Since I'll need a range for examples, I'm going to use 15 to 17 HCP, the most commonly listed range in North America. ♦<sup>1</sup> The methods presented can also be applied to a weak notrump opening.

We avoid opening 1 NT with a 5-card major. ♦<sup>2</sup> Often a hand with a 5-card major and 15–17 HCP can be downgraded or upgraded to a major-suit opening bid. It's a distinctly mid-range hand, a good 15 to a bad 17, that cries out to be opened 1 NT. Even then, and especially at matchpoints, lean toward opening in the major suit with a doubleton in the other major: otherwise, if we open 1 NT, partner may stick us in a 5–2 fit, with a 5–3 fit available in our major.

We never open 1 NT with either 2–2 or a singleton in the major suits; we seldom open 1 NT with two other doubletons. ♦<sup>3</sup>

### ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **The 1 NT range.** The 15 to 17 range is fine, but can be abused. The ACBL says only five individual point counts are permitted. Because downgrading a bad 18 HCP to open 1 NT is seldom done, the case can be made that it's OK to open an exceptional 13-count as 15–17. Tim Hill, tournament director, rules expert and bridge partner, says this works. So, 15–17 can be justified as permitting 13, 14, 15, 16 or 17 HCP. Playing that way, it would be fairer to put 13++ to 17 on the convention card.

Be that as it may, I list 14 to 16 with one partner, 15 to 17 with most, and 15+ to 18- with Gary. This last range is nominally the same as 15 to 17, half a point better. Gary said he proposed to play this way, because he got sick of having 1 NT raised to 3 NT on 10 HCP, only to have no play for the contract. I have found the 15+ to 18- range exceedingly comfortable to play. Beyond evaluating a good or bad 15, I can decide that a 15-point hand will bid better when opened in a suit or in notrump, and act accordingly. For example, I might open 1 ♣ with this moderate 15-count, to get both black suits into play:

♠ A Q 9 4   ♥ K 3   ♦ J 6 2   ♣ K Q 10 7

but open 1 NT on this more notrumpy hand:

♠ A Q 4   ♥ K 3   ♦ J 9 6 2   ♣ K Q 10 7

Inviting game or accepting an invitation is simplified: treat the range as 16 to 17 and don't worry about it.

Playing 15+ to 18-, a 2 NT rebid shows 18+ to 20-, and a 2 NT opening shows 20+ to 22-.

If you want to try such an evenly split range, you might prefer 14+ to 17-. This range avoids opening 18 at 1 NT, against the 15 to 17 field. Al Muggia asked for this range, without prompting from me.

Playing transfer responses to one club can allow opener to rebid only 1 NT on a strong balanced hand, with 17+ to 20- HCP; opening 2 NT can be 20+ to 22-.

Some partnerships play a weak notrump when non-vulnerable, and strong when vulnerable, or possibly three ranges. It pays to play response methods that are as identical as possible across the ranges, although there will usually be differences. Because the meanings of other sequences change as well, I find it not to be worth the bother.

<sup>2</sup> **5-Card major.** Marty Bergen says to *always* open 1 NT with a 5-card major, in the agreed point range. This makes the hand much easier to bid in several ways, but we can miss a fit in opener's major when responder has a partscore or invitational hand. 5-Card-major Stayman should find those fits when responder can force to game.

<sup>3</sup> **Short suits and 6-card minors.** Practitioners of specialized systems such as Precision are often under pressure to open 1 NT with anything vaguely suitable and within range. We don't have such pressures.

With our system, responder will insist on playing in a major suit with 5–5 majors. This works better if opener is not 2–2 in the majors, but this uncommon situation could be tolerated. However, if responder has a weak hand with 4–4 majors, we'll see that disaster will likely result from our crawling Stayman (coming up), when opener has 2–2 in the majors.

The ACBL permits a 1 NT opening with a singleton ace, king or queen (with no side doubleton). I would not agree to this in a major suit, but it has some merit in a minor. Partner would usually insist in playing in our minor-suit singleton only with a 6-bagger, which may work out fine.

My investigations show that responder, when holding a weak hand with five small in a major suit, should always transfer to and play in that major. Even opposite a small doubleton, having that suit as trump can allow declarer to enjoy a trick or two that would not be available in notrump – although 1 NT may turn out to score better. It's when opener provides a third or fourth trump that getting into the major shines. Allowing hands with a singleton honor in a major for opener tips those odds in the wrong direction.

Finally, consider this hand:

♠ Q 10 4   ♥ A 3   ♦ K 6 2   ♣ A Q 9 7 3

15 HCP, all suits stopped, and a fifth club – a fine 1 NT opening. No problem. How about this one?

♠ Q 10 4   ♥ A 3   ♦ K 6   ♣ A Q 9 7 3 2

My inclination was to open this hand 1 NT as well. I don't think this hand is quite good enough to open 1 ♣ and then bid 3 ♣. Superficially it has the five losers that I like for a 3 ♣ bid, but the hand is like Swiss cheese. 1 NT is the value bid. Well, I have decided to stop doing that, for psychological reasons: if it works, it's unremarkable – maybe unnoticed – but if it blows up, it's noticed for sure. Definitely forget about naming the club suit when we would not with only five, such as breaking the 2 ♦ response to Stayman. As I mentioned earlier, my plan is to open 1 ♣ and then bid 2 ♣ (3 ♣ vulnerable at IMPs) – 2 ♣ may catch a game try based on the ♣ K and assorted junk.



## Stayman

The Stayman 2 ♣ response *promises holding a major suit*, and asks opener to bid a major suit (2 ♥ with both) or 2 ♦ with any other hand. To search for a 4-4 major fit, use Stayman (or 5-card-major Stayman, described later). When responding to a 1 NT or 2 NT opening, follow this rule:

*A transfer to a major suit is used only when a 4-4 fit in the other major is not an issue.*

### Responder May Be Weak

Use 2 ♣ Stayman with any of these types of weak hands:

1. Four or five diamonds and four cards in each major, or 4-3 majors and 5 diamonds. Pass any response by opener. An example of this *garbage Stayman* from Wikipedia:

♠ 5 4 3 2 ♥ 5 4 3 2 ♦ 6 5 4 3 2 ♣ -

2. At least four cards in each major suit. Pass a major-suit response from opener. Over a 2 ♦ response, bid 2 ♥. Opener passes with three hearts, or corrects to 2 ♠ with exactly three spades and two hearts. This *crawling Stayman* produces a disaster, if opener has 2-2 in the majors.

♠ 5 4 3 2 ♥ 5 4 3 2 ♦ 3 2 ♣ 4 3 2

♠ Q 9 3 2 ♥ J 10 3 2 ♦ K 2 ♣ 10 9 2

This hand shows a downside of crawling Stayman:

♠ Q 9 3 2 ♥ KJ 4 3 2 ♦ K 2 ♣ 10 2

If opener rebids 2 ♦, responder has to suppress the fifth heart with this invitational hand, and bid 2 NT. The hand is too good to bid only 2 ♥, but not strong enough to show hearts at the three level. Stayman seems right with the above hand; but with this hand, transfer to hearts and rebid 2 NT:

♠ 9 8 3 2 ♥ KJ 4 3 2 ♦ K 2 ♣ Q 2

3. Three spades, four hearts, and five or six clubs, a special edition of crawling Stayman. If opener bids a major suit, we

pass. If opener converts our crawling 2♥ bid to 2♠, showing exactly three spades and two hearts, we push on to 3♣ – opener must pass. (The minor will always be clubs, since with diamonds, we would have passed 2♦.) A worst case:

♠ 5 4 3   ♥ 5 4 3 2   ♦ 2   ♣ 6 5 4 3 2

## Responder Is Often Invitational

Whatever opener rebids, responder has these invitational bids:

4. 3 M: with 4-card support, responder raises opener's major suit. Raise 2♠ to 3♠ with:

♠ A 8 4 3   ♥ K 5 4   ♦ 9 2   ♣ Q 9 6

5. 2 NT: with the same hand, if opener rebids 2♦ or 2♥, we bid 2 NT. Responder has promised a major suit, so responder must have spades, and thus never bids 2♠ with only four.
6. Responder's 2♠ promises 5+ spades. This avoids playing 2 NT or higher when opener has a minimum with only two spades, generally outweighing any liability from responder declaring spades. Don't use a transfer to invite with a hand that can be bid this way!

Opener passes to decline. With support, opener bids 3♠ (choice of games) or 4♠ to accept. Without a spade fit, opener accepts with 2 NT; responder's 3♥ shows five (a 4-4 fit is no longer possible); another suit is the cheapest stopper.

## Responder May Have a Game-Forcing Hand

When appropriate, 5-card-major Stayman should be used instead of 2♣. Responder should use regular Stayman when holding 4-4, 5-4, or 6-4 in the majors, or a 4-card major with a 5-card or longer minor suit to explore. The tools for bidding a slam may be better after 2♣ than after 3♣ (5-card-major Stayman). After opener's rebid:

7. 3 m: responder's minor suit is forcing, shows five or more cards in the minor and an unbid major. With this hand, bid Stayman and then bid 3♣, over opener's 2♦ or 2♥:

♠ Q 9 6 4   ♥ K 6 3   ♦ 2   ♣ A Q 9 5 4

8. 3 NT+: responder's jump to an appropriate level in notrump says a major-suit fit has not been found. When holding both majors, opener now bids the other major (which should be spades, having bid hearts first). Jump to 4 NT with:

♠ A 9 6 4   ♥ K 6 3   ♦ Q 2   ♣ A Q 9 4

9. 4 M: with 4-card support, responder jumps to game in the major, to play there.
10. 3 oM: when opener denies a major suit with 2 ♦, and responder has 5-4 in the majors, ♦<sup>1</sup> responder jumps to three of the 4-card major. Over this *Smolen* bid, opener selects 3 NT, 4 M, or control-bids with good values for a slam in a 5-3 major-suit fit.

♠ A 9 6 4   ♥ K Q 9 6 3   ♦ K 2   ♣ A 4

Bid 3 ♠ to show this major-suit shape. If opener bids:

3 NT – Raise to 4 NT, inviting 6 NT.

4 ♥ – Bid 5 ♥, asking for better than minimum values.

Other – Ask for keycards: opener is slam-worthy.

11. 4 ♦ or 4 ♥: when opener denies a major suit with 2 ♦, and responder has 6-4 in the majors, responder makes a *delayed Texas transfer* to the 6-card suit (see page 413).

The following three bids are known as *reverse Baze*: ♦<sup>2</sup>

12. 3 oM: three of the other major, over two of a major, shows an undisclosed splinter. Responder promises 4-card support for opener's major, a singleton or void somewhere, and slam interest. Opener bids the next step, and responder tells where the shortness is, with low-middle-high (LMH) steps. ♦<sup>3</sup>

*Example:*     1 NT – 2 ♣; 2 ♠ – 3 ♥; 3 ♠ – ?

3 ♥ = some splinter in support of spades. 3 ♠ asks: 3 NT = clubs (low), 4 ♣ = diamonds (middle), 4 ♦ = hearts (high).

13. 4 ♣ over 2 ♥ or 2 ♠ is a balanced slam try in opener's major.
14. 4 ♦ over 2 ♥ or 2 ♠ asks for keycards in opener's major suit.

## Summary

O2	R2	O3	R3	<b>2 ♣ Stayman over 1 NT</b>
Stayman, any strength, promises a 4-card major.				
2 ♦	No 4-card or longer major suit.			
	Pass	(garbage) Weak, 3-suited, with short clubs.		
	2 ♥	(crawling) Weak, both majors or 4=3=1=5.		
	2 ♠	All invitations with 5 (or 5+) spades.		
	2 NT	Natural invitation.		
	3 ♣	5+ clubs, forcing to game.		
	3 ♦	5+ diamonds, forcing to game.		
	3 ♥	(Smolen) 4 hearts and 5 spades.		
	3 ♠	(Smolen) 4 spades and 5 hearts.		
	3 NT	To play.		
	4 ♦	(delayed Texas) 4 spades and six hearts.		
	4 ♥	(delayed Texas) 4 hearts and six spades.		
	4 NT	Natural, invitational.		
	5 NT	Natural, forcing, grand slam invitation.		
2 ♥	4 or 5 hearts.			
	2 ♠	All invitations with 5 (or 5+) spades.		
	2 NT	Natural invitation.		
	3 ♣	5+ clubs & 4 spades, forcing to game.		
	3 ♦	5+ diamonds & 4 spades, forcing to game.		
	3 ♥	4 hearts, invitational.		
	3 ♠	4 hearts and a singleton or void, slam try.		
		3 NT	Where is it?	
			LMH: 4 ♣ = ♣, 4 ♦ = ♦, 4 ♥ = ♠.	
	3 NT	To play.		
	4 ♣	Slam try without shortness.		
		4 ♦	(last train) Interested, but cannot RKB.	
		4 ♥	Refuses slam try.	
	4 ♦	RKB hearts.		
	4 ♥	To play.		
	4 NT	Natural slam invitation (4 spades).		
2 ♠	4 or 5 spades.			
	2 NT	Natural invitation.		
	3 ♣	5+ clubs & 4 hearts, forcing to game.		

	3 $\diamond$	5+ diamonds & 4 hearts, forcing to game.
	3 $\heartsuit$	4 spades and a singleton or void, slam try.
		3NT    Where is it?
		LMH: 3 $\spadesuit$ = $\clubsuit$ , 3 NT = $\diamond$ , 4 $\clubsuit$ = $\spadesuit$ .
	3 $\spadesuit$	4 spades, invitational.
	3 NT	To play.
	4 $\clubsuit$	Slam try without shortness.
		4 $\diamond$ Diamond control.
		4 $\heartsuit$ (last train) Interested, but cannot RKB.
		4 $\spadesuit$ Refuses slam try.
	4 $\diamond$	RKB spades.
	4 $\spadesuit$	To play.
	4 NT	Natural slam invitation (4 hearts).

## Key Features

- Use Stayman, never a transfer, to find a 4-4 major fit.
- Regular Stayman includes garbage and crawling features.
- Stayman followed by 2  $\spadesuit$  is *the* invitation with 5+ spades.
- Stayman followed by a minor is natural and forcing.
- Smolen, delayed Texas and reverse Baze.

## Backstory

Baze was erroneously attributed to the late Grant Baze, who did play it; Bobby Goldman and Paul Soloway used 4  $\clubsuit$  to ask for keycards, and 4  $\diamond$  as the balanced raise, which Goldman described in *Aces Scientific*. Reverse Baze preserves a *last train* bid over 4  $\clubsuit$ , even with hearts trump.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Hinckley Smolen.** Playing either 2 NT or 3  $\clubsuit$  as 5-card-major Stayman with at most one 4-card major suit, responder's Smolen jump over a 2  $\diamond$  bid can be made into a 3-card major to show a 5-card major. Opener won't need to know it isn't four.

Why would responder bid Stayman with 5-3 in the majors, you ask? That lets the partnership explore for a 5-3 fit in both majors at the same time. If opener bids two of a major, responder jumps to 3 NT, to show three cards in

opener's major and *five* cards in the other major. Opener now has the option of playing in their own 5-card major, responder's 5-card major or 3 NT.

This method is for experienced 5-card-major Stayman players. When first adding 5-card-major Stayman to the system, a selling point is, it's OK to forget and use 2 ♣ Stayman – only an opportunity is lost. Not so, playing Hinckley Smolen, which works because responder would have bid 5-card-major Stayman with one 4-card major – the jump to 3 NT cannot be that hand. This means responder also cannot use 2 ♣ Stayman for its possibly better slam bidding, when holding one major.

<sup>2</sup> **Before Baze**, three of the other major was the only way to set trump, to explore for slam in opener's major. Indeed, due to the reduced space over a 2 NT opening, we only have the other major to set trump below game. They don't call 2 NT the slam-killer for nothing!

If we want Gerber in this situation, we can either bid a minor suit and then ask in it, or use Super-Gerber.

<sup>3</sup> **Void with spades trump.** An adjunct that *we do not play*, attributed to Mike Cappelletti, allows distinguishing a void when spades are trump: opener asks for shortness with 3 ♠; responder's 3 NT shows a void (4 ♣ asks where), and succeeding bids show singletons (LMH).

# Transfers to Major Suits

## Texas Transfers

Responder's jump to 4 ♡ is a Texas transfer to 4 ♠; likewise, 4 ♦ is a transfer to 4 ♥. Responder promises a suit of at least six cards and a play for game. Opener completes the transfer and usually plays there. However, responder may drive to slam by asking for keycards.

## Jacoby Transfers

Responder's 2 ♡ is a transfer to 2 ♠; likewise, 2 ♦ is a transfer to 2 ♥. Responder promises a suit of at least five cards, but no points. Holding four trumps and maximum values, opener bids a doubleton, or 2 NT with 4-3-3-3 shape. With four trumps and a minimum, opener jumps to three of the major – optional when vulnerable. ♦<sup>1</sup>

Over the completed transfer, responder may pass or bid notrump at the appropriate level with exactly five cards in the major. With six or more cards in the major, responder may raise to three (invitational) or four (a mild slam try, because Texas was not used), or jump into a new suit as a self-splinter (a singleton or void in the bid suit).

*Responder has no bid to ask for aces or keycards immediately over a completed two-level transfer* – that comes only when a fit has been disclosed. Texas provides this capability.

After a transfer to a major suit, responder's new suit at the three level is natural and forcing. It should not be a major suit of exactly four cards, because Stayman was not used. Responder often bids a minor suit with four cards, having concern about a short suit.

**Responder has 5-5 majors.** With 5-5 majors and a *weak* hand, just bid 2 ♣, Stayman. If opener bids a major suit, pass; otherwise start a crawl with 2 ♡.

With 5-5 majors and *invitational* values, respond 2 ♦, transferring to hearts, and then bid 2 ♠. Opener places the contract, maybe passing.

With 5-5 majors and *game* values or better, transfer to spades, and then bid 3 ♡. Opener's 3 NT is an offer to play; 3 ♠ sets spades as trump; 4 ♡ selects hearts, with no slam interest; a minor suit is a control-bid in support of hearts. No 4-card majors after a transfer!

## Summary

O2	R2	O3	<b>2 ♠ (Hearts) Jacoby over 1 NT</b>
2 ♥	2-, 3- or occasionally 4-card heart support.		
	Pass	Weak hand, to play.	
	2 ♠	5-5 majors, invitational.	
	2 NT	Exactly five hearts, invitational.	
	3 ♣, 3 ♦	Natural, forcing to game.	
	3 ♥	6+ hearts, invitational.	
	3 ♠	(splinter) Hearts are trump, short in spades.	
	3 NT	Exactly five hearts, pass or correct to 4 ♥.	
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	(splinter) Hearts are trump, short in bid suit.	
	4 ♥	Mild slam try (did not use Texas).	
	4 NT	Five hearts, slam invitation.	
	5 NT	Five hearts, forcing, invites grand slam.	
3 ♥	4-Card heart support, minimum hand.		
2 NT	4-Card heart support, maximum hand, 4-3-3-3.		
Other	4-Card heart support, maximum, doubleton in bid suit.		
O2	R2	O3	<b>2 ♥ (Spades) Jacoby over 1 NT</b>
2 ♠	2-, 3- or occasionally 4-card spade support.		
	Pass	Weak hand, to play.	
	2 NT	Exactly five spades, invitational.	
	3 ♣, 3 ♦	Natural, forcing to game.	
	3 ♥	5-5 majors, game-forcing. [Opener never 2-2.]	
		3 ♠	Spades are trump. Serious 3 NT.
		Other	Serious 3 NT or control-bid, hearts trump.
	3 ♠	6+ spades, invitational.	
	3 NT	Exactly five spades, pass or correct to 4 ♥.	
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	(splinter) Spades are trump, short in bid suit.	
	4 ♥	(splinter) Spades are trump, ♥ singleton/void.	
	4 ♠	Mild slam try (did not use Texas).	
	4 NT	Five spades, slam invitation.	
	5 NT	Five spades, forcing, invites grand slam.	
3 ♥	4-Card spade support, minimum hand.		
2 NT	4-Card spade support, maximum hand, 4-3-3-3.		
Other	4-Card spade support, maximum, doubleton in bid suit.		



O2	R2	O3	<b>4 ♠ (Hearts) Texas Transfer over 1 NT</b>
4 ♥	Required.		
	Pass	Usual.	
	4 ♠	Roman keycard Blackwood (kickback).	
O2	R2	O3	<b>4 ♥ (Spades) Texas Transfer over 1 NT</b>
4 ♠	Required.		
	Pass	Usual.	
	4 NT	Roman keycard Blackwood.	

## Backstory

Two-level transfers are named after the late, great Oswald Jacoby.

The basics of the 5–5 majors scheme, based on the idea that a transfer denies exactly four cards in the other major, came to me from Andrew Hanes. I play it with Gary, and he has passed it on. Like many good bridge ideas, Andrew’s plan is obvious, once you know it. When I asked in 2023, he wrote:

*I was playing 1NT–3♥ was invitational 5–5 and 1NT–3♠ forcing 5-5; a partner wanted to play 1NT–3♥ as a fragment so I started thinking about how to handle the invitational and forcing 5–5 hands and realized playing the above worked well, so I've been playing it that way for at least 10 years.*

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **The standard super-accept** is a jump to 3 M with maximum values. Marty Bergen recommends our plan, except that we don’t require opener to jump with a minimum when vulnerable. This plan reduces the need to invite on marginal values.

## Major-Suit Fragments, 5-5 & 5-4 Minors

Responses to 1 NT at the three level include two major-suit fragment bids and 3  $\diamond$ , forcing to game with minor suits.

### Major Suit Fragment Bids $\diamond^1$

3  $\heartsuit$  one spade, three hearts and 5-4 minors (either way).

3  $\spadesuit$  three spades, one heart and 5-4 minors (either way).

Opener may raise the fragment, to play in a 4-3 fit. Opener bids 3 NT with the short suit well-stopped. Otherwise, opener picks a minor, which is *forcing*. 4  $\diamond$  is crosswood over clubs; the short major asks for keycards over diamonds.

### 5-5 Minors, Forcing

Responder's jump to 3  $\diamond$  shows at least five cards in each minor and is forcing to 3 NT or five of a minor. Opener rebids:

3  $\heartsuit$  Hearts double-stopped, but need help in spades.

3  $\spadesuit$  Spades double-stopped, but need help in hearts.

3 NT Both majors double-stopped.

4 m This minor is trump; next step asks for keycards.

### 5-4 Minors, Slamming

In a 2023 club game, playing against GLM Steve Gladyszak, I pulled this hand and partner opened 1 NT, 15-17:

$\spadesuit$  A K  $\heartsuit$  A 8  $\diamond$  K 8 6 3 2  $\clubsuit$  J 10 6 4

After the play, Steve said there was a bid for this hand: 4  $\spadesuit$ . Opener can bid 4 NT, 5 of a minor, or 6 of a minor.

Since 4  $\spadesuit$  is forcing, it could be employed with a stronger hand than mine. Since we play 3  $\heartsuit$  and 3  $\spadesuit$  as fragments, this bid implies 2-2 majors. We permit 2=3=4=4 and 3=2=4=4 shape as well.

Be sure to discuss this before trying it on partner, as we had never heard of it before.

## Backstory

Before expert standard settled on showing 3–1 majors, a jump to three of a major often showed 5–5 majors, invitational or forcing. Our methods already handle those hands, and better: we can play an invitation in 2 ♠, and we can set trumps for slam at the three level.

In contrast, we have no other good way to bid a forcing hand with 5–5 minors, or (3–1)=(5–4) distribution.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Jump response at three of a major.** Many partnerships jump in the singleton, still with 5–4 in the minors. This singleton bid is more likely to draw a lead-directing double and possible sacrifice, but could right-side the contract if we play in the 4–3 major-suit fit. The important thing is to agree and remember one method.

## Size/Clubs, Diamonds, 5-Card-Major Stayman

The 2 ♠ response denies a 4-card major. It is used when responder has either a balanced invitation, or six or more clubs: weak, invitational, or (if we might not play 3 NT) strong.

The 2 NT response denies a 4-card major. It is used when responder has six or more diamonds: weak, invitational, or (if we might not play 3 NT) strong.

The 3 ♣ response is forcing to game. It shows zero or one 4-card major and/or a 3-card major or two. Our 5-card-major Stayman discovers major-suit fits, but opener never tells 4-card major-suit holdings to the opponents. Let's start here.

### 5-Card-Major Stayman (3 ♣)

The response of 3 ♣ is made with game values and:

- one 4-card major suit; or
- no 4-card major (but one or two 3-card majors).

O2	R2	<b>1 NT - 3 ♣: 5-Card-Major Stayman</b> ♦ <sup>1</sup>	
3 ♦	No 5-card major.		
	3 ♥	Four <i>spades</i> .	3 NT, 4 M = play.
	3 ♠	Four <i>hearts</i> .	Other = cue-bid for slam in M.
	3 NT	Play here.	
3 ♥	Five hearts.		3 NT, 4 M = play.
3 ♠	Five spades.		4 NT = quantitative (misfit). Other = cue-bid for slam in M.
No other responses are defined.			

Unless we find a fit in opener's 5-card major, we have better tools for bidding slam after a 2 ♣ Stayman response.

It's nice when this method finds a 5-3 major-suit fit. More importantly, opener's major-suit holdings are concealed, when opener does not have a 5-card major. We can achieve this, because responder should never have both majors: regular Stayman is sufficient when responder does have both majors, as we don't much care whether opener's major is four or five cards.

## Transfer to Diamonds (2 NT)

Responder's 2 NT denies a 4-card major suit. It promises six or more diamonds with a weak, invitational, or (if we might not play 3 NT) game-forcing hand. If responder has a short suit and opener has no stopper there, slam will be in the picture. Opener's responses are often called *post-accept*.

O2	R2	O3	1 NT – 2 NT [♦, any strength]
3 ♣	Refuses potential invitation to 3 NT. ♦ <sup>2</sup>		
	Pass	Weak 5-5 minors (a kludge).	
	3 ♦	Weak, to play.	
	Other	See “When responder...” below.	
3 ♦	Accepts potential invitation to 3 NT. ♦ <sup>2</sup>		
	Pass	Weak, to play.	
	3 NT	To play.	
When responder has a game force, over 3 ♣ or 3 ♦:			
	3 ♥, 3 ♠	Singleton or void in bid suit.	
		3 NT	Double stopper opposite shortness.
		4 ♣	Great fit – RKB ♦ (crosswood).
		4 ♦	Bad fit – suggests playing here.
		3 ♠, 4 ♥	5- or chunky 4-card suit.
		5 ♦	Game try.
	4 ♣	RKB diamonds (crosswood).	

## Size Ask (2 ♠) – Clubs or Balanced Invitation

Responder's 2 ♠ size or range ask denies holding a 4-card major suit. Except when balanced, it promises a 6-card or longer club suit, and any strength. These are the possible hand types:

- A balanced game invitation – we play 2 NT or 3 NT.
- A weak hand with clubs – we play 3 ♣.
- An invitational hand with clubs – we play 3 ♣ or 3 NT.
- A game-forcing hand with clubs – we play 3 NT or aim at 6 ♣.

Opener replies to show strength: 2 NT shows a minimum, and 3 ♣ shows a maximum:

O2	R2	O3	1 NT – 2 ♠ [Size Ask]
2 NT	Opener has a minimum hand.		
	Pass	Balanced invitation.	
	3 ♣	Clubs, weak or invitational.	
		Pass	Opener must pass.
3 ♣	Opener has a maximum hand.		
	Pass	Clubs, weak.	
	3 NT	To play.	
When responder has a game force, over 2 NT or 3 ♣:			
	3 ♦, 3 ♥, 3 ♠	Singleton in bid suit.	
		3 NT	Shortness double stopped.
		4 ♣	Bad fit – suggests playing here.
		4 ♦	Great fit – RKB (crosswood).
		3 ♠, 4 ♥	5- or chunky 4-card suit.
		5 ♣	Hope I can make it.
	4 ♦	RKB clubs (crosswood).	

No longer must responder bid Stayman and expose opener's major-suit holdings, just to invite game in notrump (as when we played 2 ♠ as a pure transfer to clubs).

## Key Features

- 2 ♠ is a size ask (balanced or clubs).
- 2 NT for diamonds.
- 3 ♣ is 5-card-major Stayman.

## Backstory

The 2 ♠ size ask is by Gavin Wolpert.

*Puppet Stayman* can be used over a 2 NT opening to discover 4- and 5-card majors in opener's hand. In order to handle cases when responder has no, one or two 3- or 4-card majors, puppet Stayman leaks information like crazy to the opponents and sometimes uses arcane bids.

We play 3 ♣ over 1 NT as 5-card-major Stayman, as recommended by the late Justin Lall. He called it puppet Stayman for its similarity to its predecessor, even though the requirements and responses are different.

There is a slight cost to overlaying the size ask on the transfer; when 2 ♠ is always a transfer to clubs, opener can indicate a hand that would accept an

invitation to 3 NT, *based on a fit for clubs*. With the size ask, it's just minimum or maximum, without reference to clubs. The benefits of the size ask greatly outweigh the value of this rare club nudge.

## ◆ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **2 NT 5-card-major Stayman.** Unfortunately, the next opponent gains a nearly free swing at 3 ♣, to request a club lead against a likely 3 NT contract; if it happens that opener has no club stopper, we could be in real trouble, and already at the three level. Switching to 2 NT solves this problem – see the Appendix.

If we have been playing 3 ♣ as our 5-card-major Stayman bid for a while, a change to 2 NT may be more disruptive than the problem it would fix. There is no urgency until opponents actually start doubling our 3 ♣.

<sup>2</sup> **Pre-accept.** The post-accept method above supports the inference for selecting trump with a weak 5–5 minors. It works even better with the common description “likes diamonds,” rather than the more generally useful “would accept 3 NT.”

Gary and I have decided to stick with the much older *pre-accept*, where 3 ♣ says opener would accept 3 NT, because that's the way we have always played. There is a memory cost to any change, so we are going with what we know. With a weak 5–5 in the minors, we'll pass 1 NT; Gary noted that, if we need to play in three of a minor, they probably have lots of majors, and they will be in the bidding. This is not an important decision; just play, and know, what we play!

# Opening Bid Doubled or Overcalled

## 1 NT Doubled: Systems On

Responder may simply ignore an opponent's double and go on about their business, whether the double is for penalties or has some artificial meaning. In addition, we have:

**Rdbl** Responder's redouble says to "run up the line," to bid suits until a playable fit is found. Responder should have two or three places to play.

**Pass** If responder passes, and the double comes around, opener must redouble. Responder may leave this in, to play for penalties, or escape into a long minor suit.

When the 1 NT bid is strong, this basic system is fine. ♠<sup>1</sup> What about this auction?

-	1 NT	(Pass)	Pass
	(Dble)	Pass	(Pass) ?

Having denied a 5-card major or game interest, this is simpler. If we have some values, we pass, and hope partner makes it. Otherwise, we can bid a 5-card minor suit or redouble to run up the line.

## 2 ♣ Overall: Systems On

When an opponent overcalls our 1 NT opening with 2 ♣, we again play systems on, using double as Stayman. Of course, responder may pass with nothing to say.

**2 ♣ Landy.** If an opponent overcalls 2 ♣ to show both majors, Stayman makes no sense, so our double shows at least an invitational hand and the ability to punish at least one major suit. Otherwise, systems are on. ♠<sup>2</sup>

## 2 ♦ or Higher Overcall

When an opponent overcalls our 1 NT opening above 2 ♣, responder's bid of a suit at the two level (if available) is to play; a bid at the three level is forcing to game. Responder's 3 NT denies a stopper, as does the immediate cue-bid (Stayman).



**Lebensohl.** Everyone should play lebensohl in this situation, because it allows responder to bid in additional ways. Responder bids 2 NT and opener relays to 3 ♣, which may be passed, to play there. Over 3 ♣, responder's suit bid is now competitive (but invitational if the bid of two of that suit were available); 3 NT promises a stopper in the bid suit; and a cue-bid is Stayman with a stopper – “slow action shows stopper (SASS),” aka “fast denies.” ♦<sup>3</sup>

**Negative doubles.** The cue-bid as Stayman is fine, if the auction is at the two level and responder has the strength to drive to game. Otherwise, we need the negative double. It's clearly essential at the three level; it's an advantage at the two level as well.

**Example:** We are vulnerable, LHO opens 1 ♥, partner overcalls 1 NT, and RHO bids 2 ♠. What would you do, holding:

♠ K 7 5 2 ♥ 9 ♦ Q 9 5 3 2 ♣ K 8 4

No bids are pleasing, including lebensohl 2 NT. If the tool is in your box, make a negative (takeout) double. Perfect!

In competitive situations takeout doubles usually have an edge. They improve our chances of getting to our own best contract – the primary goal – and sometimes partner can pass for penalties.

## Backstory

Long ago, David Metcalf provided the system for when our 1 NT is doubled.

Ron Andersen's book was the primary resource on lebensohl. Many free articles are available online as well. (Ken Lebensold disavowed the convention, so lower case “l” is correct.)

Stewart Rubenstein got TNT runouts (below) from Lew Gamerman. I started playing this with Stewart and Andrew Hanes, when we were playing weak notrumps, non-vulnerable. I applied the TNT name to this system; I took it from a system favored by Eric Schwartz to intervene over 1 NT.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

### <sup>1</sup> TNT (Touching/Non-Touching) Runouts

This advanced system of runouts applies in any of these cases, whether or not transfer or natural systems would otherwise be in effect:

- An opponent doubles our 1 NT opening bid or overcall *for penalty*.
- An opponent doubles our weak 1 NT opening bid, for any reason. (Since an artificial double of a weak notrump usually shows values, it can easily be converted for penalties.)

Except when playing weak notrump openings, the added complexity of TNT runouts is probably not worthwhile.

**Primary TNT Runout System.** These are the primary auctions of concern:

1. – 1 NT (Dble) ?
2. (1x) 1 NT (Dble) ?

Responder has three choices:

**Bid** the lower of two *touching* suits.

**Rdbl** with a single suit, asking opener to bid 2 ♣. Responder will either pass, or correct to the long suit.

**Pass** (alert) forces opener to redouble. Responder may pass for penalties or bid the lower of *non-touching* suits: bid 2 ♦ with diamonds and spades, or bid 2 ♣ with clubs and a major (might be a 4–3–3–3 stinker).

A direct 2 ♠ bid shows the black suits, but is reserved for hands that can brave a 3 ♣ contract.

**Secondary TNT Runout System.** The primary system won't work in the passout seat, for example:

- |   |        |        |          |
|---|--------|--------|----------|
| – | 1 NT   | (Pass) | Pass     |
|   | (Dble) | Pass   | (Pass) ? |

Here, all two-suiters are shown by bidding immediately. Bid the lower of any two suits (as in the DONT convention). Redouble with a single suit, as in the main system.

We play penalty doubles of 1 NT when the opening is weak. When they play (as we do) that pass forces a redouble, we play the secondary system:

- |        |      |         |   |
|--------|------|---------|---|
| (1 NT) | Dble | (Pass!) | ? |
|--------|------|---------|---|

Again, a bid shows the lower of two suits. With a single suit, pass and bid it over the redouble.

## They Overcall Our 1 NT Opening

<sup>2</sup>**Two of a minor for both majors.** This situation does not come up that often. For a while, Stewart had me playing this plan, which he plays with Zach Grossack:

- Dble Values, penalty-oriented, forcing to 2 NT or 2 M doubled.
- 2 ♠ Natural, weak (over 2 ♣).
- 2 ♥ Both minors, competitive.
- 2 ♠ Transfer to clubs, at least invitational. New suit is short, and forcing to game (as usual).
- 2 NT Lebensohl (weak).
- 3 ♣ Transfer to diamonds, at least invitational. New suit is short, and forcing to game (as usual).
- 3 ♠ Artificial game force, worried about stoppers.
- 3 ♥ Short hearts, both minors.
- 3 ♠ Short spades, both minors.

<sup>3</sup>**Transfer lebensohl.** Consider this South hand, from a club game:

♠ A J 7 3 2 ♥ 8 7 6 5 ♦ 9 4 ♣ A Q

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	1 NT [14–16]	2 ♠
?			

These folks play DONT, so 2 ♠ showed diamonds and a higher suit. I ignored the heart suit, and jumped to 3 ♠, forcing. Partner raised with:

♠ K 8 5 4 ♥ A K ♦ K 3 2 ♣ J 8 6 5

The ♠ J came whistling through; East cashed two diamonds from a 6-card suit, and promoted a trump trick for West's ♠ Q-10 doubleton. Making only four was a bad board. East also had ♣ K-10-2. When North declared, they cleared trump, won the club finesse, ruffed out the king and made six. It turns out that East had 2–2 in the majors – he forgot and bid his 6-bagger.

Transfer lebensohl would have right-sided the hand: I would leap to 3 ♥, invitational or better. Whether opener bids 3 ♠ or 4 ♠, North declares 4 ♠. On the other hand, had I simply bid 3 ♠ (Stayman without a stopper), partner would have declared without transfer lebensohl. So, as far as I know, in over two decades, I have never recognized a need for transfer lebensohl, as I would with:

♠ A J 7 3 2 ♥ 8 7 6 ♦ 9 4 ♣ A Q 3

For more information, see Larry Cohen's article, "Lebensohl."

# Artificial Response Doubled

## Stayman 2 ♣ Doubled

**Opener's redouble** is an offer to play for game right there. If we make exactly two clubs redoubled, our score will exceed bidding and making 3 NT, except 3 NT vulnerable making five. With more confidence in making notrump than clubs, responder bids notrump at the appropriate level.

**With a stopper** in clubs, opener responds normally.

**Lacking a stopper**, opener passes.

When 2 ♣ doubled is passed around, responder bids:

R2	O3	R3	2 ♣, doubled, passed around to responder
2 ♦			Garbage Stayman: opener passes or bids a major.
2 ♥			Crawling Stayman: opener passes with four hearts, bids 2 ♠ with four spades or two hearts, or passes with 3-3. Responder may remove 2 ♠ to 3 ♣ with 3=4=1=5.
2 ♠			Natural invitation.
Rdbl			Forward-going. So that responder declares, opener:
	2 ♦		Transfer to 4-card hearts.
		2 ♥	3-Card heart support, non-forcing.
		3+♥	4-Card heart support.
	2 ♥		Transfer to 4-card spades.
		2 ♠	3-Card spade support, non-forcing.
		3+♠	4-Card spade support.
	2 ♠		No major suit (forcing - we don't have 2-2 majors).
	2 NT		No major suit (3=3=5=2).

## 5-Card-Major Stayman 3 ♣ Doubled

As at the two level, opener's redouble of 3 ♣ is an offer to play, and a bid promises a club stopper. If the double comes around, responder redoubles, and opener answers the *wrong 5-card major*, hoping to protect a potential club value by responder declaring.

Over opener's 3 ♦, responder bids the *right major*. In any of these cases, a 7-card major-suit fit may be played.

## Transfer Doubled

**Texas transfer is doubled.** Completing the transfer promises the ace or king of the doubled suit. Otherwise, pass; and then responder's redouble is a re-transfer.

**Jacoby transfer is doubled.** When our two-level transfer to a major suit is doubled, the primary need is to know if opener has three or more cards in support. When this is the case, we complete the transfer normally – this much is standard.

With only two cards in responder's major, the focus shifts to a stopper in the doubled suit.

- With a stopper and only 2-card support, opener redoubles.  $\diamond^1$  Given the stopper, responder can then bid notrump at the appropriate level, sign off at two of the major, or bid on.
- Lacking a stopper, and with only 2-card support, opener passes. With no interest in game, responder signs off at two of the major. With interest in game, responder may redouble to re-transfer, or bid on.

**2 ♠ size ask is doubled.** *With a spade stopper*, opener responds normally.

*If opener lacks a stopper*, we may be in trouble, so we mostly give up on game, unless responder has a good hand with clubs. Since responder has no major suit, we focus on minors.

Rdbl A redouble by either opener  $\diamond^1$  or responder asks partner to pick a minor suit. Opener should be 4-4 for the redouble, but could hold something like:

♠ 8 6   ♥ A J 5 2   ♦ A 9 3 2   ♣ A Q 3

Since opener may not have a 4-card minor, responder should be at least 4-4 to redouble.

Pass Opener's pass denies both a stopper and 4-4 minors.

Here are responder's other actions:

2 NT No longer invitational – hope you can make it! Responder may not have a stopper, for example:

♠ J 7 5   ♥ K 6 4   ♦ K Q 10 4   ♣ 10 9 2

- 3 ♣ To play, with *five* or more clubs (weak with six clubs or formerly invitational).
- 3 ♦ To play, formerly invitational with five diamonds.
- 3 ♥ Three good hearts, forcing to 4 ♣.
- 3 ♠ Based on a good club suit, suggests bidding 3 NT with half a spade stopper (Q-x or J-x-x) and a club honor:  
♠ Q 5   ♥ K 6 4   ♦ 10 4   ♣ A Q 10 9 4 2
- 3 NT To play.
- 4 ♣ Invites 5 ♣, should deny three good hearts.
- 4 ♦ Asks for keycards in clubs, perhaps:  
♠ 5   ♥ K 6 4   ♦ K Q 4   ♣ A Q J 9 4 2

## Key Features

After the double of responder's artificial bid, opener's bid is the best news. Redouble is useful; pass is worst.

- When either Stayman is doubled, opener's redouble is an offer to play. Opener responds normally with a club stopper, or passes without; responder's redouble shows values and asks opener to transfer to a 4-card major.
- When a Jacoby transfer is doubled, opener's bid shows true support; redouble shows a doubleton with a stopper.
- When a Texas transfer is doubled, opener's bid shows the ace or king of the doubled suit.
- When the 2 ♠ size ask is doubled, opener's bid shows a spade stopper. Otherwise, responder's minor suit is to play; 2 NT is "hope you can make it," and a redouble by either partner shows both minors.

## Backstory & Alternative Method

Gary Schwartz and I worked out the systems for doubles of responder's bids in 2019 and refined them in 2022.

**☐ Override: 1NT-opener's redouble always offers to play.**

This overrides better meanings for Jacoby transfers and the size ask.

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# Two Notrump Opening

## Overview of Responses

Over 2 NT, we do not have the wealth of responses that we have over 1 NT. The responses to 2 NT, or a 2 NT rebid after opening 2 ♣, are:

3 ♣	Stayman, at least one 4-card major, or a 6-card minor.
3 ♦	Transfer to a heart suit of at least five cards.
3 ♥	Transfer to a spade suit of at least five cards.
3 ♠	Relay to 3 NT for crosswood or both minors.
3 NT	To play.
4 ♣	Gerber: respond 0/4, 1, 2, 3 aces.
4 ♦	Transfer to a heart suit of at least six cards.
4 ♥	Transfer to a spade suit of at least six cards.
4 ♠	Slam try, 5-4 minors & 2-2 majors.
4 NT	Slam invitation (quantitative).
5 NT	Forcing grand slam invitation.
Higher	To play.

## Stayman

O2	R2	Responses to 3 ♣ Stayman $\diamond^1$
3 ♦		No 4-card major.
	3 ♥, 3 ♠	Smolen: 5+ cards in the other major.
	3+NT	Natural.
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	6+ cards, forcing slam try (likely no major).
3 ♥		Four hearts (possibly four spades).
	3 ♠	Artificial slam try; hearts are trump.
	3+ NT	Natural, four spades but fewer hearts.
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	6+ cards, forcing slam try (likely no major).
3 ♠		Four spades, and not four hearts.
	3+ NT	Natural, four hearts but fewer spades.
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	6+ cards, forcing slam try (likely no major).
	4 ♥	Artificial slam try; spades are trump.

The Stayman 3 ♣ response *promises holding a 4-card major suit or a minor suit of at least six cards*. Opener bids a 4+ card major suit (3 ♥ with both) or 3 ♦ – no other bids are defined.

Delayed Texas does not apply – use Smolen with 5-4 or 6-4 majors.

Over any of opener's bids, with a 6-card or longer minor, responder bids it, cancelling the promise of a 4-card major. Unfortunately, it is possible to miss a 4-4 fit in spades, when holding a 6-card minor (with 4-4, opener bids hearts first).

Use Stayman to search for a 4-4 major fit; our rule applies over 2 NT:

*A transfer to a major suit is used only when a 4-4 fit in the other major is not an issue.*

## Transfers

### Texas Transfers

Responder's jump to 4 ♡ is a Texas transfer to 4 ♠; likewise, 4 ♦ is a transfer to 4 ♥. Responder promises a suit of at least six cards and expectations of making game. Opener completes the transfer and usually plays there. However, responder – or opener – may drive to slam, but only by asking for keycards.

### Jacoby Transfers

Responder's 3 ♦ is a transfer to 3 ♥; likewise, 3 ♡ is a Jacoby transfer to 3 ♠. Responder promises a suit of at least five cards, but possibly no points. Opener usually completes the transfer. Holding strong trumps and maximum values, opener *super-accepts*, jumping to game or bidding a control.

Over the completed transfer, responder may pass or bid notrump at the appropriate level with exactly five cards in the major. With six or more cards in the major, responder may raise to game (a mild slam try, because Texas was not used), or bid a new suit (natural and forcing). *Responder has no bid to ask for aces or keycards immediately over a completed three-level transfer* – that comes only when a fit has been disclosed. Texas provides the keycard capability.

Responder's new suit is natural and forcing. If a major, it will be five cards, because Stayman was not used.

## Responder Has 5-5 Majors

When bidding 5-5 majors, it is normal to transfer to spades, and then bid 4♥. Opener passes, or picks spades, and the auction ends in game. To transfer to hearts and follow with 3♠ saves space and shows slam interest.

O3	<b>5-5 Majors, Slam Interest: 2 NT - 3♦; 3♥ - 3♠; ?</b>
3 NT	Offer to play, non-forcing. [If a possibility, 2-2 majors.]
4♣	Hearts are trump, the best hand, forcing to 5 M.
4♦	Spades are trump, the best hand, forcing to 5 M.
4♥	Hearts are trump, not the best hand.
4♠	Spades are trump, not the best hand.

## Relay to 3 NT with Minors; 5-4 Minors

The 3♠ response is a relay. ♦<sup>2</sup> Opener is required to bid 3 NT, so responder can move toward a minor-suit slam.

**Single minor.** Responder may take charge with a single, long minor suit (contrast this to Stayman and a minor, above):

- 4♣ Asks for keycards in diamonds (crosswood).
- 4♦ Asks for keycards in clubs (crosswood).

**Both minors.** Responder may show both minors with slam interest.

- 4♥ At least 5-5 minors, with heart shortness (splinter).
- 4♠ At least 5-5 minors, with spade shortness (splinter).
- 4 NT Two cards in each major suit (5-4 minors, non-forcing).

Opener's least encouraging action is to bid (or pass) 4 NT, an offer to play there. Opener may also pick a minor at the five or six level.

## 5-4 Minors, Slamming

As over 1 NT, the jump to 4♠ shows 4-4 or longer minors with slam interest. Opener can bid 4 NT, 5 of a minor, or 6 of a minor. Since 4♠ is forcing, it could be employed with a stronger hand than via the 3 NT relay.

## Interference over 2 NT or a Response

Mostly, we play the same as after our 1 NT opening.

**2 NT Doubled** – see “1 NT Doubled: Systems On” on page 422.

**3 ♣ Doubled** – see “Stayman 2 ♣ Doubled” on page 426.

**Transfer Doubled** – see “Transfer Doubled” on page 427.

### 3 ♠ Doubled

Opener has three possible actions:

- 3 NT Shows the ace or king of spades.
- Rdbl Shows a slower stopper.
- Pass Otherwise.

Responder may pass or bid 3 NT for opener to play there, or go on about their business.

## Key Features

- Stayman promises a 4-card major or a 6-card minor.
- The other major is an artificial slam try in opener’s major.
- Delayed Texas does *not* apply – responder’s 4 ♦ is natural.
- With 5-5 majors and game-only values, bid 3 ♥ (spades), and next bid 4 ♠. Opener should pass or correct to 4 ♠.
- With 5-5 majors and slam interest, bid 3 ♦ (hearts), and next bid 3 ♠. Opener’s 4 ♣ shows the best hand and hearts, and opener’s 4 ♦ shows the best hand and spades – either is forcing to five of the major.
- When 2 NT, Stayman or a transfer is doubled, we play the same as after a 1 NT opening. After the double of responder’s bid, opener’s bid is the best news. Redouble is useful; pass is worst.
- When the 3 ♠ relay to 3 NT is doubled, bidding 3 NT shows the ♠ A or ♠ K; redouble shows a slower stopper.

## Backstory

Once, my partner had enough to commit to slam after Texas over 2 NT, and bid it. As responder, I had been planning on asking for keycards. I don’t bid speculative grand slams, and we missed one. The answer to this is an

extension of our keycard principles: the 2 NT opener must ask for keycards before bidding a slam. If we “have them all,” then opener must ask for kings, to say so.

Billy Miller recommended the handling of 5–5 majors with slam interest in his column in the November 2015 Bulletin. I discovered it in a pile of my bridge stuff, and we adopted it in 2023.

The best feature of the 3 s scheme is being able to bid crosswood – so much better than Gerber – for either minor. The bids showing both minors might be useful. This 3 s response first appeared in an early version of my article, “Roman Keycard Blackwood, Delayed Kickback and Crosswood.”

## ◆ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Puppet Stayman.** Many partnerships prefer that 3 ♣ ask for a 5-card major over 2 NT, and sometimes it works well for them. However, it introduces multiple complications. Long ago, Howard Piltch pointed out that puppet Stayman precludes using Smolen. Regular Stayman won’t discover that opener’s major contains five cards, but it does great on most other things.

<sup>2</sup> **Minor-suit Stayman.** A simpler approach to the 3 ♠ response is minor-suit Stayman, showing slam interest with at least 4–4 in the minors. This plan appears to leave Stayman as the only route with a long minor, and with no way to insist on asking for keycards (only Gerber).

# Strong Two Club Opening

## Introduction

The chance of picking up a hand with 22 or more HCP is 0.42% (1 in 238). For a partnership, that comes out to once in five sessions. When the partnership is focused on events with IMP scoring, the 2 ♣ system is important, due to the outsize value of slams. With interest in all events, and matchpoints in particular, we just need a decent system that is easy to remember.

## Suit Responses

A standard suit response to 2 ♣ promises at least five cards (six in a minor), headed by two of the top three honors. The hand must also contain at least 8 HCP, or perhaps A-K-10-x-x in spades. We play standard; but for other pairs, a suit-positive response ranges from much lighter to not permitted at all. ♦<sup>1</sup>

## Game-Force Values

Over a standard 2 ♣ opening, an ace, king or (for most pairs) two queens is sufficient to force to game. This should give a balanced opening a play for 3 NT; we assume the same for an unbalanced opening, although a lone king could be orphaned opposite shortness.

## Competition

### □ Plan 1 – 2 ♣ responder's X/XX = bad hand (standard).

Pass Pass is positive, lacking a suit response – opener's double is takeout. ♦<sup>2</sup>

X/XX Double or redouble is negative (bad hand).

Bid A suit is positive, but requirements are relaxed.

### □ Plan 2 – 2 ♣ responder's X/XX positive.

In 2022 we gained a trap pass by switching to playing:

Pass Pass is negative or trapping – opener's double is takeout.

X/XX Double or redouble is positive, lacking a suit response.

Bid A suit is positive, but requirements are relaxed.

## When to Open 2 ♣

A strong 2 ♣ opening bid is appropriate for these types of hands:

1. A strong balanced hand:
  - a. Invitational, about 23 HCP, or
  - b. Forcing to game.
2. A strong 1-suited hand:
  - a. Invitational with a major suit (about 9 tricks). Playing the Parrish relay, invitational with a minor also works.
  - b. Forcing to game with any suit.
    - i. Good suit, or
    - ii. Self-sufficient suit.
  - c. Playing *birthright* (Kokish relay), a running suit with all side suits stopped. (Our 3 NT opening handles this.)
3. A rare 2-suited, game-forcing hand, usually longer than 5-4.

**Note:** A 2 ♣ opening bid should never be 3-suited.

Opener's new suit is forcing, so that opener can get responder to choose one of two suits for game. Opener's second suit will be at the three level or higher, so the auction will be higher still, when responder picks it. No way opener can afford to bid three suits!

As usual, the sensible interpretation of "forcing to game" is 3 NT or higher, but a new suit is always forcing.

When deciding whether or not to open 2 ♣ on an unbalanced hand, especially a two-suiter, consider what might happen if we open one of a suit instead:

- A. If the one bid is passed out, are we likely to miss a game?
- B. How likely is it, that everybody will pass our one bid?
- C. If we open 2 ♣, does the hand have the strength to penalize interfering opponents?

For example, given modest support, we basically have game in hand with:

♠ A K 10 9 6 2   ♥ A K 10 9 6 2   ♦ –   ♣ 2

If a 1 ♠ opening is passed out, we may well miss a game. However, there is almost no chance of that: 26 HCP and lots of minor-suit cards

are out there. If we open 2 ♣, the opponents may be at the five level before we name a suit. It will be difficult to bid our hand or to penalize the opponents.

♠ A K 10 9 6 2   ♡ A K 2   ♦ A K 6   ♣ 2

This is a 4-loser hand, but 21 HCP and six quick tricks, four of them in 3-card suits. Open 2 ♣, and invite in spades.

A strong 1½-suiter can present problems when opened 2 ♣:

♠ A K 10 9 6 2   ♡ A K 6 2   ♦ A K   ♣ 2

Treated as a one-suiter, the heart suit will probably be lost. Treated as a two-suiter, responder may pick hearts when spades are better. 4 ♠ is a good prospect opposite 2-2 majors, so this hand should be treated as a strong two-suiter. Turn the ♡ K into the ♡ Q, and a better plan would be to open 1 ♠; jump shift in hearts; and, if not raised, bid 4 ♠.

Major suits are easy after opening 2 ♣, compared with minor suits; and diamonds are hardest. Plan how the bidding is likely to go. When still uncertain whether to open at the one level or 2 ♣, the one level is likely to be the better choice.

## 2 ♡ Bust & Parrish vs. 2 ♦ Waiting & Birthright

2 ♡ Bust with the Parrish Relay is our recommended system over the 2 ♣ opening. The 2 ♦ response is an artificial positive, showing at least an ace, king or two queens – but not suitable for a standard response in a suit. The 2 ♡ response is an artificial negative, denying the values for 2 ♦. 2 NT is a suit-positive in hearts.

**Parrish.** The Parrish relay is an artificial 2 ♠ by opener over 2 ♡ negative, requiring responder to bid 2 NT. Opener then bids a long suit, which is non-forcing. This allows opening 2 ♣ without game in hand, based on *any* long suit. This is a significant benefit for clubs, diamonds and hearts, at the cost of not being able to bid a natural 2 ♠ over 2 ♡ negative. ♦<sup>3</sup> Over any non-forcing suit bid by opener, responder can look down, see the queen of trump or a ruffing value, and raise!



## □ Plan A – 2♥ Bust & Parrish Relay

R1	O2	R2	O3	2♥ Bust & Parrish Relay
2♦	Positive (GF, at least A, K or QQ), lacking a good suit.			
	2♥, 2♠	Natural.		
	2 NT	Natural, balanced, unlimited.		
	3♣, 3♦	Natural.		
	3♥, 3♠	Natural, at most one loser opposite a void, sets trump, requires control-bidding.		
	3 NT	A running suit with all side suits stopped; any action by responder is a slam try.		
2♥	Negative (No ace or king and at most one queen).			
	2♠	Parrish relay. ♦ <sup>4</sup>		
		2 NT	Required, allowing opener to continue.	
		3 Suit	Natural & non-forcing.	
	2 NT	Balanced, about 22–24 HCP, non-forcing.		
	3 Suit	Natural and forcing.		
	3 NT	Balanced, 25+ HCP. ♦ <sup>5</sup> Stayman and transfers are on, but are a gamble without a 6-bagger.		
2♠ 2NT 3♣ 3♦	Suit-positive response (2 NT = hearts). ♦ <sup>6</sup>			

Parrish is unlikely to wrong-side 3 NT. Opener has shown an unbalanced hand. The 2♥ responder is not likely to fix opener's problem with notrump, so the final contract should be in a suit. On Bridge Winners, Adam Parrish wrote regarding his convention:

*There are a lot of benefits from having 2♦ be GF. And from not having to use the cheaper minor as artificial. (I feel like I always have a decent hand with clubs when I play that method.)*

*I have a certain fondness for the Parrish Convention. It's simple and effective and easy to learn if you already know Lebensohl. It makes the 2♥ bust, which I prefer to a waiting 2♦, much more playable. Its major downside is that it's harder to show two-suiters with spades after 2♣ – 2♥, but those hands are quite rare.*

*I have had very bad luck passing 2♥.*

An advanced partnership that plays 2 ♡ bust should be playing Parrish – if not, add it.

### □ Plan B – 2 ♦ Waiting & Birthright (Kokish Relay)

A partnership that plays 2 ♦ waiting should be playing birthright (named by Eric Kokish) – if not, either add it, or switch to 2 ♡ bust with Parrish. Few pairs should look further, but I do in my article. Here is basic birthright, all that is needed for many pairs: ♦<sup>7</sup>

R1	O2	R2	O3	Birthright (Kokish Relay)
2 ♦	Waiting: negative, or positive lacking a good suit.			
	2 ♡	Kokish Relay: either a balanced game force, or unbalanced with hearts.		
		2 ♠	Required, allowing opener to continue.	
			2 NT	Game-forcing, balanced.
			3 ♡	Natural and invitational.
			Other	Natural & forcing, primary hearts.
	2 ♠	Natural and forcing; new suits forcing.		
	2 NT	Balanced, about 22–24 HCP, non-forcing.		
	3 ♣, 3 ♦	Natural and forcing; new suits forcing.		
	3 ♡, 3 ♠	Natural, at most one loser opposite a void; sets trump and requires control-bidding.		
	3 NT	A running suit with all side suits stopped; any action by responder is a slam try.		

### Polls

2012	2022	Polls on Bridge Winners
39%		2 ♦ GF, 2 ♡ bust
	25%	2 ♦ GF, 2 ♡ bust (opt: Parrish, Kokish, or other)
31%		2 ♦ waiting, rebid cheap minor with bust
	52%	2 ♦ waiting (options: Kokish or other)
16%	11%	Controls/steps (options: Kokish or other)
14%	12%	Other

Any system of responses to the 2 ♣ opening will have strengths, weaknesses and differing complexity. The “2 ♦ GF, 2 ♡ bust” system is no longer the most popular system on Bridge Winners. However, a follow-up poll shows that the Parrish relay is not yet in general use.

## Backstory

Birthright is in BWS.

The standard treatment for interference over the 2 ♣ opening is described by Max Hardy and many others. In 2022, we flipped the meanings.

Adam Parrish is a bridge player/teacher/writer and Bridge Winners admin. With Greg Humphreys of Bridge Winners, Parrish won the NABC Fast Pairs in March 2022, and they have NABC wins since.

Gary and I have played 2 ♥ bust for decades, and it's OK. Parrish announced his convention in his column in the July 2020 *Bridge Bulletin*. It is a solid improvement to 2 ♥ bust.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Jump responses.** Gary and Geoff Phipps play that responder's jump response in a major suit denies the strength for a positive response, showing a 6-card suit at the three level, and a 7-card suit at the four level. These clearly can be valuable, but they run the risk of blowing up opener's auction.

Bridge World Standard says, "A suit-bid response to two clubs from three hearts to four diamonds indicates a one-loser suit." That seems like a narrow agreement designed to keep responder out of opener's way – a sensible plan, in general.

<sup>2</sup> **Responder's double/redouble.** A majority of commenters on Bridge Winners play that a double or redouble is negative (bad hand), even after a 4 ♥ overcall. Many commenters do not like this, but they propose multiple, conflicting plans.

<sup>3</sup> **Pete's extensions:** Over responder's Parrish 2 NT, opener's jump into four of a suit has no defined meaning; it could be defined as a game-going, pure one-suiter. If the opponents decide to get into our Parrish auction, it won't confuse us.

This lets opener's direct bids over 2 ♥ show a game-going 1½-suiter, or 5–5 minors, long suit first, at the three level. Responder bids the next step (or raises), and opener shows the second suit (3 NT for the step suit).

Opener's four-level bids over 2 ♥ are forcing to game and show at least 5 cards in a (higher) major suit and 5 cards in the bid suit – like leaping Michaels.

O3	R3	R4	O4	Pete: 2 ♣ – 2 ♥; 2 ♠ – 2 NT; ?
4 ♣	5+ clubs & 5+ cards in a major, forcing.			
	4 ♦	Please bid the major. Responder may correct to 5 ♣.		
4 ♦	5+ diamonds & 5+ cards in a major, forcing.			
	4 ♥	Pass or correct to 4 ♠. Responder may recorrect to 5 ♦.		
	4 ♠	Pass or correct to 5 ♦.		
4 ♥	5+ hearts & 5+ spades. Pass or correct.			

<sup>4</sup> **Without Parrish.** The Parrish relay is a game-changer, but we did without it for decades: any new suit by opener was forcing. Without Parrish, this system has but one way for opener to get to 3 ♥ over the 2 ♥ negative response: bid it. This forces additional considerations on both opener and responder, regarding the heart suit. If opener has primary hearts, and gets the 2 ♥ response, 3 ♥ is forcing: opener may have a game-forcing two-suiter, wanting to find the correct trump suit. So, passing the 2 ♥ response may be the only acceptable solution with an invitational opening. Therefore, responder needs to strain to bid 2 ♦ when holding a trick for hearts being trump.

<sup>5</sup> **Balanced game force.** Whether playing Parrish or not: a 2 ♥ negative response requires opener to jump to 3 NT with a game-forcing balanced hand. Other systems address this, the main defect of 2 ♥ negative.

<sup>6</sup> **Transfer Positives.** Suit-positive responses can be swapped around, in hopes of having opener declare.

<sup>7</sup> **Pete's breaks:** Responder may break the birthright 2 ♥ relay to 2 ♠, with:

2 NT    Transfer, any 6+ spades; opener's 3 ♠ sets trump (2+ spades) and is forcing – all other bids show hearts, including 3 NT (to play).

3 ♣    Club bust: negative with six or more bad clubs.

3 ♦    Diamond bust: negative with six or more bad diamonds.

Other modifications to birthright are out there. This basic plan handles responder's minor-suit busts, plus spades, trying to stay out of opener's way.

# Three Notrump, Four Notrump, Five of a Major

## 3 NT Opening

### □ Plan 1 – NAMYATS

3 NT – preempt to four of a minor. Responder's choices:

- Pass     Stoppers in all four suits.
- 4 ♣     Pass or correct.
- 4 ♦     Could be a slam try, asking for shortness (4 NT = minor).

**Four of a minor – strong preempt in a major.** This plan allows a 4 ♣ opening to show a hand with long hearts and about 8 to 8½ tricks, and 4 ♦ to show an equivalent hand with spades. The direct preempt to four of a major then shows a lesser hand.

Over four of a minor, responder bids the trump suit to play there, or makes the intervening bid to show interest in slam.

### □ Plan 2 – 3 NT to Make – Long Suit and Stoppers

This opening shows a long, running suit and stoppers all around. ♦<sup>1</sup> These two 3 NT hands might otherwise be opened 2 ♣, when playing Kokish relay:

1. ♠ A 8    ♥ A 5 2    ♦ A K Q J 3 2    ♣ A 3    [perfect: 9 tricks]
2. ♠ K 2    ♥ K 8 2    ♦ A Q    ♣ A K Q 8 7 6    [Larry Cohen]

These weaker hands that need help from partner would also be opened 3 NT:

3. ♠ K 2    ♥ K 8 2    ♦ K 7    ♣ A K Q J 7 6
4. ♠ A    ♥ Q 10 3    ♦ K 7 3    ♣ A K Q J 7 6

After the opening 3 NT bid, responder passes all bad hands, and we cannot play in responder's suit. Responder may only bid with prospects of slam in notrump or opener's suit. In such a case, the number of aces held by the partnership is paramount.

- 4 ♣ is Gerber for aces (0/4, 1, 2, 3). Responder promises sufficient tricks, if the opponents do not hold two aces. If we have all the aces, then responder tells partner by asking for the number of kings with 5 ♣.

- With an *invitational* hand, responder tells aces, as if opener had bid Gerber: 4  $\diamond$  = 0, 4  $\heartsuit$  = 1, etc.

Some combination of two aces or kings would be a minimum invitation. Any ace in opener's hand could be singleton, so a KQ combination is not sufficient without a potential side entry.

Counting fewer than 3 total aces, or fewer than 11 tricks, opener signs off in 4 NT. With 11 or 12 tricks, opener makes a *forcing* bid of the long suit. Responder assumes 11 tricks and bids 5 NT to refuse, 6 NT with an extra honor trick, or 6 of the suit with a ruffing value. Opener bids one more, if having originally counted 12 tricks.

**Strong 2  $\clubsuit$  and Kokish 3 NT.** The same methods could be played on this auction:

2  $\clubsuit$  – 2  $\diamond$  [waiting]; 3 NT [long suit] – ?

Playing the Kokish relay, opener never needs to jump to 3 NT on a balanced hand, so it shows a long, strong suit with stoppers.

The 3 NT opening could still be used, to show a lesser hand.

**Example 1** – Responder holds:

$\spadesuit$  K 3  $\heartsuit$  K Q J 3  $\diamond$  7 6 5  $\clubsuit$  10 9 5 4

Opener's only possible stopper in hearts is the ace. Assuming opener can get here with a heart or spade, this hand is worth at least three tricks. Bid 4  $\clubsuit$  (Gerber). Opener [1] bids 4  $\diamond$  (4 aces). We can count 13 tricks and bid 7 NT.

**Example 2** – Responder holds:

$\spadesuit$  K 9 7 3 2  $\heartsuit$  K J 9 4  $\diamond$  8 6 5  $\clubsuit$  5

Responder tries 4  $\diamond$  (0 aces).

Opener [1], on the previous page, bids 5  $\diamond$ , counting 11 tricks opposite two kings. Responder bids 6  $\diamond$ , with a ruffing value, where we play.

Opener [4] hopes to make 4 NT, and bids it.

## 4 NT Opening

A 4 NT opening asks responder to bid an ace:

- 5 ♣ No aces.
- 5 ♦ Ace of diamonds.
- 5 ♥ Ace of hearts.
- 5 ♠ Ace of spades.
- 5 NT Two aces.
- 6 ♣ Ace of clubs.

**Interference.** If they overcall 4 NT, modified DoP1 applies:

- Dble No aces, or the ace of the bid suit.
- Pass The ace of a suit below the bid suit.
- Bid Normal response, as above.

The suit an opponent bids will likely be opener's void, so only show that ace in clubs (for which opener is ready).

Opener's new suit is to play.

## Five of a Major Opening

This spectacular, natural opening bid promises no losers outside of trump, with a pile of trumps missing the ace and king. Holding one of the top trumps, responder raises to six; with both, responder raises to seven. Don't try notrump – there is probably a void (or two) involved.

## Backstory

Gary and I agreed to ditch gambling 3 NT in favor of the running suit with stoppers in 2022. We bounced various ideas off each other and came up with the dual Gerbers. It's not perfect, but it should let us bid laydown slams.

NAMYATS is Stayman spelled backwards. Prefer natural preempts at four of a minor? See my article, "EÉPAR 3 NT Opening" – pronounced A-par, it's Rapée spelled backwards. (George Rapée invented Stayman.)

Pat or Steve Lapidés opened five of a major against me in 1971, at their home, when I was living in Baltimore. I've never seen it since.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Gambling 3 NT.** A classic use of the opening 3 NT bid has been based on a long running suit. Some pairs promise one side stopper, so it's a true gamble for everybody. The modern style is to deny any stopper. With three suits stopped, responder passes. With a suit open, responder *should* bid 4 ♣; opener passes or corrects. Responder can ask for a singleton with 4 ♦.

The best defense against the gambling 3 NT is to lead an ace, inspect dummy, and attack – particularly effective if responder left it in with a suit wide open. Gambling 3 NT usually wrong-sides the contract.



# Preemptive Openings

## The Rule of 2-3-4

Our three-level and higher preempts include all the opening suit bids from 3 ♣ to 5 ♦. We estimate the number of tricks in hand, and follow the *rule of 2-3-4* according to vulnerability:

Unfavorable	Down two (or one and a half) in hand.
Equal	Down three in hand.
Favorable	Down four (or four and a half) in hand.

This is important for partner to be able to judge what to do with a good hand, or a fitting bad hand.

Other than that, we count a four-card side suit as a trick, we want values in our long suit(s), and an ace (especially on the side) is a negative factor in deciding to preempt.

For a preempt of 2 ♦ to 4 ♣, we have the option of “RKB over Our Preempt” – see page 618.

## Weak Two-Bid

We don't particularly follow the rule of 2-3-4 at the two level. However, we may open a weak two-bid on a 7-card suit that meets the requirements for a two-bid, but does not meet the rule of 2-3-4 for the three level.

**Good Suit and Feature.** In first or second seat, our weak two bid promises a good suit: ♦<sup>1</sup> two of the top three honors, or A-J-10-x-x-x. Not vulnerable, it might be a 5-card suit with four honors, and usually a 4-card suit on the side. The point is for responder to see honor-doubleton and plan to run the suit.

A response of 2 NT or a new suit (both forcing) asks opener to bid a high-card feature with a maximum, preferably an ace or king.

If the opponents double our good-suit weak two bid, we play there.

**Third seat.** Anything goes, subject to common-sense.

**Fourth seat.** The 2-bid shows a good suit and an expectation of a positive score, but little chance for game. Billy Miller says 11-13 HCP.

**Not vulnerable at matchpoints.** Some of my partnerships play almost any 6-card suit is acceptable for a weak two-bid, not vulnerable at matchpoints. We also permit a chunky 5-card suit, when we have a 4-card side suit. Over responder's 2 NT, we play *5-B-M-G Ogust rebids*:  $\diamond^1$

- 3  $\clubsuit$  5-card suit. 3  $\diamond$  asks B-M-G.
- 3  $\diamond$  Bad hand.
- 3  $\heartsuit$  Middle hand.
- 3  $\spadesuit$  Good hand.

We get to bid lots and wreak havoc upon the opponents, but life is not so good when responder has a good hand. A new suit is still forcing, unless we are doubled.

## Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup>**Ogust rebids.** These responses to 2 NT were invented by Harold Ogust:

Original Plan	Modern Plan
3 $\clubsuit$ bad suit & bad hand	3 $\clubsuit$ bad suit & bad hand
3 $\diamond$ bad suit & <i>good hand</i>	3 $\diamond$ good suit & bad hand
3 $\heartsuit$ good suit & bad hand	3 $\heartsuit$ bad suit & <i>good hand</i>
3 $\spadesuit$ good suit & good hand	3 $\spadesuit$ good suit & good hand
3 NT suit headed by A K Q	3 NT suit headed by A K Q
Tip: Hold out your left hand, show off a ring. Diamonds shows a good hand.	Tip: Hold your hand over your heart. Hearts has a good hand.

**GHAK!** The *Encyclopedia of Bridge, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed.*, says people now reverse the meanings of the red suit responses, without giving a reason. A major problem with Ogust rebids is remembering what the red suits mean!

**Medium suit.** With this plan, a weak two bid in first or second seat promises Q-J-9-x-x-x, or better. My testing suggests that when responder bids 2 NT over this, Ogust rebids are better.

A new suit is natural and forcing. We get to bid more often, but things tend to work less well when responder has a good hand.

**Lead-directing.** With a bit of a fit for opener, a lead-directing suit bid can pay powerful dividends. Some partnerships have detailed agreements about this – research McCabe on the web.

## 6. Keycards

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## Introduction

Asking for aces or keycards is a major tool for bidding sound slams at bridge, and *Roman keycard Blackwood* (RKB) is the preeminent such tool. The five keycards are the four aces and the king of trump. The queen of trumps (or 10 combined trumps) is the sixth key feature. Slam is unsafe, if the opponents hold two of these six features.

**Not a slam try.** We don't roll into RKB just because a slam is *possible*. We use it when we *plan to bid* a small slam. RKB is a slam safety check. When we are about to cross the street, we look both ways first. When we have decided to bid a slam, we check for keycards, so we don't get hit by double-decker losers. If no more than one key feature is missing, we bid the slam. RKB is the *wrong tool* if we don't know what to do, once we get the answer.

The main tool leading up to using RKB is control-bidding, often called cue-bidding. We have seen this in detail, in "Serious Three Notrump" on page 245.

**Basic approach.** Let's work through the basic approach, with spades as trump. One partner decides to bid a slam, and bids 4 NT to ask for keycards. Assuming popular 1430 methods, the responses are:

- 5 ♣ 1 or 4 keycards.
- 5 ♦ 0 or 3 keycards.
- 5 ♥ 2 or 5 keycards, without the queen of trump.
- 5 ♠ 2 or 5 keycards, with the queen of trump.

If the response is 5 ♥ or 5 ♠, we have the full picture. If two (or more) of the six features (four aces plus the king and queen of trump) are missing, we sign off in 5 ♠. If one is missing, we bid 6 ♠. No dithering is expected – we count and act.

**We have them all.** If none of the six key features is missing, we bid 5 NT, to ask for specific kings, *whether we want that information or not*: asking for kings tells partner we have them all. Rule:

*If we have them all, asker must use the king ask. ♦<sup>1</sup>*

If responder counts 13 tricks, they bid a grand slam. Powerful!

If the response is 5 ♣ or 5 ♦, and we have at most one missing keycard, we use the queen ask: 5 ♦ over 5 ♣, or 5 ♥ over 5 ♦. Without the queen, responder signs off in 5 ♠. With it, but without a source of tricks for a grand slam, responder bids their cheapest side king, or 5 NT with none.

*If we have five keycards, but the status of the trump queen is unknown, asker must use the queen ask. ♦<sup>1</sup>*

### □ Grand slam demand.

The queen ask does not say whether or not we have all five keycards. A responder holding the queen of trumps who counts 13 tricks, *if we have them all*, jumps to six of the trump suit. This demands that asker bid a grand slam, if we do have them all. ♦<sup>2</sup> *Be sure to discuss this non-standard treatment with partner.*

#### Example:

Opener	Responder
♠ A K 10 6 4	♠ Q J 3
♥ A 7 6	♥ 8 3
♦ A 6 3	♦ K Q J 8 6 2
♣ A 4	♣ 7 6
1 ♠	2 ♠ [fit-jump not available]
2 NT [nondescript GT]	3 ♦ [secondary ♦ value]
3 ♥ [♥ control, slam try with 5 keycards]	4 ♦ [another secondary ♦ value & source of tricks]
4 NT [RKB]	5 ♦ [1430: 0 or 3]
5 ♥ [queen ask]	6 ♠ [grand slam demand]
7 ♦ [might be safer]	7 NT [no ruffs needed]

## Backstory

Eddie Kantar wrote *five* editions of a whole book on asking for keycards. For most people, a whole book is overkill. I, too, have written many versions of my article on RKB, but it's only one chapter in this book. There is still plenty of system here.

Jeff Rubens introduced kickback in the third of six parts of "The Useful-Space Principle" series in *The Bridge World*. The key feature of kickback is using the next bid above four of the trump suit as the RKB ask. Kickback is most commonly used when hearts are trump, but may also be used for minor suits.

Gary accepted and helped me refine my invention of crosswood, where the other minor is used to ask for keycards when a minor suit is trump. I first wrote about it in 2011; others may have played this way before I came to the idea and gave it a name. I was inspired by a couple who played that 4 ♣ was always Gerber, in any auction. These folks were never in doubt about the bid. Once we decide a minor is trump, we are not in doubt, either.

In 2016, I introduced “Delayed Kickback for Hearts” (see the Appendix).

In years around 2016, Mike Diesel produced a series of *six* books about RKB 1430 – at least five steps in the wrong direction. He sent me a copy of “Level IV, for all suits” to proofread for him, but I was flummoxed by a whole book – heck, I may not have read all of Kantar’s. Otherwood™ is his proprietary name for what others should call crosswood – while I coined that term, I do not claim ownership.

The grand slam demand was invented by Richard Lee – at the table – and I did not field it, because I don’t bid speculative grand slams. I latched onto the idea, wrote about it in 2011, and have finally given it a name.

## ◆ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **King ask and queen ask.** It is standard that asking for kings says, we have them all. When I returned to bridge in the 1990s, Jim Negro told me the rule to always ask for kings when we do have them all. This should be standard, but I cannot find a reference stating that. I added the rule for the queen ask, to enable the grand slam demand.

<sup>2</sup> **Extra values.** In response to the queen ask, still assuming spades are trump, there are two bids to say, “I have the queen,” without showing a side king: 5 NT and 6 trump. For Kantar, 6 trump denies a queen, singleton or doubleton on the side. Holding one of those “extra value” features, Kantar bids 5 NT. This allows asker to probe for that value, *with the knowledge it is there*. We might need to wait years for this nuanced knowledge to prove useful.

Suppose responder wants a grand slam demand, but has to settle for 5 NT or bidding a king to show the trump queen. Anything opener bids, other than 6 trump, is an active request to bid a grand slam with a specific feature, not just a statement that we have them all. Asker usually bids 6 trump, and responder cannot move.

The grand slam demand is superior. When it does not apply, without a side king, responder bids 5 NT with or without a lesser side value.

## Asking Bids & Responses

When spades are trump, we use 4 NT as the Roman keycard Blackwood asking bid, the *RKB ask*. The first four responses are well known.

Step	4 NT:	3014 Responses	1430 Responses
1	5 ♣	0 or 3 keycards.	1 or 4 keycards.
2	5 ♦	1 or 4 keycards.	0 or 3 keycards.
3	5 ♥	2 or 5 keycards, <i>without</i> the queen of trump (nor length that guarantees a 10-card fit).	
4	5 ♠	2 or 5 keycards, <i>with</i> the queen of trump (or extra length that guarantees a 10-card fit).	
		<b><i>With a useful void and values for slam:</i></b>	
Higher suit		Odd: 1 or 3 keycards, void in the bid suit.	
6 Trump		Odd: 1 or 3 keycards, void above trump (rare).	
5 NT		Even: 0 (unlikely), 2 or 4 keycards – always 5 NT, no matter what the RKB ask is. ♦ <sup>1</sup>	

The *void-showing responses* are mainstream methods. (Never count a void as an ace, lest partner decide to play notrump!)

### Another Suit Is Trump

Our plan when another suit is trump is to use a bid that is at least as efficient as 4 NT is for spades:

Trumps	RKB Ask	Name
Spades	4 NT	
Hearts	4 ♠	Kickback
Diamonds	4 ♣	Crosswood
Clubs	4 ♦	

Later, we'll see details for kickback and crosswood. The same step responses apply; for example, if clubs are trump, 4 ♦ is the RKB ask, and 4 NT is the third step, showing “2 without.”

First, let's see the full system of responses, with only occasional mentions of a specific trump suit or the RKB ask.

Either 3014 or 1430 responses work with our methods. While neither



has a predictable advantage most of the time, 3014 is better when Roman responses are played with exclusion keycard Blackwood – we choose to play 3014 all the time. ♦<sup>2</sup>

## Sign Off Below Slam

When asker determines that the partnership is likely to lose two tricks, they sign off, often by bidding five of the trump suit or bidding 4 NT, or passing the RKB response. Choose a plan below; do not play that there is any choice over the sign-off. That will surely lead to director calls and adverse rulings, if asker dithers at all.

### ❑ Plan A – Partner always passes the sign-off

This works well with crosswood, kickback and serious 3 NT.

### ❑ Plan B – Partner always answers queen ask with 3 or 4

When holding 0, 1 or 2 keycards, or having denied the trump queen, responder always passes the sign-off. However, when holding 3 or 4 keycards, respond to the queen ask over the sign-off.

*If responder may overrule a sign-off, asker must hold at least one keycard, to avoid a bad slam on a “3-overrule.”*

Eddie Kantar wrote:

*It is assumed that a player of your caliber will know from the bidding which number partner has. If your partner has trouble differentiating, gin rummy is a viable option.*

However, Kantar did not play kickback. When hearts are trump, the RKB ask is 4 NT, and the response is 5 ♦, Kantar played that 5 ♥ is the queen ask, for a 3 or 4 response. This may be the origin of the overruling plan.

In this situation, I would rather play 5 ♠ as the queen ask, with 5 NT negative. This way, asker remains in full control and can pass the negative 5 NT – and can insist on stopping in 5 ♥. Kickback is better.

## Play in Notrump

When a *minor suit* is trump, and the RKB ask is not 4 NT, we want to be able to sign off at 4 NT (or non-jump 5 NT) as often as possible. Those bids are an offer to play, unless needed for the queen ask.

When a *major suit* is trump, 5 NT is never an offer to play. When hearts are trump and 4 ♠ is the RKB ask, a non-jump 5 NT is asking or telling about the *spade* suit.

## The Queen Ask

When asker does not know whether the queen of trump is held, to ask for her majesty, they bid the cheapest available bid below 6 NT that is not trump, not notrump, and not the king ask.

Responses to Queen Ask	
Cheaper NT or trump	Neither the queen of trump nor <i>sufficient extra trump length to guarantee a 10-card fit</i> .
Suit below 6 NT	Cheapest king, with the queen or extra length... Seldom show a king above 6 trump.
Higher NT or trump	No side king, with the queen of trump or sufficient extra trump length to guarantee a 10-card fit.
Jump to 6 trump	<i>Grand slam demand</i> : Shows the queen or extra trump length, <i>plus a source of tricks (or three side kings and extra values)</i> . If we have them all, asker must bid a grand slam.

**Exception E1:** When clubs are trump, 4 ♦ is the crosswood RKB ask. When the response is 4 ♠ (second step), 4 NT is the queen ask, since no suit bid is available below 5 ♣ – sorry, we cannot play 4 NT.

## The King Ask

Eddie Kantar calls this the *specific king ask*: asker's bid of *five of the RKB ask strain* (e.g., 5 NT with spades trump) promises that all keycards and the trump queen (or extra length) are held:

Cheaper NT or trump	No side king to show.
Suit (or NT)	Cheapest king; <i>the higher of NT or trump shows the king of the RKB-ask suit</i> .
7 ♣	Promises an undisclosed source of tricks, or all three side kings and undisclosed values.

At any time, of course, responder may count tricks and bid a grand.

## The Second-King Ask

Asker's new suit (notrump for the RKB-ask suit), after a king-showing response to either the queen ask or king ask, asks for the king of that suit. If either of two is enough, ask for the cheaper.

Cheaper NT or trump	No king to show.
Suit (or 5 NT)	No, but have the king of the bid suit (5 NT shows the king of the RKB-ask suit).
7 ♣	King of the ask suit.

## After a Void Response

After a void response, there can be no king ask. ♦<sup>3</sup>

**Asking for the queen, after a void response.** When the response to the RKB ask shows a void, and a bid is available below 6 trump, the cheapest bid confirms all the keycards and asks for the trump queen:

Cheaper NT or trump	Neither the trump queen nor sufficient extra trump length to guarantee a 10-card fit.
6 NT or 7 ♣	Have either the queen or extra trump length. <i>Bid 6 NT or 7 ♣, not 7 trump, in case asker plans to play in a solid suit different from the asking trump suit.</i>

## Play in Another Suit

If we have bid and raised a second suit, asker's bid of six in that suit is to play. Here is an example:

*Opener*

♠ A 4

♥ Q 10 9 6 5

♦ 3

♣ K Q J 6 4

1 ♥

3 ♣ [extra values, GF]

3 ♠ [1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> round control]

4 ♠ [RKB ask in hearts]

6 ♣ [to play]

*Responder*

♠ ? ?

♥ K J 3

♦ A 10 8 5

♣ A 10 7 2

2 ♣ [GF, unless rebid]

3 ♥ [hearts are trump]

4 ♦ [control, ♣ A or K only\*]

4 NT [0 or 3 keycards]

Pass

\* An own-suit control-bid promises two of the top three honors. A 2/1 response suit should contain an ace or king, to go slamming like this.

When pushing to a thin slam, it's wise to play in the strongest contract, even at matchpoints. Opener can see that playing in clubs should produce an extra trick. 6♥ makes only if we get a second spade or diamond trick (e.g., responder holds the ♠K). In contrast, 6♣ will make, unless the opponents establish a spade trick on the opening lead, clubs split 4-0, or the opponents negotiate a heart ruff.

This offer to play is sensible, but not standard. A suit at the six level is an offer to play in:

- Any suit (killing off most third-round-control asks).
- A suit bid by partner.
- A suit that has been bid and raised. (Our choice is also recommended by Eric Rodwell).
- No suit.

Before deciding to play the third-round-control ask after crosswood, consider that asker may wish to offer to play in an unsupported major suit, or to offer a choice of slams when 5NT is not a jump.

## The Third-Round-Control Ask

Any bid by asker that has no defined meaning is a grand slam try, asking for third-round control of the bid suit. Once we ask for kings or the trump queen, there are only a few bids available to be third-round-control asks. However, immediately after the response to the RKB ask, there are a bunch of potential third-round-control asks. Also, a second-king ask in a suit where responder has already shown or denied a king becomes a third-round-control ask. Our responses are consistent with the rest of this system: ♠<sup>4</sup>

Cheaper NT or trump	No third-round control.
Higher NT or trump	Queen of bid suit.
Non-trump suit or 7♣	Two or fewer cards in bid suit.

### Example 1:

*Opener*

♠ A J 10 x x

♥ x

♦ K Q x

♣ A K x x

1 ♠

3 ♥ [singleton or void]

3 NT [serious slam interest]

4 NT [RKB ask in spades]

5 ♦ [queen ask]

6 ♣ [third-round ask in ♣]

*Responder*

♠ K Q x x

♥ A 10 x (?)

♦ A x (?)

♣ x x (?)

2 NT [Jacoby: 4-card forcing raise, usually balanced]

3 ♠ [nothing to say yet (or 4 ♦, a courtesy cue)]

4 ♦ [1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> round control, no ♣ control]

5 ♣ [0 or 3 keycards]

5 NT [yes, no king to show]

?

Responder then bids 6 ♠ with no third-round control, 6 NT with the ♣ Q, or 7 ♣ with club shortness. 7 ♠ will be great opposite the ♣ Q. A doubleton club will usually produce 13 tricks in spades as well.

### Example 2 - "The Bidding Box" (5), March 2023 *Bulletin*:

We are not vulnerable.

*Dealer (South) is vulnerable and opens 3 ♥.*

The opponents are otherwise silent.

*West*

♠ A K 6 3

♥ A K

♦ A K J 6 4

♣ A 10

*East*

♠ Q 10 8 7 4

♥ 5 2

♦ Q 10 7

♣ 9 5 2

*Our auction:*

Double [of South's 3 ♥]

4 ♥ [generic force]

4 NT [RKB ♠]

5 ♥ [queen ask]

6 ♦ [3rd-round-control ask]

7 ♠ [only count 12 w/o ruff]

3 ♠

4 ♠

5 ♦ [none (1430)]

5 NT [♠ Q, no king]

6 NT [♦ Q]

Pass or 7 NT

After the control-bid, 4 NT must be asking for keycards. West counts four spades, five diamonds and three more top tricks. The 13<sup>th</sup> trick will come from a ruff or a fifth (unseen) trump on dummy.

## Backstory

In his book, Eddie Kantar offers more options and details on the third-round-control ask, as well as a chapter on double-agreement sequences.

Originally, 5 ♣ showed 0 or 3 keycards, and 5 ♦ showed 1 or 4. These responses, now called 3014, retained similarity to the original Blackwood responses (0 or 4, 1, 2, 3) and are easier for “finger bridge.” (Don’t laugh! I once played in a tournament with a strong partner who twice messed up his RKB responses.)

When hearts are trump, 4 NT is the RKB ask, and the response is 5 ♦, there is no queen ask below 5 ♣. 1430 responses swap the meanings of the 5 ♣ and 5 ♦ responses. The hope is to get a 5 ♦ response only when you intend to sign off anyhow: when the strong hand asks, you would usually sign off after a zero response of 5 ♦, and would often continue after a one response of 5 ♣.

Gary set us on the track of using the flexible cheaper/higher of notrump and trump responses. He probably obtained the idea when proofreading a book written by Mike Diesel. When notrump is cheaper than trump, we can stop the auction right there – a great feature.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Even keycards with a void.** It’s technically superior, but more to remember, to play that the fifth step (five of the RKB-ask strain) shows this hand, swapping meanings with 5 NT. Here is a possibility, both simplified and enhanced from Robert Munger’s plan:

A1	R1	A2	R2	Asking for the void
4 K	RKB ask.			
	5 K	Even number of keycards with unspecified void.		
		5 K + 1	Asks for the void (LMH, to avoid dual surrogates).	
			5 K + 2	Void in lowest-ranking side suit.
			5 K + 3	Void in middle-ranking side suit.
			6 trump	Void in high-ranking side suit.
		5 K + 2	Queen ask: 6 trump = no.	
		5 K + 3	Relay to 6 trump; FYI, we have them all.	
		6 trump	Sign-off: a keycard is missing or major wastage.	
	5 NT	[K is a suit] Odd number of keycards, void in K.		

<sup>2</sup> **3014 vs. 1430.** A heavy majority of pairs appear to use 1430 responses, because it's likely to be better when the RKB-ask is two or more steps higher than four of the trump suit. It's important to understand that 1430 responses do not solve the problems; they push them around, changing the odds.

Eddie Kantar's simplified rules for using *both* variants:

*When the opener asks, it is a 1430 Ask – period.*

*When the responder asks, it is also a 1430 Ask unless opener has shown extras by:*

- *Opening 1 NT, 2 NT or 2 ♣*
- *Has made ANY jump bid previous to the Ask*

*In each of these scenarios when responder asks it is a 3014 Ask.*

Kickback and crosswood are better in practice than pushing the problems around.

<sup>3</sup> **Availability of asks after a void response.** The table below shows that a void response is always at least five of the RKB ask strain, so there is no king ask. The next available bid is the queen ask, except in cases marked with an asterisk (\*), where there is no such bid below six of the trump suit.

			Even KC Any Void	Odd Keycards, Void in			
Trump	Ask	Step4		♣	♦	♥	♠
♣	4 ♦	5 ♣	5 NT*	–	5 ♦	5 ♥	5 ♠
♦	4 ♣	4 NT	5 NT	5 ♣	–	5 ♥	5 ♠
♦	4 ♥	5 ♦	5 NT	6 ♣*	–	5 ♥	5 ♠
♥	4 ♠	5 ♥	5 NT	6 ♣	6 ♦*	–	5 ♠
♠	4 NT	5 ♠	5 NT	6 ♣	6 ♦	6 ♥*	–

Here is the table with Step 5 as the “Even KC Any Void” response:

			Even KC Any Void	Odd Keycards, Void in			
Trump	Ask	Step4		♣	♦	♥	♠
♣	4 ♦	5 ♣	5 ♦	–	5 NT*	5 ♥	5 ♠
♦	4 ♣	4 NT	5 ♣	5 NT	–	5 ♥	5 ♠
♦	4 ♥	5 ♦	5 ♥	6 ♣*	–	5 NT	5 ♠
♥	4 ♠	5 ♥	5 ♠	6 ♣	6 ♦*	–	5NT
♠	4 NT	5 ♠	5 NT	6 ♣	6 ♦	6 ♥*	–

<sup>4</sup> **Third-round-control ask – special case.** *If responder has shown the suit: respond in steps, skipping the “no” response from the table: 1=Q, 2=K, raise=KQ. [Good luck remembering this!]*

# Interference, Crosswood, Kickback, Exclusion, Our Preempt

## Interference – Roman DoP1 & RoP1; DEPO

What if those pesky opponents interfere over our asking bid? If they bid below 5 trump, we play *Roman DoP1* (pronounced dopey), which stands for *double zero, pass one*:

Step	Bid	Roman DoP1 & RoP1	Gerber
	Dble/Rdbl	0 or 3 keycards.	0 or 4 aces.
	Pass	1 or 4 keycards.	1 ace.
1		2 or 5 keycards, <i>no queen</i> .	2 aces.
2		2 or 5 keycards, <i>with queen</i> .	3 aces.
		<b><i>With a useful void:</i></b>	
	5 NT	Even: 0 (unlikely), 2 or 4 keycards with some useful void.	
	Suit	Odd: 1 or 3 keycards with a void in the bid suit.	
	6 Trump	Odd: 1 or 3 keycards with a void that would require a bid higher than 6 trump to show.	

Double takes the place of the response that includes 0 (zero) keycards or aces. Pass takes the place of the response that includes 1 keycard or aces. The cheapest bid shows the third step, etc. If they double the RKB ask, then *Roman RoP1* (ropey) applies: *redouble zero, pass one*, and the cheapest bid shows the third step, etc.

Finally, if they bid at 5 trump or higher,  $\diamond^1$  we play plain DEPO (depot): *double even, pass odd*, by count of keycards or aces, ignoring steps and the trump queen. Only these two non-Roman responses are used. This allows us to stop below slam.

If they interfere over a Gerber ask, play the same way, treating notrump as the trump strain: DEPO applies at notrump of the Gerber level (4 NT over 4  $\clubsuit$ ), or higher. (Confirm this with partner – it makes sense to me, so I wrote it in here.)



The queen ask (top priority), king ask, and second-king ask are still operative on RKB auctions, space permitting. *In competition, only show a void in a suit that the opponents have shown.* The void-showing responses begin just higher than responses described above. For example, if spades are trump and an opponent bids 5  $\diamond$  over 4 NT, then the four normal steps are (in order) Double, Pass, 5  $\heartsuit$  and 5  $\spadesuit$ ; 5 NT and higher bids are void-showing. However, if they interfere with 5  $\heartsuit$ , then 5 NT shows “2 with,” not a void.

## Other Suits – Crosswood and Kickback

### Crosswood $\diamond^2$

When a minor is trump, we use *crosswood*: when possible, four of the other minor asks for keycards:

*4  $\diamond$  is the RKB ask when clubs are trump, and 4  $\clubsuit$  is the RKB ask when 4  $\clubsuit$  is available and diamonds are trump.*

**Exception:** When diamonds become trump at the four level, the 4  $\clubsuit$  RKB ask is too low. In this case, *4 of the cheaper major not shown by either partner, or 4 NT if neither, becomes the RKB ask.* This exception also applies when either minor is trump, and bidding by the opponents prevents us from asking with the crosswood minor. Asker’s non-jump 5 NT is always natural, when the non-void response is above five of our minor.

Crosswood reduces the disaster potential of alternative methods, by *dedicating* four of the other minor as the RKB ask. This bid is seldom needed to be natural, although we might miss having it as a control-bid, splinter or EKB.

When diamonds are trump, crosswood allows us to play in hearts more often. A bid of four of either major can be an offer to play there in a likely 7-card fit.

- The king ask is five of the other minor, if available and not needed as the queen ask; otherwise, five of the actual RKB-ask suit is the king ask.

*The queen ask has priority over the king ask.*

- When a minor suit is trump, asker's simple bid of notrump is to play, unless it is the only possible queen ask (4 NT over a 4 ♠ response, with clubs trump).
- Asker's *jump* to 5 NT is "pick a slam."

## Kickback ♦<sup>2</sup>

When hearts are trump, using 4 NT as the RKB ask can blow up when asker holds fewer than two keycards. Also, there is no queen ask below 5 ♡ when the response is 5 ♦. When hearts are trump, we dedicate 4 ♠ as the RKB ask (and 5 ♠ as the king ask).

*When hearts become trump, spades can never become trump, and 4 ♠ is always the RKB ask.*

When hearts are trump, 4 NT takes the place of whatever a 4 ♠ bid would otherwise have meant, often a control-bid.

A jump to 4 ♠ is not kickback, if the bidder could have set trump, but failed to do so: ♦<sup>4</sup>

1 ♡ - 2 ♦

3 ♦ - 4 ♠ [EKB ♦, spade void - 3 ♡ would have set ♡]

Consider these auctions:

*Auction 1:*

1 ♠ - 2 ♡

2 ♠ - 3 ♣

3 ♠ - 4 ♣

4 ♡ - ?

The belated 4 ♡ bid does not truly set trump. Responder's 4 ♠ would be a belated preference to spades, with iffy hearts; 4 NT would be an offer to play.

*Auction 2:*

1 ♠ - 2 ♡

2 ♠ - 3 ♣

3 ♠ - 4 ♣

4 ♡ - 4 ♠

?

Over the belated 4 ♠ preference, opener's 4 NT asks for keycards in spades.

## Exclusion Keycard Blackwood (EKB)

*Exclusion keycard Blackwood (EKB)*, also called *voidwood*, is a void-showing *jump* into a suit above either game or the RKB-asking bid.

*For purposes of EKB only, if no trump suit has been agreed, the suit last bid (or shown) is trump.*

Strike fast, or lose the chance to make an EKB ask! Kantar gives the example { 1 ♠ – 2 ♥; 5 ♦ }. If we raise hearts, partner may bid 4 ♥, and now 5 ♦ is a control-bid. More examples:

1 ♠ – 2 NT; 5 ♦ [EKB ♠ over Jacoby 2 NT, diamond void]

1 ♠ – 2 ♦; 4 ♥ [EKB ♦, ♥ void, above 4 ♣ tho' below game]

**EKB for the other minor:** Playing *inverted minor raises*, four of the other minor is always the RKB ask, so it cannot be EKB. The jump to four of the *agreed* minor can be either a splinter or EKB, with a *splinter taking priority*:

1 ♣ – 2 ♣ [limit raise or better]

4 ♣ [EKB, diamond void – 3 ♦ would be a splinter]

1 ♦ – 2 ♦ [limit raise or better]

4 ♦ [splinter, if our 3 ♣ is natural: short ♣]

The jump in the agreed minor is not needed to be natural – we have plenty of forcing natural bids available.

After EKB at four of the agreed minor, if the queen of trump has not been shown, the cheapest non-trump bid asks for it.

The king ask is the cheaper of the void (other minor) and the suit above trumps – skipping the queen ask, if any. Returning to the agreed minor is a sign-off.

**EKB over a Notrump Opening:** Kantar says EKB applies after a Jacoby transfer. What else could it be? A jump above game meets the requirements, while a five-level bid after Texas is not a jump – a dangerous bid to attempt to utilize.

EKB is possible after a response to Stayman:

1 NT – 2 ♣; 2 ♠ – 5 ♣ [RKB ♠, club void]

## **EKB Responses – 3014**

The ace of the void suit no longer counts, so there are four keycards and the queen of trump. We use *RKB 3014 responses*. We want zero

to be cheapest, and one might not be enough, with or without the queen of trump. ♦<sup>4</sup> Before firing the EKB rocket, we must be sure that no response will boost us into an impossible slam contract.

## RKB over Our Preempt

Step	Bid	Meaning (when 4 ♣ Asks)
1	4 ♦	0 keycards.
2	4 ♥	1 keycard, without the trump queen.
3	4 ♠	1 keycard, with the trump queen.
4	4 NT	2 keycards, without the trump queen.
5	5 ♣	2 keycards, with the trump queen.

When partner preempts with a natural bid of two or three of a suit, or 4 ♣, 4 ♦ asks for keycards over clubs, and 4 ♣ asks over all other suits. The responses are 0, 1, 1+, 2, 2+.

Responses to 4 ♦ (for clubs) range from 4 ♥ to 5 ♦. A shapely hand with three keycards should be opened at the one level, so we do not need a response for that.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **DEPO barrier.** We turn on DEPO at 5 trump or higher. Eddie Kantar turns it on at 6 trump or higher! Tim Hill likes one below 5 trump.

<sup>2</sup> **Methods other than kickback & crosswood.** See below.

<sup>3</sup> **Two main styles for when kickback applies:** always, whenever it could be; or never, unless it must be. We are in the latter camp, which works better resolving heart-spade issues.

<sup>4</sup> **Exclusion responses.** In 1998, Eddie Kantar's EKB responses were 0, 1, 2. In 2008, he expanded them to 0, 1, 2, 2+, 3 – close enough to 3014. We will bid slam with a 2 response, so we might as well tack on the queen info.

In the past, I recommended (and sometimes still play) 0, 1, 1+, 2, 2+ responses to EKB, as over our preempt. However, that makes a 2 response one step higher, which increases the chance that we cannot risk asking at all, if we need to find 2. After all, it's possible to make a slam, off the queen of trump. As always, most important is to have – and know – an agreement!

## Methods Other than Kickback & Crosswood

*Get ready for a bucket of pain.*

Brutal proof that the queen ask is better with kickback and crosswood!

Queen Ask – Gory Details							
After RKB Ask		1 <sup>st</sup> Step Response			2 <sup>nd</sup> Step Response		
Trump Suit	RKB-Ask		Queen Ask	Stop Bids		Queen Ask	Stop Bids
♠	4 NT	5 ♣	5 ♦	5 ♠	5 ♦	5 ♥	5 ♠
♥	4 NT	5 ♣	5 ♦	5 ♥	5 ♦	5 ♠ <sup>E2</sup>	5 ♥
♥	4 ♠	4 NT	5 ♣	Pass, 5 ♥	5 ♣	5 ♦	5 ♥
♦	4 NT	5 ♣	5 ♥!	5 ♦	5 ♦	5 ♥!	Pass
♦	4 ♠	4 NT	5 ♣	Pass, 5 ♦	5 ♣	5 ♥!	5 ♦
♦	4 ♥	4 ♠	5 ♣	4 NT, 5 ♦	4NT	5 ♣	Pass, 5 ♦
♦	4 ♣	4 ♦	4 ♥	4 NT, 5 ♦	4 ♥	4 ♠	4 NT, 5 ♦
♣	4 NT	5 ♣	5 ♦!	Pass	5 ♦	5 ♥!	5 NT
♣	4 ♠	4 NT	5 ♦!	Pass, 5 ♣	5 ♣	5 ♦!	Pass, 5NT
♣	4 ♥	4 ♠	4NT <sup>E1</sup>	4 ♠	4NT	5 ♦!	Pass, 5 ♣
♣	4 ♦	4 ♥	4 ♠	4 ♥	4 ♠	4 NT <sup>E1</sup>	5 ♣

“Stop Bids” are how asker can sign off after the given step response. Shaded rows work worse than 4 NT with spades trump. E1 (page 608) and E2 (below) refer to the two exceptions in the text.

### When Hearts Are Trump

**Delayed kickback.** There are occasional issues with nailing down 4 ♠ to ask for hearts. An option is “Delayed Kickback for Hearts” in the Appendix.

**Without kickback – warning:** If hearts are trump, and we ask with 4 NT holding only one keycard, partner could respond 5 ♠. That would commit us to a bad slam, missing two keycards. Holding the ♥ Q is no protection, if partner holds extra length.

*Do not ask with 4 NT in hearts, when holding only one keycard.*

Curiously, it may be safe to bid 4 NT when holding no keycards, such as with a long suit opposite a huge balanced hand: bid the slam (or ask for the trump queen) opposite a 4 response, but sign off opposite 3 keycards – if partner lets us sign off!

**Exception E2:** When hearts are trump, 4 NT is the RKB ask, and the RKB response was 5 ♦:

- 5 ♥ is a sign-off.
- The queen ask is 5 ♠, which commits the partnership to at least 5 NT (the “no” response). ♦<sup>6</sup>
- There is no grand slam demand available – 6 trump is not a jump.

**5 ♥ as the queen ask.** When hearts are trump, and 4 NT is the 1430 RKB ask, Kantar plays that 5 ♥ is the queen ask over 5 ♦ (0 or 3): holding zero, pass; holding three, answer.

*A better idea:* holding zero or lacking the queen, pass 5 ♥; holding three with the queen, answer. Use 5 ♠ to ask when looking for a grand slam.

### ***When a Minor Suit Is Trump***

Kantar devotes over 100 pages to minor-suit auctions in his book. His approach appears beyond all but quite serious partnerships.

**Sign off in 5 NT.** Our crosswood plan allows asker to sign off in 4 NT, 5 NT, or 5 of the minor. There is no need for an old-fashioned relay to 5 NT.

**Redwood:** When a minor suit is trump, kickback is known as *redwood*, because the RKB ask is always a red suit. This is the same as crosswood for clubs, but different for diamonds.

Using 4 ♥ as the RKB ask for diamonds prevents us from playing in 4 ♥, which we have done several times. Bumping the ask up to 4 ♠ when we have bid hearts may fix that problem, but the reduced space for responses then becomes a problem (as when asking for hearts with 4 NT). Crosswood is technically superior.

When starting up with a new, strong partner, it's tempting to agree on kickback for all suits, and move on. Crosswood slots into various tools in this book, and it's better in the long run.

**Minorwood:** Four of the minor trump suit can be used as the RKB ask, known as *minorwood*. This may be technically superior to redwood. People have various rule sets to define when the bid is asking and when it is natural. Steve Willner and Alex Ogan played minorwood with these rules:

1. The suit must be bid and raised (not 1 ♣ – 4 ♣).
2. A natural notrump bid pre-raises a minor.
3. We may compete to four of a minor naturally.
4. Minorwood may not be bid by a limited hand.

The *Encyclopedia of Bridge* says, "A bid of one higher than game in the trump suit (5 ♦ for clubs, 5 ♥ for diamonds) guarantees all the key cards and asks about kings."

## Setting Trump for RKB

The full system is laid out, except the key part. What suit is trump?

1. If the bidder had an opportunity to set trump with a forcing bid, and failed to do so, a potential RKB ask is not an RKB ask.

1 ♠ – 2 ♥

3 ♣ – 4 NT [quantitative: 3 ♠ would have set trump]

2. When a minor suit is bid and raised, including a preference, that minor is trump, and the other minor cannot be trump for asking purposes. 4 NT would usually be a quantitative slam invitation.
3. If a major suit is bid and raised, that major is trump for asking purposes, and a minor suit cannot be trump for asking purposes, even if previously raised. Similarly, the other major cannot become trump. It may be possible to actually play in the other major, a minor suit or notrump.
4. A suit is presumed to have been raised, if a probable eight-card fit exists in the suit. Example auction:

1 ♣ – 1 ♠

1 NT – 2 ♦ [one-way NMF]

2 NT – 3 ♠ [forcing, 6+ spades]

3 NT – 4 NT [RKB ♠: 6-2 fit]

5. A natural notrump bid raises or pre-raises partner's lone minor suit. However, when an opponent overcalls, a natural notrump bid does not raise partner's minor. (This notrump bid shows a stopper, not necessarily a balanced hand).

*Having bid diamonds*, partner's bid of clubs *without jumping* is natural and turns off the trump-setting of a natural notrump bid, requiring an actual raise. ♦<sup>1</sup> Without crosswood available, a jump to 5 ♣ is super-Gerber.

a. 1 ♣ – 3 NT

4 ♦

[crosswood: 3 NT raised clubs]

- b. 1 ♠ - 2 ♥  
2 NT - 3 ♦  
4 ♣ [RKB ♦: 2 NT pre-raised diamonds]
- c. 1 ♦ - 2 NT  
3 ♣ [cancels diamonds: a raise (3 ♦ or 4 ♣) is required to set trump]
- d. 1 ♦ - 3 NT [13-15, an obnoxious, standard bid]  
4 ♣ [natural - more on this below] -OR-  
5 ♣ [super-Gerber]

6. Responder's suit becomes trump if raised, or if they bid it twice.

7. A weak two bid becomes trump if responder bids 2 NT. Examples:

- a. 2 ♠ - 4 NT [natural, quantitative]
- b. 2 ♠ - 4 ♣ [RKB over preempt: 0, 1, 1+, 2, 2+]

Opener hears from responder before asking:

- c. 2 ♠ - 2 NT  
3 Any - 4 NT [RKB ♠, normal responses]
- d. 2 ♥ - 2 NT  
3 Any - 4 ♠ [RKB ♥, normal responses]
- e. 2 ♦ - 2 NT  
3 Any - 4 ♣ [crosswood, normal responses]

8. A suit bid naturally by responder over partner's preempt becomes trump, superseding the preempt.

9. For purposes of EKB only, if no trump suit has been agreed, and the last bid was a suit, that suit is trump.

10. If they bid over our major-suit opening or overcall at the three or four of the other major, there is no quantitative bid and no EKB. RKB is activated for our major - we strike before they can!

- a. 1 ♠ - (3 ♥) - ? [4 NT = RKB ♠. 4 ♥ = ♠ trump.]
- b. (2 ♠) - 3 ♥ - (3 ♠) - ? [4 ♠ = RKB ♥. 4 NT = ♥ trump.]



11. After a one-level response, opener's jump rebid sets trump, unless responder immediately rebids their suit, which then becomes trump. (If this is also a misfit, notrump is a likely destination.) Opener can take it back with yet another bid.

**Example** – “The Bidding Box” (8), January 2023 *Bulletin*:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ A K 6 3 2	♠ 8
♥ A Q 6	♥ K 9
♦ A K 8	♦ 10 7
♣ Q 3	♣ A K J 9 8 5 4 2

*Our Auction 1:*

2 ♣	3 ♣
3 NT [natural]	4 ♦ [crosswood, RKB ♣]
4 ♥ [0 or 3]	4 ♠ [queen ask]
5 ♦ [♣ Q and ♦ K]	7 NT [1♠+2♥+2♦+8♣=13]

*Our Auction 2:*

2 NT	3 ♠ [relay to 3 NT for minors]
3 NT	4 ♦ [crosswood, RKB ♣]
etc.	

## ♦ Alternative Methods

**1 Diamonds, then clubs.** Marty Bergen's column, July 2016 *Bridge Bulletin*:

<i>Partner</i>	<i>Opponent</i>	<i>Us</i>	<i>Opponent</i>
1 ♠	2 ♥	3 ♦	Pass
3 NT	Pass	4 ♣	

Our non-jump first rebid of clubs (our 4 ♣ here), having bid diamonds, is natural. Instead of 4 ♣, the jump to 5 ♣ would be super-Gerber. If opener bids 4 ♦ over 4 ♣, diamonds are trump, so 4 ♥ is crosswood. Those are the only situations, over 3 NT, when either partner can ask for anything.

Andrew and I play that, in the given example, 3 NT raises diamonds, and 4 ♣ is crosswood. If we had a 5–5 minors hand, we would jump to 5 ♣ (or make a responsive double in the first place). He and I don't play super-Gerber, and there is no room (or need) for it here. The problem with this approach: it improves slam bidding at the cost of bidding games, violating the “game over slam” principle.

## RKB Summary

1. Basics: When a spade fit is agreed or implied, 4 NT is the RKB ask. With no fit, 4 NT is natural, Gerber (jump to 4 ♣ over notrump) and super-Gerber (jump to 5 ♣, when 4 ♣ is not Gerber) for aces. Roman DoP1 & RoP1, with plain DEPO if they bid 5 trumps or higher. 4 NT opening asks for specific aces.
2. Kickback (4 ♠ is the RKB ask) whenever hearts are trump.
3. Crosswood: the RKB ask, when a minor fit is agreed or implied, is four of the other minor. Exception: If competition prevents asking with the other minor, or if diamonds are set as trump by a 4 ♦ bid, then the cheaper major that has not been shown by either partner (or 4 NT if both have been shown) becomes the RKB ask. Asker's non-jump 5 NT is always natural, when the non-void response is above five of our minor.

Asker's subsequent jump to 5 NT is "pick a slam." Asker's simple notrump bid is natural and to play, except when it is the only possible queen ask (see below).

4. Holding a useful void in response to the RKB ask:  
Even: with an even number of keycards (seldom 0), bid 5 NT, no matter what the RKB ask was.  
Odd: with an odd number of keycards, bid the void suit above the "two with" bid, but below 6 trumps; bid 6 trumps with a higher void – unlikely with kickback and crosswood.
5. The queen ask is the next available non-trump suit bid, but is 4 NT when the response was 4 ♠ with clubs trump – the queen ask has priority. (Otherwise, 4 NT is to play.) Select the first applicable response:
  - a. Lacking the trump queen (or extra length), always bid the cheaper of notrump and the trump suit.
  - b. *Grand slam demand*: With a source of tricks (or three side kings and undisclosed extras), jump to 6 trump, which demands a grand slam, if all keycards are held.
  - c. Bid the cheapest side king, if any.
  - d. Bid the higher of notrump or trumps, holding no side king.

6. The king ask is five of the RKB ask strain, with cheapest king responses. Between the response and 6 NT, a non-trump bid is the second-king ask: holding that king, bid 7 ♣; otherwise, bid an intervening king, or sign off in the cheaper of NT and trump. Responder is not required to bid beyond 6 trump to show a king.
7. EKB is a jump into a void suit above the RKB ask: Roman responses, excluding the ace of the void suit. The queen ask is on, but no king ask – asker's cheapest undefined bid above the queen ask is used as a general slam try, confirming all keycards are held. When no trump suit has been agreed, the suit last bid (or shown) is trump.
8. Directly over our preempt through 4 ♣, we ask for keycards with 4 ♣ [4 ♢ over clubs], with responses: 0, 1, 1+, 2, 2+.
9. After a 2 NT opening bid or equivalent, responder's 3 ♠ bid is a relay to 3 NT. Responder's 4 ♣ or 4 ♢ is then crosswood, asking about the other minor. Responder's 4 ♥ and 4 ♠ promise both minors, with a singleton or void in the bid suit (opener's 4 NT natural), and 4 NT is non-forcing with both minors but no singleton.
10. After a 1 NT opening, responder's 3 ♢ bid is game forcing, with at least 5-5 minors. Opener often bids a double-stopper, or 3 NT to play (responder may remove to a 3-card major). Opener's 4 of a minor is crosswood for the other minor, and 5 of a minor is a sign-off.
11. If they bid over our major-suit opening or overcall at the three or four of the other major, there is no quantitative bid and no EKB. RKB is activated for our major; the next bid past RKB (4 ♠ or 4 NT) is a cue-bid, setting partner's major as trump.



**Super-Gerber.** When there is no RKB ask and 4 ♣ is not Gerber, a *jump* to 5 ♣ is super-Gerber for aces, with the same responses, a level higher. There is no king ask after super-Gerber.

Any bid by a Gerber or super-Gerber asker, other than the noted club bids, is natural and non-forcing. (Special RKB asks do not apply.)

## Backstory

After asking for kings, I used to think that 6 ♣ was Gerber for number of queens! I think we extrapolated, when we learned Gerber in our teens. 6 ♣ might need to be the final contract, so it should not be used to ask for anything.

After more than a decade since starting to play crosswood, I used Gerber for the first time in 2023, with a club suit headed by K-Q-J. Gerber does have advantages. When partner opens in notrump, Gerber can reveal less to the opponents than setting up for and using crosswood. However, if we are not looking at the king and queen of our long suit, Gerber is a bad bargain.

When super-Gerber is needed, there is nothing else. Experts have this tool in their bag, and pull it out once or twice a decade.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **After a quantitative 4 NT.** An intuitive method is to treat a quantitative 4 NT as “optional Blackwood.” Experience has shown this to be an inferior method.

<sup>2</sup> **Gerber variations.** Originally, 4 aces were shown by step 5. We use step 1 for 0 or 4, as does Hardy in *Standard Bidding*. In *Advanced Bidding*, Hardy describes Roman responses: 0 or 3, 1 or 4, 2 without slam interest, 2 with slam interest.

In *rolling* or *sliding Gerber*, the step responses used are 0 or 3, 1 or 4, 2. The next bid asks for kings, with the same step responses – and the next bid after that asks for queens. (*Encyclopedia*)

<sup>3</sup> **Gerber for kings.** Historically, asking for kings only promised three aces. Before RKB, missing an ace, we might need to know about kings to decide.

We have seen a fine application for Gerber, when we open 3 NT. In that situation, aces are paramount, and the trump suit is unknown. The likely reason for asking for kings is to tell partner we have all the aces, so we need to make that so. In all other cases, Gerber must be a jump.



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## Two-Suited Overcalls

The next few topics describe how to intervene when an opponent opens the bidding in a suit. A highlight, “Doubler Has 3-Card Support,” is coming, and we need a foundation for that.

### Michaels & Unusual Notrump

Two-suited overcalls are a great place to start. They mean we do not need to overcall twice to show our shape, perhaps with the opponents fighting all the way. Two-suiters are a major offensive threat, since they often take more tricks than their high cards would indicate.

Tournament bridge partnerships commonly play these two-suited overcalls, promising at least five cards in each suit:

*Michaels cue-bid:* over the opening bid of a minor suit, the cue-bid at two of opener’s suit shows both majors; over a major suit, the cue-bid shows the other major and either minor.

*Unusual notrump:* a jump to 2 NT over any opening bid shows the two lowest unbid suits.

Some use these bids wildly, but I suggest they be reserved for hands where our side may actually declare the hand. After we make such a bid, declaring a hand against us will be easier. Consider these hands, after our right-hand opponent (RHO) opens 1  $\diamond$ :

- a.  $\spadesuit$  Q J 8 4 2  $\heartsuit$  A J 9 7 3  $\diamond$  8 4  $\clubsuit$  8 [7 losers]
- b.  $\spadesuit$  K Q J 8 2  $\heartsuit$  A J 9 7 3  $\diamond$  8 4  $\clubsuit$  8 [6 losers]
- c.  $\spadesuit$  K Q J 8 2  $\heartsuit$  A K J 9 3  $\diamond$  8 4  $\clubsuit$  8 [5 losers]
- d.  $\spadesuit$  K Q J 8 2  $\heartsuit$  A K J 9 3  $\diamond$  A 4  $\clubsuit$  8 [4 losers]

Losing trick count only applies when an eight-card fit has been found, so the counts above are preliminary. A normal opening bid in a major suit often has seven losers; clearly, two-suiters have extra playing strength, once a fit is found.

Mike Lawrence recommends a minimum of eight working HCP non-vulnerable, 10 when vulnerable, for a Michaels bid over a minor-suit

opening; partner can get out at the two level. Vulnerable, or when we might have to play at the three level, we should have more length, strength and/or texture to our suits. Hand [a] would be a minimum non-vulnerable Michaels cue-bid of 2  $\diamond$ . With any of the other three hands, we would take a Michaels cue-bid at any vulnerability.  $\diamond^1$

**Continuations after Michaels over a Major Suit.** When partner takes a cue-bid over a major-suit opening, the minor suit is not yet known. Our continuations are:

- 2 NT Promises values; overcaller bids their minor.
- 3  $\clubsuit$  Weak hand, pass or correct.
- 3  $\diamond$  Limit raise or better in overcaller's major.

After our 2 NT or 3  $\clubsuit$ , overcaller picks a minor, or:

- 3  $\heartsuit$  Strong hand, minor is clubs.
- 3  $\spadesuit$  Strong hand, minor is diamonds.

### **Coverage for Possible Two-Suiters $\diamond^2$**

The plan above handles the ambiguity of our Michaels cue-bid over a major suit. From a coverage perspective, this is the *good* case: all three possible two-suiters (of new suits) are covered. A jump to 2 NT shows both minors, and Michaels shows either of the two major-minor hands.

When the opening bid is one of a minor, the Michaels cue-bid shows both majors, excellent when it comes up, but not so good for coverage. The unusual 2 NT covers hearts and the other minor. With spades and the other minor, overcall in one suit and hope to get a chance to bid the other. Overcalling in the minor suit can be an effective choice, particularly when the major and the overall strength are ordinary:

$\spadesuit$  A J 9 7 3    $\heartsuit$  8    $\diamond$  8 4    $\clubsuit$  K Q J 8 2

When the opening bid on our right is one of our long suits, we strain to overcall in our second suit. Our high cards should be well-placed, and partner (with a fit) should be able to ruff RHO's suit after LHO. There is no special bid for this situation.

## The Opponents Bid Two Suits at the One Level

(1 ♠) – Pass – (1 ♥) – ?

This is called the *sandwich* position, between two active opponents, both with unlimited values. With only one two-suiter unbid, the unusual 2 NT shows 5-5 in those suits.

An overcall in responder's suit (2 ♥) is natural. This offer to play in a suit bid by an opponent is alertable, even though it is standard.

Discuss an overcall in opener's suit (2 ♠) with partner: ♠<sup>3</sup>

- ❑ Standard: “Natural in either suit, if opponents have bid two suits” (SAYC, confirmed by BWS).
- ❑ Michaels: 5-5 (or such) in the unbid suits, possibly landing below 2 NT.
- ❑ Lower-longer: The two unbid suits, with the lower-ranking longer. Double shows suits of equal length, or higher longer.

Gary provided this example for lower-longer, which we will play:

2 NT would also show length in both suits, but in some cases would get us too high, such as:

(1 ♣) – Pass – (1 ♠) – ?

Using 2 ♣ to show longer diamonds lets us both show shape and get out at the two level, in case we have stepped in it.

**Sandwich 1 NT.** By a passed hand, ♠<sup>4</sup> we play 1 NT as takeout for the two unbid suits. After 1 ♠ – 1 ♥, we won't have this hand, or we would have opened:

♠ A J 9 7 3   ♥ 8   ♦ 8 4   ♣ K Q J 8 2

and 2 NT seems too high on:

♠ K J 7 6 3   ♥ 8   ♦ 8 4   ♣ K J 9 8 2

Some might bid 1 NT with only 5-4 in the unbid suits.

## Leaping Michaels

Leaping Michaels uses bids at the four level to show strong two-suited hands, after an opponent has opened the bidding, and *partner*

has no more than passed. It works well in all seats. It may be employed in these situations,  $\diamond^5$  when an opponent:

1. Opens a natural, weak 2  $\diamond$ , 2  $\heartsuit$ , 2  $\spadesuit$ , or 3  $\clubsuit$ , whether or not it promises a side suit. Also applies over a 2 NT response.
2. Opens a natural, intermediate (e.g., Precision) 2  $\clubsuit$ .
3. Opens 1  $\heartsuit$  or 1  $\spadesuit$ , and is raised to 2  $\heartsuit$  or 2  $\spadesuit$ .
4. Opens 1  $\clubsuit$  or 2  $\clubsuit$  natural, and is raised to 3  $\clubsuit$ .

## The Leaping Michaels Bids

The leaping Michaels bids are intended as *forcing*, but it's reasonable to hope for a useful card from partner. The bids show two suits of at least five cards each, and are always made at the four level:

**Control-bid.** A four-level cue-bid shows two suits of the same rank: either both majors or both minors, whichever applies. For example, after a weak 2  $\heartsuit$  opening, bid 4  $\heartsuit$  holding:

$\spadesuit$  A 3  $\heartsuit$  -  $\diamond$  K Q J 10 7 3  $\clubsuit$  A K J 10 5

**Four of a minor.** Four of a minor suit shows that minor, plus an unbid major. For example, after a weak 2  $\heartsuit$  opening, bid 4  $\clubsuit$  with:

$\spadesuit$  K Q 10 7 3  $\heartsuit$  9  $\diamond$  A 3  $\clubsuit$  A K J 10 5

## Continuations $\diamond^6$

Advancer usually places the contract in one of partner's suits. We cannot play in advancer's suit; unless agreed otherwise, advancer's bid of a new suit is a slam try in support of one of partner's suits.

When the opponent has bid a minor suit, and the overcaller bids four of the other minor, the major will not be known.

- 4  $\diamond$ , if available, asks overcaller to name the major suit.
- Otherwise, 4  $\heartsuit$  asks overcaller to pass with hearts, or correct to 4  $\spadesuit$ . Advancer may have slam interest in spades (with heart tolerance) for this bid.
- 4  $\spadesuit$  asks opener to pass with spades or correct to five of the minor. Advancer may have slam interest in hearts (with spade tolerance) for this bid.

## The Rest of the System

The takeout double is used with a three-suited hand, or a strong one- or one-and-a-half-suiter.

*Never double a single suit with a two-suiter.*

Overcall a preempt with a lesser one- or two-suiter. For example, after a weak 2 ♡ opening, bid 3 ♦ holding either of these hands:

♠ A 3 ♡ K 7 ♦ K Q 10 7 4 3 ♣ Q 5 3

♠ A 3 ♡ - ♦ K J 10 7 4 3 ♣ A J 10 5 3

A three-level cue-bid is used with a fistful of tricks but not necessarily points. It asks partner to bid 3 NT with a stopper. ♦<sup>7</sup> Should 3 NT not be bid, cue-bidder's new suit is non-forcing. For example, over a weak 2 ♦, bid 3 ♦ with:

♠ K 4 ♡ A 7 6 ♦ 2 ♣ A K Q J 9 6 2

(If the auction is already at the three level, we either double or bid our suit with such a hand.)

A jump to 4 ♡ or 4 ♠ is natural, an attempt to make game on distribution, typically with the high card strength of a normal opening bid. For example, over a weak 2 ♠, bid 4 ♡ on:

♠ - ♡ A K 10 9 6 5 3 ♦ K 7 3 2 ♣ Q 9

Advancer should seldom try for slam. *Discuss this plan with partner.*

A jump to 4 NT means whatever it would, had the opponents never bid. For us, that means 4 NT asks for specific aces.

## Backstory

Michaels is the first topic in the first chapter of Lawrence's book, *Takeout Doubles*. Here is the extent of what he says about his plan:

I admit that partner may not get to find out how strong you are, but you gain a lot anyway since you can put bidding pressure on the opponents. Anytime your partner has a fit, you can jerk the bidding to the three- or four-level in a hurry and leave the opponents guessing.

The continuations after a Michaels cue-bid over a major suit are attributed to Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Two-suiter range.** For many years, I have played a split range, but given a hint, I posted this poll on Bridge Winners:

**Single range:** One approach, favored by Mike Lawrence and others, is to make these bids with any hand deemed strong enough.

**Restricted range(s):** A popular alternative, favored by Marty Bergen and others, requires a simple overcall (or other call) instead with some hands, typically those of normal opening bid strength. The two-suiter bids are used with the other hands deemed strong enough, typically stronger or weaker than the excluded hands.

Which do you prefer?

104	73%	Single Range
33	23%	Restricted Range(s)
6	4%	It Depends
7		Abstain

<sup>2</sup> **Full coverage.** With three bids, we can show each of the three two-suiters immediately. Here is the plan that Gary and I used to play:

Cheapest jump shift	The two suits above opener's.
2 NT	The suits above and below opener's.
Cue-bid	The two suits below opener's.

2 NT and the cue-bid work fine, because they are kind of self-alerting to both partners. Not so with the cheapest jump shift – I had to give it up after the bid flew out of my box one too many times with only the one weak-jump-overcall suit. The JS also could be a problem when holding a strong hand, since partner might pass. While we considered passing the JS to be a feature, the issue could be addressed by swapping the meanings of the JS and the cue-bid.

Another three-bid approach is *Ghestem*: 2 NT, 3 ♣, plus either 2 ♦ over 1 ♣ or the cue-bid over other openings – great coverage, but tends to put you at the three level, even over 1 ♦.

Another way of providing full coverage is to change the cue-bid of a minor-suit opening from both majors to spades and a lower-ranking suit. Muddying the waters for the pure major-suit Michaels bid does not appeal.

So, when this hand came up, I had no two-suited bid:

♠ Q J 10 8 4   ♡ Q 6   ♦ 2   ♣ A 9 8 6 2

Playing matchpoints, I made a jump 2 ♠ overcall of the 1 ♦ opening on my right, which worked out fine. Tim Hill, my partner, pointed out that some folks

play top and bottom cue-bids instead of Michaels; they show the two top suits with a takeout double and equal-level conversion (and the two lowest at 2 NT, as usual). This is not for me, but if it interests you, Max Hardy wrote about these ideas.

<sup>3</sup> **Opponents bid two suits.** Bridge Winners poll:

The opponents bid two suits at the one level, perhaps:

(1 m) – Pass – (1 M) – ?

Perhaps since Culbertson, it's been standard to play 2 M as natural – but offering to play in a suit bid by an opponent is alertable! Most players would understand 2 NT as showing 5–5 in the unbid suits, but often prefer not to get that high. This poll is about the meaning of 2 m here:

**Standard:** “Natural in either suit, if opponents have bid two suits,” says SAYC, confirmed by BWS. (I do occasionally bid a natural 2 m.)

**Michaels:** 5–5 (or such) in the unbid suits, says the 2NT-is-too-high crowd.

**Lower-longer:** The two unbid suits, with the lower-ranking longer. Double shows suits of equal length, or the higher longer. (New to me, I supplied a name.)

Which do you prefer?

44	60%	Standard
22	30%	Michaels
0	0%	Lower-longer
7	10%	None of the above
9		Abstain

Don't give up immediately on lower-longer – it is the plan of GLM Curtis Cheek, who presumably plays it with other experts.

<sup>4</sup> **Sandwich 1 NT.** Some pairs play this overcall by an unpassed hand, but we retain that 1 NT as a natural, strong, balanced overcall.

<sup>5</sup> **Non-leaping Michaels.** This extension of leaping Michaels gives up minor-suit overcalls over 3-bids, to permit bidding strong two-suiters using the same methods. It may be applied when an opponent:

- opens a natural weak bid of 3  $\diamond$ , 3  $\heartsuit$  or 3  $\spadesuit$ .
- opens 1  $\diamond$ , 1  $\heartsuit$  or 1  $\spadesuit$  and is raised preemptively to 3  $\diamond$ , 3  $\heartsuit$  or 3  $\spadesuit$ .
- opens a weak 2  $\diamond$ , 2  $\heartsuit$  or 2  $\spadesuit$  and is raised to 3  $\diamond$ , 3  $\heartsuit$  or 3  $\spadesuit$ .

It's one thing to agree to play non-leaping Michaels, and it's another to remember to not overcall a three-bid with four of a long minor suit. I have never played non-leaping Michaels.

When non-leaping Michaels applies, we won't have a natural overcall in a minor below game. We will need to bid 3 NT with a stopper, jump to game, double, or pass. It makes sense to treat the jump to game as an attempt to make game on distribution, and to double with stronger hands.

<sup>6</sup> **Advanced Continuations.** The mess when the opponent has bid clubs is often addressed by inverting the meanings of the 4 ♣ and 4 ♦ leaping-Michaels bids:

- 4 ♣      Diamonds and a major. Advancer's 4 ♦ asks for the major.  
*Not an offer to play diamonds!*
- 4 ♦      Both majors.

A common theme is to use the cheapest off-suit or 4 NT to show a good raise in the major (or higher-ranking) suit, which might permit overcaller to ask for keycards. The next off-suit or 4 NT shows a good raise in the lower-ranking suit. These meanings could be reversed or otherwise optimized.

An alternative is to prioritize keycarding. Once both suits are known, it makes sense to play kickback for a single major suit: 4 NT asks for keycards when spades are trump, and 4 ♠ asks for keycards when hearts are trump. As we know, it's dangerous to ask with 4 NT in hearts holding one keycard – and this is a likely situation after leaping Michaels. Kit Woolsey plays the cheapest artificial bid as RKB; the other artificial bid is an unspecified slam try (often for a minor).

<sup>7</sup> **Regular Michaels.** Some experts play that over a natural 2 ♣ or 2 ♦ opening – or perhaps any weak two bid – the three-level cue-bid is regular Michaels, not good enough to leap. These folks are willing to give up the asking cue-bid on the example hand above.



# Common Interventions over One of a Suit

## The Overcall

When contemplating an overcall at the one level, the vulnerability matters a great deal. We expect partner to raise with support and some values. When vulnerable, overcaller should have something like an opening hand, since we don't want to get hammered up there.

Non-vulnerable, an overcall could be based on as few as eight points, with a good suit. A one-level overcall is usually based on a 5-card or longer suit. With an opening hand that lacks support for some unbid suit, it could be a chunky 4-card suit. Bid 1 ♠ over 1 ♦ on:

♠ K Q J 7   ♥ J 2   ♦ Q 9 6 2   ♣ A 10 7

For a two-level overcall, a 6-card suit is best, and partner might choose to raise on honor-doubleton. While a chunky 5-card suit is common, we need a good reason for it.

The upper bound for an overcall is 17 HCP – or more! With the right shape, overcaller may follow up with a takeout double. With this hand, overcall 1 ♥ with 1 ♠, planning to double 2 ♥ for takeout:

♠ A Q J 3 2   ♥ 4   ♦ K J 3   ♣ Q J 7 4

Don't make a takeout double, holding a 5-card major that we could overcall at the one level, unless we are strong enough to bid the suit later. Bid 1 ♠ over 1 ♥, planning to double 2 ♥ for takeout, with this:

♠ J 7 5 3 2   ♥ 4   ♦ A Q 3   ♣ A Q J 4

With a lesser hand, still overcall, but don't back into the auction.

After a 1 ♠ opening bid, the holder of a modest heart suit can have a tough decision. Make a takeout double with:

♠ 4   ♥ J 7 5 3 2   ♦ A Q 3   ♣ A Q J 4

But don't lose a decent heart suit; overcall 2 ♥ with:

♠ 4   ♥ A Q J 3 2   ♦ K J 3   ♣ Q J 7 4

Avoid making the *secondary* double with a void. Double a 1 ♠ opening with hands such as these, despite holding five decent hearts:

♠ – ♥ K Q 9 7 4    ♦ A K 10 3    ♣ A K 9 7

♠ – ♥ K Q 9 7 4    ♦ K 10 7 3    ♣ A J 9 7

As mentioned earlier, we strain to overcall with length in opener's suit. Our overcall implies a lack of interest in partner's suits – we can override that with a later double.

## Advancing an Overcall

Here is how we advance partner's overcall:

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| Pass     | Not enough for one of the other actions.  |
| 1 NT     | A free bid of 1 NT promises 8 to 10 HCP; this one could be 10 to 11 with a singleton in the overcall suit.  |
| Raises   | <i>Support with support.</i> We have no slow-down raise, so the raise has a wide range, about 5 to 9 HCP. The jump raise is weak.   |
| Cue-bid  | The cue-bid of opener's suit shows a limit raise or better. If RHO bids a new suit over the overcall, we still cue-bid <i>opener's</i> suit as a raise; since responder's suit could be junk, our bid of that suit is natural (and alertable). ♦ <sup>1</sup> |
| Jump cue | A jump cue-bid shows a mixed (4-card constructive) raise; for example, bid 3 ♣ in this case:<br><br>(1 ♣) – 1 ♥ – (Pass) – ?<br><br>♠ Q 10 3    ♥ Q 9 7 4    ♦ A 10 8 3    ♣ 9 7  |
| Double   | If RHO raises, a double is <i>responsive</i> – a takeout double asking overcaller to pick an unbid suit. Since overcaller has shown no interest in our suits, we should be 5-5 or have at least invitational values for this call.                            |
| New suit | Bidding a new suit is <i>forcing</i> – advancer's only forcing action that does not promise support. This all fits, as an overcall discourages us from bidding a new suit.  |
| JS       | A jump shift is invitational and fit-showing.   |

## The Snapdragon Double

This special double can be a real winner. On our convention card we write “A-B-C-X, no jumps.” This means LHO opens the bidding in one suit, partner overcalls in another suit, and RHO bids a third suit – all bids without jumps. The snapdragon double occurs on auctions in this range:  $\diamond^2$

1. (1  $\clubsuit$ ) – 1  $\diamond$  – (1  $\heartsuit$ ) – Double
2. (1  $\spadesuit$ ) – 2  $\heartsuit$  – (3  $\diamond$ ) – Double

The double shows the fourth suit and tolerance for the second suit (partner’s). In auction [1], the double shows constructive values, perhaps:

$\spadesuit$  A J 7 5 2    $\heartsuit$  J 7 4    $\diamond$  K 3    $\clubsuit$  9 8 4

We get our message across cheaply and safely.

At the three level, the double tends to be based on 6–3, somewhat like a fit-showing non-jump, perhaps this hand on auction [2]:

$\spadesuit$  A J 10 9 7 2    $\heartsuit$  J 7 4    $\diamond$  A 10    $\clubsuit$  9 4

We would be pleased to play in either major, perhaps in game. Partner might convert the double to penalties with a misfit for spades. Note the poor quality of the 3-card heart support.

## The 1 NT Overcall

With a balanced hand of about 16 to 18 HCP that includes a stopper in opener’s suit, we overcall 1 NT.

- “Systems on,” sometimes called “front of card,” is commonly played over 1 NT, because the partnership is comfortable with it.
- Systems off, with a cue-bid as Stayman, lets advancer sign off in a 5-card minor suit at the two level. However, the only invitational sequences are a 2 NT bid or starting with a Stayman cue-bid: new suits are weak at the two level and forcing at the three level.

## The Typical Takeout Double

The typical takeout double of an opening bid contains at least 3-card support for all three unbid suits. Advancer (the partner of the doubler) acts accordingly. Advancer's cue-bid is at least invitational to game, often with doubt as to strain, such as two four-card majors.

### Advancer Plans to Draw Opener's Trump

Advancer passes only when planning to draw trump and set the opening bid. Doubler must lead a trump – and borrow one, if necessary! Pass a takeout double of 1 ♠ with a hand such as:

♠ K Q J 10 8   ♡ A 7 2   ♦ 4 2   ♣ 8 7 6

### Typical Advances

The top priority for advancer is to bid a major suit. With these hands, advancer bids 2 ♡ over the takeout double of 1 ♠:

♠ 9 7 3   ♡ Q 9 7 4 2   ♦ A 6 3   ♣ 7 4

♠ 9 7 3 2   ♡ 9 7 4 2   ♦ 10 3 2   ♣ J 7

♠ 9 7 3 2   ♡ 9 7 4 2   ♦ Q J 10 9   ♣ 7

If advancer does not have a major suit to bid, then notrump is the next target. We play that the 1 NT advance shows the same values as a free bid of 1 NT: a stopper and about 8 to 10 HCP. ♦<sup>3</sup> Advance 1 NT with this hand over a double of 1 ♠:

♠ K 9 3   ♡ Q 7 4   ♦ K 10 3 2   ♣ 7 4 3

Advancer's third choice is a minor suit, 2 ♣ on this hand:

♠ 9 7 3 2   ♡ Q 7 4   ♦ K 3   ♣ J 7 4 3

Lacking both a stopper and an unbid 4-card suit, advancer should bid a cheap 3-card suit.

Since we might wish (or be forced) to bid again, we usually choose the *higher* suit of equal length and rank.

**Important:** Advancing after a takeout double is fundamentally different from responding to an opening bid or overcall. Doubler is not forced to bid, and will usually pass a non-jump advance.

Therefore, advancer bids the higher of equal suits, being prepared to compete in the lower suit next (without reversing), if necessary. We'll see that this approach also pays off when doubler shows a strong hand with 3-card support.

When advancer has to bid a three-card suit, a minor suit is less encouraging than a major. On this next hand, clubs and diamonds are suits of equal rank and length. Over the takeout double of 1 ♠, 2 ♣ is acceptable, but we'll see how 2 ♦ can be better.

♠ 9 7 3 2   ♥ Q 7 4   ♦ 9 3 2   ♣ J 7 4

### Advancer Has Encouraging Values

Advancer should make a jump response with a working 9 to 11 points and at least a four-card suit. Advancer discounts honors in opener's suit and adds a point for each card over four in the suit. For example, after partner doubles 1 ♠, jump to 3 ♥ on any of these hands:

♠ 9 7 3   ♥ 9 7 4 2   ♦ A K J 3   ♣ K 7

♠ 9 7 3   ♥ Q 9 7 4   ♦ A K 9 3   ♣ J 7

♠ 9 7 3   ♥ Q 9 7 4 2   ♦ A Q 9   ♣ 7 4

♠ 9 7 3   ♥ Q J 9 7 4 2   ♦ A 9   ♣ 7 4

A jump advance to the two level can be a tad weaker.

**After a jump advance.** A jump advance is not forcing, and doubler's raise below game (if available) is invitational. A cue-bid is forcing to game, but implies doubt as to strain; a new suit by doubler is forcing.

**Advancer's notrump bids.** From above, we know that a 1 NT advance shows about 8 to 10 HCP, with a stopper. Advancer's jump to 2 NT shows about 12 HCP. 3 NT shows a good 13 or more, or perhaps less with a good, long suit we expect to run.

**Advancer's Free Bid.** If RHO raises opener to the two level, advancer should bid with any decent excuse. Since a free bid shows some values, it is no longer necessary to jump with a marginal hand. When partner doubles 1 ♥, and RHO raises to 2 ♥, bid 2 ♠ with either of these hands:

♠ 9 7 6 3 2   ♡ 7 4 2   ♦ 9 3   ♣ A 7 4

♠ K 7 3 2   ♡ 7 4 2   ♦ Q 3   ♣ K J 4

## Doubler Has 4-Card Support

Advancer may have no values at all for a non-jump forced bid in a suit; with a normal hand, doubler must pass. Any action, even if the opponents bid, shows extra values. ♦<sup>4 5</sup>

With at least 4-card support, doubler may raise advancer's suit in these cases:

- Holding 16 or more support points, doubler raises to the appropriate level.
- If advancer has taken a free bid, doubler may compete.

Actions other than a raise start at 18 HCP!

## Advancer's Responsive Double

When RHO raises opener over partner's takeout double, our double is takeout, asking partner to pick one of the two suits with the same rank. ♦<sup>6</sup> For a typical original double, partner has at least 3-card support for all three unbid suits; this double promises 4-4, and hopes to land in the better fit. If we had a 5-card suit, we would just bid it. After this auction:

(1 m) – Double – (2 m) – ?

double with this hand, to find the correct major:

♠ Q 9 7 2   ♡ Q 7 4 3   ♦ K 3 2   ♣ 7 4

With the same hand, after:

(1 ♡) – Double – (2 ♡) – ?

just bid 2 ♠ with four of them. A double would show at least 4-4 minors.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup>**A-B-C-Q.** RHO's new suit over partner's overcall provides a potential second cue-bid. When the overcall is 1 ♦, it's standard to bid a single 4-card major, and reserve the negative double for both majors (or possibly 4-3). In this

case, it's better to retain the natural bid in RHO's suit (but see Mel Colchamiro's article). However, after a 1♥ or higher overcall, RHO's free bid generally promises a 5-card suit. In such a case, we could play that the cheaper cue-bid shows 3-card support, and the higher cue, 4 cards or more.

<sup>1</sup> **Snapdragon at the one level.** Mike Lawrence gives a half-hearted recommendation of snapdragon in *Double!* He recommends that it be played only at the one level, where a penalty double is not needed. We have been playing A-B-C-X, no jumps, for years, and have found it quite useful.

<sup>2</sup> **1 NT with a bad hand.** Mike Lawrence says to advance 1 NT over a double of 1♠ with as few as four HCP, perhaps:

♠ Q 9 7 2   ♥ Q 7 4   ♦ 9 3 2   ♣ J 7 4

It's not that he likes 1 NT here, it's just that anything else seems worse. Don't worry, 1 NT can be plenty bad, and a raise of it can be worse. The typical takeout double is specifically looking to play in a suit, not in notrump; doubler's ideal holding in opener's suit is a singleton. As advancer, our potential stoppers will be poorly placed in front of opener. Playing our way, we bid 2♦, prepared to bid 3♣ over a cue-bid by partner.

<sup>3</sup> **Raise with four:** Some pairs play that doubler's raise shows 4-card support, but not extra strength. I used to play this way with Phyllis Rye, and it worked fine. This helps in the mix-it-up of matchpoint pairs, but doubler will need to jump raise to show extra values with support.

<sup>4</sup> **Equal-level conversion:** Playing this method, if the takeout doubler removes the advance in the lowest ranking unbid suit to the next unbid suit, it shows five cards in that suit and four in the highest unbid suit. This removal promises neither real support for advancer's suit nor extra values. This is most often employed after the double of a major suit, where removing a 2♣ advance to 2♦ shows five or more diamonds and four cards in the unbid major. It could also be used with four spades and five or more hearts, over clubs or over either minor suit. ELC is the third topic in the first chapter of Mike Lawrence's *Takeout Doubles*.

<sup>5</sup> **Two places to play.** Some pairs agree to play that this responsive double shows at least two places to play, not two suits of the same rank.

**Example** – “The Bidding Box” (1), June 2016 *Bulletin*:

(1♣) – Double – (3♣) – ?

♠ J 3   ♥ K Q 9 4   ♦ A K 8 4 2   ♣ 7 6

“Double was forward-going and noncommittal regarding strain.” This complements the cue-bid of 4♣, which asks partner to pick a major suit.

## Takeout Double with a Strong Hand

For our purposes, a *strong hand* usually contains at least 18 HCP. After a simple advance of a takeout double in a suit, game is likely only when doubler has a strong hand. Our initial action with a strong hand, directly over an opening bid, might be:

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Two-suited bid | Best with two suits of at least five cards, as we saw in preceding sections.  |
| 3 NT           | With a long, running suit and a stopper in at least opener's suit.  |
| Jump cue-bid   | In opener's <i>major</i> suit, with a long, running suit, to ask for a stopper in opener's suit.  |
| Overcall       | Sometimes it's correct to overcall with a strong hand: with a two-suiter, but no corresponding two-suited bid available; or when shortness in an unbid major suit makes a double unattractive.  |
| Takeout double | Unlimited strength and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. A balanced hand with a stopper, too strong to overcall 1 NT;</li><li>B. At least 4-card support for all three unbid suits – a normal takeout double with extra strength; or</li><li>C. A <i>good, one-suited hand</i> (Andrew Robson and Oliver Segal call this a GOSH).</li></ul> |
| Trap pass      | With no better action, usually long in opener's suit.   |

Having finally said all that I plan to about the other strong hands, at last it's time for the meat of the issue, the takeout double.

### Doubler Is Too Strong for a 1 NT Overcall

With a balanced hand that includes a stopper in opener's suit, we may be too strong to overcall 1 NT, so we double.

After any advance, we simply bid notrump at an appropriate level. Doubler no longer promises 4-card support for unbid suits. Advancer continues as if opener had overcalled in notrump.



With a strong, balanced hand that does not include a stopper, we may trap pass, or make a typical 3-suited takeout double.

## Doubler Has a Good, One-Suited Hand (GOSH)

With a GOSH, after any advance, we usually bid our long, strong suit at an appropriate level. We no longer promise any support for other suits, but we may have a 4-card side suit not named by advancer.

On a rare occasion, doubler may have a super-GOSH, so strong that slam is possible opposite a simple advance to the takeout double. With such a hand, doubler's plan is to cue-bid next, and then to *jump*  $\diamond^1$  into the suit – usually to game or higher.

$\spadesuit$  –  $\heartsuit$  A K Q J 9 7 4  $\diamond$  A 3  $\clubsuit$  A Q J 7

With this hand, after doubling  $1\spadesuit$ , jumping to game over a simple  $2\diamond$  advance could miss a slam. It's reasonable to cue-bid on such a powerful hand, *so long as we jump next*, forcing to game. (We'll see that, a non-jump is fit-showing, in our very modern methods.) Bidding this way shows a hand with at least 11 playing tricks, at most 2 losers. Opposite the  $\clubsuit$  K, we want to be in slam.

With this lesser hand, don't cue-bid, just rebid  $4\heartsuit$ :

$\spadesuit$  –  $\heartsuit$  A K Q 10 9 7 4  $\diamond$  A 3  $\clubsuit$  A J 9 7

## Doubler Has 4-Card Support

As we know, it takes at least 16 support points and 4-card support to raise a simple advance one level.

With a stronger hand that includes 4-card support for advancer's major suit, we normally bid the suit at an appropriately higher level. With a hand that is so strong that we might have a slam opposite a simple advance, we cue-bid, and then *jump*  $\diamond^2$  to game or higher.

After we double  $1\spadesuit$  and catch a  $2\heartsuit$  advance, we cue-bid  $2\spadesuit$  and jump in hearts with:

♠ – ♥ K Q 10 7 4    ♦ A K Q 10    ♣ A K 9 7

1 ♠	Dble	Pass	2 ♥
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	3 ♥
Pass	5 ♥		

This sequence asks advancer to bid slam with one winner, in this case, either ♥ J and ♣ Q, or ♥ A. On some other deal, any non-spade king would suffice.

## Doubler Has 3-Card Support

*The whole start of this chapter leads up to this section. This is good stuff!*

With only 3-card support in a strong hand, we never raise. ♦<sup>2</sup>  
Suppose 1 ♠ is doubled and advancer bids 2 ♥ on:

♠ A 8 7 3    ♥ 8 6 3 2    ♦ K 3    ♣ 9 6 2

When opener's raise to 3 ♥ promises 4-card support, bidding 4 ♥ should be automatic. However, should doubler be permitted to have only 3-card support, even 3 ♥ may be a poor contract – and 3 NT may be the top contract.

**Two of opener's suit is available:** The two-level cue-bid of opener's suit implies exactly 3-card support for advancer's suit, in a good hand. Doubler may later cancel that implication with a jump or notrump raise, but such a hand is unusual. Advancer assumes doubler has 3-card support. Consider this auction:

1 ♠	Dble	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	?

*Weak*    Repeating the original suit is weak and does not promise extra length. A new, lower-ranking suit is also weak. Suppose we hold this stinker:

♠ 9 7 3 2    ♥ Q 7 4    ♦ 9 3 2    ♣ J 7 4

Diamonds may be a 3–3 fit, so suggest an alternative with 3 ♣. With more diamonds than clubs, rebid 3 ♦.

*Invitational* Advancer's top priority is to bid 2 NT with a stopper and some values, as opener may have a strong, balanced hand, lacking a stopper – here is a minimum:

♠ Q 9 7 3   ♡ Q 7 4   ◇ 9 3 2   ♣ J 7 4

If available (perhaps a minor suit was opened), a jump to three of advancer's suit shows five cards and some points.

*Forcing* Advancer's cue-bid is forcing to game, as is a jump into a new suit. Any new suit that bypasses advancer's first suit is natural and forcing: four or more cards, if that makes sense, or a value in the suit. See example 3, below.

Advancer's jump to game shows some points and a suit of six or more cards. If doubler happened to be slamming, they bid their suit.

**Opener has rebid two or three of the opening suit:** The two-level cue-bid is no longer available, so a *second double* shows a strong hand with exactly 3-card support. At the three level, 19+ points are required, and advancer has no invitational actions.

### Doubler's Cue-Bid-and-Bid

Most of the time, doubler's cue-bid provides 3-card support. ◇<sup>3</sup> Playing this way, non-jump bids made by doubler after the cue-bid are *fit-showing*: at least five cards, a hand suitable for playing at least one more of advancer's suit. The final contract might be in advancer's first or second suit, notrump, or in doubler's primary suit. Advancer might choose to pass that primary suit, for example:

♠ 9 8 7 3 2   ♡ 7 4   ◇ 9 7 3   ♣ J 5 2

1 ♠	Dble	Pass	2 ◇
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	3 ♣
Pass	3 ♡	Pass	Pass

Advancer's 3 ♣ shows equal lengths in the minors, trying for the better fit. It does not show any values. A 3 ♡ contract sure looks safer than four of a minor.

**After a minor-suit advance:** When advancer has bid a major suit, the cue-bid showing 3-card support works well. However, when the advance is in a minor suit, 3 NT may be the best contract. Doubler's

cue-bid should not deny 4-card support, when a smattering of useful values will produce game in some other strain.

**Example 1** – Here is an exceptional hand, after RHO opens 1 ♠:

♠ – ♥ K Q 9 7 4    ♦ A K 10 3    ♣ A K 9 7

As mentioned earlier, we double for takeout. If we overcall with these anemic hearts, we may play there in a 5-1 fit, with game or even slam making in either minor suit. Also, a secondary takeout double with a void is a particularly bad idea: partner may pass for penalties, expecting us to have at least one trump. The opponents might make 3 ♠ with a bunch of trumps and a singleton or two.

Partner advances 2 ♦. It's somewhat encouraging that partner did not scrape up a 1 NT bid. It must be right to try for game in hearts. But bidding hearts would show a GOSH – pard might again pass us in a 5-1 fit. We cue-bid 2 ♠.

Advancer's first responsibility, over the cue-bid, is to bid 2 NT with a few points that include a stopper. Doubler might have a hand such as one of these:

♠ 9 2    ♥ K 7 4    ♦ A K 3    ♣ A K J 9 7    [pass 2 NT or try 3 ♣]

♠ 9 2    ♥ A Q 4    ♦ A K 3    ♣ A K Q 9 7    [raise to 3NT]

If advancer bids 2 NT over the 5-4-4-0 hand:

♠ – ♥ K Q 9 7 4    ♦ A K 10 3    ♣ A K 9 7

some or all of partner's meager values are wasted. It should be best to sign off in 3 ♦. Advancer may figure out that the reason for bidding this way is a heart suit with spade shortness.

If advancer instead bids 3 ♦, bid 3 ♥ saying, my hand can support a 4 ♦ contract, but we may have game in hearts – without heart support, please go back to 4 ♦.

The above deal is analyzed in my session note, "A Minor Advance."

### Example 2:

♠ 6 ♥ A K 9 8 6 2 ♦ A Q J 4 ♣ K 3  
1 ♠ Dble Pass 2 ♦  
Pass 2 ♠ Pass 3 ♣  
Pass 3 ♥

RHO opens in spades, and we double. If partner advances in clubs, we will bid hearts, treating the hand as a GOSH. When partner bids 2 ♦, we get to explore for the correct strain with a cue-bid followed by a fit-showing 3 ♥. Here are some hands for advancer:

♠ 9 8 7 3 2 ♥ 7 4 ♦ 9 7 3 ♣ J 5 2 [pass this stinker]  
♠ 9 7 3 2 ♥ 4 ♦ 10 9 7 3 ♣ J 5 4 2 [4 ♣, pick a minor]  
♠ 9 7 3 2 ♥ 10 7 4 ♦ K 7 3 ♣ 9 5 2 [raise to 4 ♥]  
♠ 9 8 7 3 2 ♥ Q 4 ♦ 10 9 7 ♣ J 5 2 [raise to 4 ♥]

Not perfection, but we reliably reach a decent strain. These concepts extend Lawrence's methods and are well worth playing.

### Example 3 – “The Bidding Box” (7), March 2023 *Bulletin*:

Both vulnerable.

South deals and opens 2 ♦.

West	East
♠ A Q J 5 3	♠ 4
♥ Q J 6	♥ K 8 7 3
♦ Q	♦ 10 9 2
♣ A Q 10 5	♣ K 9 6 3 2

*We get it right:*

Double [South's 2 ♦]	2 ♥
3 ♦ [three hearts or huge]	4 ♣ [longer clubs, values]
5 ♣ [found it!]	Pass

Our aggressive 3 ♦ bid could be a huge hand (slam interest), but usually shows 3-card heart support with interest in game – according to our methods. East has two fine cards and can afford to show the club length. With a weaker hand, East would try to play in 3 ♥. Then if West pushes on with 3 ♠, East can offer 4 ♣.

Responder's second, lower suit *at the same level* would show equal length (as in example 2), not additional strength. That is not going on here. 4 ♣ shows values – both partners know we can hide in 3 ♥.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Jump after cue-bid.** The requirement to jump after a cue-bid with a super-GOSH or a super-raise is mine, and is not required by others. A super-GOSH is so rare, that it makes sense to make the primary message of the cue-bid be, “I have a strong hand with exactly 3-card support” – but then we need to jump with a super-GOSH.

<sup>2</sup> **The 3-card raise.** Experts on Bridge Winners do not double and then raise immediately with 3-card support, nor, as I recall, does Eddie Kantar. Mike Lawrence's book says to avoid the 3-card raise; BWS permits it. Be sure to discuss the methods presented here with partner.

<sup>3</sup> **Doubler's cue-bid guarantees 3-card support:** Some pairs on Bridge Winners do not permit doubler to cue-bid to set a game force in doubler's suit, with a super-GOSH, or with a strong, balanced hand lacking a stopper. This is far simpler than our methods, and as a matchpoints player, I would be pleased to play this way – in the rare case when we get one of those other deals, we'll just tough it out.

## Over Their One Notrump Opening

Many systems are out there to mess with an opponent's 1 NT opening. Here are two favorites.

### Meckwell

We play this system aggressively, possibly with 4-4 chunky suits – and over any balanced hand range for the 1 NT opening.

Int1	Adv1	Int2	Meckwell over 1 NT
Dble	Clubs, or diamonds, or hearts and spades, or the rare good hand with spades.		
	Pass	Values for a solid opening bid.	
	2 ♣	The expected action.	
		Pass	Clubs.
		2 ♦	Diamonds.
		2 ♥	Both majors.
		2 ♠	Good hand with spades.
	Other suit	Long suit – probably best to play here.	
2 m	The bid minor and a major.		
	2m+1	Next step asks for major (pass 2 ♥ with ♥).	
	Other suit	Long suit – probably best to play here.	
2 M	Natural, long suit.		
2 NT	Both minors.		
	3 m	Better minor – play here.	

**Next opponent redoubles 1 NT.** Advancer's bid is to play. Pass says to bid out the hand. Optional exception:

□ 2 ♣ is pass or correct, with equal length in the majors.

**Two of a minor is doubled.** Advancer's bid shows a long suit (to play), pass picks the minor, and redouble asks for the major.

**Next opponent bids.** Advancer's double asks overcaller to bid.

**Cue-bid.** With Meckwell, we mostly intend to contest the partscore or mess up their game auction, but advancer's 2 NT is a cue-bid, showing interest in game.

## Multi-Landy

Multi-Landy combines these conventions:

Landy	2 ♣ for majors (2 ♦ asks partner to pick).
Multi	2 ♦ shows a 6-card major suit.
Cappelletti	2 ♥ or 2 ♠ shows 5+ cards in the major, and 4+ in a minor.
Unusual NT	2 NT shows both minors (not in Oakley's book).
Woolsey	Double shows a 6-card minor; a 5-card minor and a 4-card major; a strong major; or a strong balanced hand.

The combination of the first three or four is often called reverse Cappelletti. Over 1 NT, multi 2 ♦ became legal in most ACBL games in 2015. We have substantially simplified the Woolsey double, playing penalty against a weak notrump, and minor-major otherwise.

Int1	Adv1	Int2	<b>Simplified Multi-Landy over 1 NT</b>
Double	[1 NT is weak, optional] Penalty. (Natural runouts.)		
Double	[1 NT is strong, 14+ HCP] 5+ card minor & 4-card major.		
	Pass	Solid opening bid, can stand minor suit lead.	
	2 ♣	Pass or correct to diamonds.	
	2 ♦	Asks for the 4-card major.	
2 ♣	Both majors.		
	Pass	Long clubs.	
	2 ♦	You pick (implies equal length).	
	2♥/2♠	To play. (Higher is preemptive.)	
	2 NT	LR+ (cue-bid).	
2 ♦	6+ card major suit, includes 6-4 hands.		
	2 ♥	Pass or correct to 2 ♠.	
	2 ♠	Shows short spades, pass or correct to 3 ♥.	
2♥/2♠	Natural, 5 cards, with a 4+ card minor suit.		
	2 NT	Shows values, asks for the minor suit.	
	3 ♣	Pass or correct to 3 ♦.	
2 NT	Both minors.		
	3 m	Better minor – play here.	



**Responder bids.** Here is a plan that may need discussion:

**1 NT is redoubled.** Advancer's bid is to play. If the double is penalty, pass is to play. Otherwise, pass asks doubler to bid their minor.

**2 ♣ is doubled.** Advancer's pass or 2 ♦ shows a long suit and wants to play there. Two of a major says to play there. Redouble asks overcaller to pick a major.

**2 ♦ is doubled.** Advancer's pass or new suit is to play. Redouble asks for the major suit.

**Two of a major is doubled.** Advancer's pass or new suit is to play. Redouble asks for the minor suit. (2 NT asks, with values.)

**2 NT is doubled.** Advancer's suit bid is to play. Redouble asks overcaller to pick the minor.

## Backstory

**Meckwell**, developed by multiple world champions Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell, has an impeccable pedigree. Meckstroth still plays it.

Gary noted that we don't encounter many opponents who play weak notrumps, and proposed that we play Meckwell all the time, not just against strong notrumps. Here is why, with some trepidation, I accepted:

Good penalties are possible when an opponent opens 1 NT. However, when I double 1 NT for penalties, LHO finds a place to hide. Sometimes LHO has five spades, and we cannot sort out whether to double them or bid on – most of those times, we let them play 2 ♠ undoubled. Playing Meckwell, when we have a good hand behind opener without shape to show, we just pass and hope to go plus – without telling them where the points are – a fine matchpoint plan.

With other partners, I have been trying Multi-Landy. I love Landy: 2 ♦ gets us to the correct major, when responder has equal length. Landy also confounds the Stayman-double typically played over our 2 ♣. For more about multi-Landy, see David Oakley's book.

## Precision One Club & One Diamond Openings

The strong, artificial, and forcing 1 ♣ opening of Precision and similar bidding systems gets all the attention. When we sit down to play against a Precision pair, it is well to have a defense ready. However, it can be more important to be ready for 1 ♦, the most common Precision opening.

### Not Mathe over 1 ♣

Not Mathe provides these advantages: (1) It is relatively simple. (2) Double, which tends to help the opponents, is used only with a strong hand; it allows us to explore for game. (3) We can bid all suits naturally at any level – bid early and often. (4) We cannot show all two-suiters, but we have the ones that most pairs with standard opponents have: majors (Michaels) and minors (Unusual Notrump). (5) The level of the 1 NT and 2 NT bids is high enough to discourage us from making frivolous two-suited bids that will help the opponents declare the hand.

- 1 NT    Majors: at least 5 spades and 5 hearts. 2 ♣ or 2 ♦ is to play, with a long suit. Use 2 NT as a cue-bid showing interest in a major-suit game.
- 2 NT    Minors: at least 5 clubs and 5 diamonds. Discuss whether 3 ♥ or 3 ♠ should be to play.
- Suit    Kit Woolsey says, “The best defense is to bid as high as you dare as quickly as possible – and maybe even higher.”
- Dble    One of three strong hand types: (A) a balanced hand with at least a good 17 HCP, (B) a powerful one-suiter, or (C) a powerful two-suiter.

### Over the 1 ♦ Opening

It is likely that a Precision pair will open 1 ♦, when playing against us. Only the bidder knows if the suit is real; but we can bet that, without interference, they are adept at sorting things out. Furthermore, they open at least a point lighter than standard bidders. Get in there early, or go hungry! Use this defense aggressively:

Dble A typical takeout double promises support for both majors, but might have a doubleton club. Advancer should prefer 1 NT more than usual, perhaps with  $\diamond$  J-x-x or  $\diamond$  10-8-x-x, rather than bidding clubs. However, don't double frivolously, as it can help responder.

Optional: We could agree to add an equal-level conversion: if doubler removes clubs to diamonds, they show a five-card suit, but no extra values, perhaps as little as:

$\spadesuit$  A J 4 3    $\heartsuit$  K J 2    $\diamond$  K J T 6 2    $\clubsuit$  7

1 NT Make aggressive 1 NT overcalls when their balanced hand range for 1  $\diamond$  is around 11–13. Lowering our range by a point makes sense in this situation. Our diamond stopper might be dubious, with compensating values.

2  $\diamond$  Natural; use clubs as the cue-bid.

2  $\heartsuit$  Michaels (non-forcing).

3  $\diamond$  Michaels (strong).

The Standard Modern Precision 1  $\diamond$  opener's 2  $\clubsuit$  rebid promises at least eight cards in the minors, but it could be 5–3 either way (or 4–4). If we leave that one alone, they could land in a 3–3 fit.

If we are on lead with a weak hand at a notrump contract, after a Precision 1  $\diamond$  opening, we should consider leading a diamond. If partner has values, but did not bid, diamond length is a likely reason.

## Backstory

Billy Miller provided the name "Not Mathe" for Peter Weichsel's defense to the Precision 1  $\clubsuit$  opening. For more background and alternatives, see my article, "Disrupting Precision Minor Suit Openings."

## Balancing

Balancing is backing into, or reopening the bidding, when we are in the pass-out seat. We are going to talk specifically about balancing after opener's one-bid has been passed around to us.

We act when we expect to improve our score. When our fear that the opponents will improve their score exceeds our expectation, we pass. Here are a number of factors to consider:

**Length in their suit.** With shortness in opener's suit, we want to act. With length in opener's suit, we usually need opening bid strength in order to consider acting. Even then, holding four or more cards in opener's suit, we often pass; three cards are an indication to pass.

Partner would probably have acted when holding both values and shortness in opener's suit. With length in opener's suit, but less than opening strength, we have these likely cases:

- Partner has shortness, but is weak. This hand probably belongs to the opponents – they may even have game in another suit – we should pass.
- Partner has length. If we also have length, almost surely, we want to play right here. If we declare, the opener will either cash out their suit (responder discards) or prepare to ruff our honors there. We should pass.

**High card points.** We seldom reopen when holding fewer than eight HCP. Suppose partner has an opening hand, but could not act. With 8 HCP, we should have a fair chance in a partscore battle, and be safe if partner makes a serious try for game. (We also need to discount secondary honors in opener's suit.)

**Unbid major suits.** Length and strength in unbid major suits, especially spades, increases our chance to buy the contract. Shortness and weakness in a major means the opponents may have a fine home there – but they can only get there, if we bid.

## Bidding in the Balancing Seat – Borrow a King

Some things we just have to know, and we'll talk about them in a bit. Other things we can figure out, using these principles:

*Before balancing, borrow a king from partner.*

*Before acting over partner's balancing bid, subtract the king we loaned to partner, except when raising an overcall.*

To act in the balancing seat, we need something like an opening bid, including the borrowed king. For this auction,

(1 ♡) – Pass – (Pass) – ?

consider these hands:

1. ♠ A J 4 3 ♡ 6 2 ♦ K 10 6 2 ♣ 7 6 5

Hand [1] is a minimum reopening double. With our borrowed king, say ♣ K, this is close to an opening bid. This hand fits the three requirements nicely: short in opener's suit, 8 HCP, and the unbid major is covered. (A 4-card 1 ♠ should provide a chunkier suit.)

2. ♠ A K J 3 ♡ 7 6 5 ♦ J 10 6 2 ♣ 3 2

Hand [2] is a minimum 1 ♠ bid, 12 HCP with the borrowed king, despite holding three hearts. Don't be surprised if the opponents bid and make 3 ♣.

3. ♠ A K J 3 ♡ 10 9 6 2 ♦ 4 2 ♣ 10 6 5

Pass with hand [3] – way too many hearts, and only four spades. Yes, if we overcall and push the opponents into their minor suit instead of 5-1 hearts, we should get a spade lead.

4. ♠ A 3 ♡ 10 9 6 2 ♦ K J 10 4 2 ♣ 6 5

Pass like a shot on hand [4] – short spades and long hearts.

5. ♠ A J 8 4 3 ♡ 6 2 ♦ K 10 6 ♣ 7 6 5

Hand [5] is a fine reopening 1 ♠ overcall. With our borrowed king, this is close to an opening bid. This hand fits the three requirements nicely: short in opener's suit, 8 HCP, and the unbid major is covered.

6. ♠ A J 4 3 ♡ K J 5 ♦ K 10 6 2 ♣ 6 2

With 12 HCP, a stopper in opener's suit, and partner's borrowed king, we reopen 1 NT on hand [6]. Consider the official range for this bid to be 12 to 14 (plus a king is 15 to 17), but we may have to do this with a point or two more.

7. ♠ A J 4 3 ♥ K J 5 ♦ K 10 6 2 ♣ A 2

With about 16 to 18 on hand [7], plus the borrowed king, we are too strong for a 1 NT overcall. We reopen with a double and bid notrump next.

### Have to Know

8. ♠ A Q 4 3 ♥ A Q 5 ♦ K 10 6 2 ♣ A 2

A balancing jump to 2 NT shows a hand such as [8], that would have opened in a suit and then jumped to 2 NT. (Some writers say 19 to 20, others 19 to 21 or 20 to 21.) *Not the unusual notrump!*

A yet stronger hand would double, and then jump in notrump.

The reopening jump overcall shows a good suit, usually at least six cards, and solid opening bid values (14 to 16 points). We bid 2 ♠ on hand [9]. *Not a weak jump overcall!*

9. ♠ A Q 8 6 4 2 ♥ A K 8 ♦ 5 ♣ 6 5 4

10. ♠ A Q 10 8 4 2 ♥ A K 8 ♦ 5 ♣ Q 10 4

On hand [10], with the borrowed king, we just have the 18 HCP required to double and bid our spade suit. Notice how nicely the reopening jump to 2 ♠ fills in the gap between this double-and-bid hand and a routine 1 ♠ overcall, hand [5] or better.

### Further Bids

**Michaels.** A reopening cue-bid is Michaels.

**Western cue.** A jump to three of opener's suit asks for advancer to bid 3 NT with a stopper, the Western cue-bid.

**Leaping Michaels.** Let me suggest agreeing to play four-level bids as if opener had made a weak two-bid in their suit – nothing new to learn, if we remember it applies.

**Double jump overcall.** I recommend not using the double jump to three of a suit higher than opener's. Lawrence has a suggestion for it, but it's another bid to remember.

# Advancing a Balancing Double or Overcall

## Summary

Reopening actions are mostly typical doubles and overcalls, but based on borrowing a king. Advancer subtracts that borrowed king, *except when raising an overcall*.

## Advancing in Notrump

Whether partner has reopened with a double or an overcall, our advance in notrump takes into account the borrowed king:

- 1 NT 11 to 13 actual HCP (about 8 to 10 effective HCP, having subtracted the borrowed king).
- 2 NT 14 to 15 actual HCP (11 to 12 HCP without the borrowed king).

These bids definitely come up. Having passed with strength, we usually have length in opener's suit.

See why we need to be so strong for these bids, and to have at least 8 HCP to reopen? We cannot afford to get overboard on a misfit auction, so we don't mess around in notrump.

## Advancing a Reopening Double

A jump advance to a reopening takeout double shows 11 to 13 support points, staking a claim to that partscore. Within the borrowed-king theory, this is aggressive (8 to 10 net), and we need to be. Note that, since advancer would have overcalled with a good suit and a good hand, this jump is may be based on a bad suit.

Since advancer is likely to have length and strength in opener's suit:

*If opener redoubles, advancer's pass shows intent to set this contract – doubler should normally pass.*

Of course, this means advancer cannot leave the choice of strain to doubler, and has to bid with a weak hand.

## Advancing a Reopening Overcall

When we have a fit for the overcall, we ignore the borrowed king. It's crucial for advancer to *support with support*. The range for a simple

raise is wide, a good 7 to a bad 11 support points. As always, our cue-bid shows a limit raise or better.

A change of suit denies support, and is an attempt to improve the strain. This carries some risk, as we are unlikely to have a good suit, and we may have no good fit. We do have the fit-showing jump.

If we have a good hand but have no fit, no suit we are willing to bid, and no stopper, we have to pass the overcall. This may work out fine.

### **Advancing a Reopening 1 NT**

1 NT is a not safe bid, with the strength behind us. If opener doubles 1 NT, we play our usual methods, including redouble to run up the line, and pass forces a redouble (for business, or to run to a minor).

#### **□ Plan A – Systems Off**

To allow advancer to play in two of a minor at will, we play *systems off*: 2-bids are to play (cue-bid is Stayman, at least invitational), 2 NT is natural, and 3-bids are natural and forcing. However, advancer often declares, with the opening lead across partner's strength.

#### **□ Plan B – Systems On**

To put the strong hand on lead, we play *systems on*. We probably cannot play in two of a minor, unless opener doubles.

□ Since a reopening 1 NT can have a wide range, we give up crawling Stayman. 2 ♣ is a version of Crowhurst, showing interest in game:

- With a normal balancing hand, up to 14 HCP, opener responds to Stayman with the usual continuations.
- Opener bids 2 NT with 15 to 16. We are forced to game; systems are on, as over a 2 NT opening.

### **Advancing a Reopening Jump Overcall**

We expect to play in the jump overcall suit or notrump. As advancer, we won't have a good suit in a good hand, so our new suit bid is a natural force, but does not promise a real suit. Advancer passes with any misfit, or lacking interest in game. 2 NT and 3 NT are natural, with a stopper. When overcaller's suit is a minor, then 3 NT will be the main target, and advancer's new suit shows a stopper.



11. ♠ A Q 8 6 4 2 ♥ A K 8 ♦ 5 ♣ 6 5 4

Real deal [11] was played in a matchpoint pairs game. 4 ♠ is the target unless advancer bids notrump.

Notice that we have six losers, ideal for a game try, assuming advancer has support. We would also make this bid with five losers, perhaps:

♠ A Q 9 8 6 4 2 ♥ A K 8 ♦ 5 ♣ 5 4

□ **Game tries on:** With support, advancer should consider 2 ♠ as an immediate nondescript game try: raise with two winners, jump to game with three winners, and bid a secondary value (K or Q) with two other winners. *Be sure to discuss this with partner!*

On the actual deal [9], advancer held:

♠ 9 7 3 ♥ J 10 ♦ K 9 8 6 2 ♣ K Q 8

Applying our methods, advancer has only one sure cover card, but should still raise with the positional advantage of the three main honors, plus the doubleton. Overcaller passes with six losers. As it turns out, both minor-suit aces are onside, and game should be made by dropping the stiff ♠ K. Too much science?

## Backstory

Marshall Miles recommended borrowing a queen.

What we have here is based on my expansion of the borrowed-king theory (mentioned on *Bridge Winners*), filled in from Mike Lawrence's *Balancing*. His book covers many more auctions than just a one-bid passed around. Continue for a comparison of my methods to Lawrence's.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

**Comparison.** Lawrence and I mostly agree on the reopening actions:

Reopening Action	Matthews	Lawrence
Overall	8 <sup>1</sup> to 14 or more.	6 <sup>1</sup> to 14 or more.
Double	8 to unlimited.	6 <sup>2</sup> to unlimited.
1 NT	12 to 14 to 16. <sup>3</sup>	
Jump 2-bid	14 to 16 SP, 5–6 losers.	14 to 16 SP.
Jump 3-bid	Probably stronger.	

Cue-bid	Michaels.	
Jump 2 NT	19 to 20 HCP, balanced.	
Jump cue-bid	Western.	
Four level	Leaping Michaels.	

<sup>1</sup> Common sense required. At the two level, decent 5+ card suit.

<sup>2</sup> Perfect 4–4–4–1 shape for less than 8 HCP.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence says: 14 over 1 ♣, 14.5, 15.5, and 16.5 over 1 ♠. Over the higher suits, doubling and bidding notrump is less attractive.

Lawrence gives this essential advice:

*Fight like crazy throughout the one and two levels. If partner makes a takeout double, try really hard to show a fit if your RHO bids something.*

*If you have already made a bid, continue to contest at the two level, but go to the three level with caution.*

So far, we mostly agree. We also agree that advancer's pass of opener's redouble should be for penalties – with a weak hand, advancer picks a suit.

Unfortunately, I disagree with Lawrence's meaning for some of advancer's bids, especially in notrump, as inconsistent with borrowed-king theory.

Advance	Matthews	Lawrence
1 NT	11 to 13 HCP.	7+ to 11- HCP.
2 NT	14 to 15 HCP.	12 to 14 HCP.
3 NT	Unlikely.	15+ HCP.
After a 1-level reopening overcall:		
Low new suit	Misfit, NF.	Misfit, NF.
High new suit <sup>5</sup>	Misfit, NF.	Fit, value in suit.
Jump shift	Fit-showing.	N/A.
Jump raise	Weak (or mixed).	4-Card limit raise. <sup>6</sup>
Cue-bid	Limit raise or better. <sup>6</sup>	3-Card LR or good hand without a stopper. <sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> A high new suit is above two of opener's suit. Lawrence's method is superior, but another thing to remember.

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence's limit raise methods are consistent with his recommendations over normal overcalls; we, of course, play a cue-bid as LR+. We may have to pass the overcall with a good hand lacking a fit or a stopper. This is not necessarily a bad thing.

Lawrence also recommends equal-level conversion after a takeout double. I agree, but only when the partnership is already playing this way.

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## Transfers after Transfers over One Notrump

Over partner's 1 NT opening bid, we bid Stayman and follow with 2 ♠ to invite game with 5 or more spades. This plan effectively makes this auction obsolete, as an invitation:

1 NT - 2 ♡; 2 ♠ - 2 NT

Do experts repurpose that?

Gavin Wolpert replied, "Most experts are shifting to transfers after transfers." Here is a summary of the plan he provided:

R2	1 NT - 2 ♦; 2 ♡ - ?	1 NT - 2 ♡; 2 ♠ - ?
2 ♠	All heart invitations. ♦ <sup>1</sup>	-
2 NT	Secondary clubs, GF.	Secondary clubs, GF.
3 ♣	Secondary diamonds, GF.	Secondary diamonds, GF.
3 ♦	Six hearts - hand type 1.	5-5 majors.
3 ♡	Six hearts - hand type 2.	Six spades - hand type 1.
3 ♠	-	Six spades - hand type 2.

**5-5 majors.** If you have been paying careful attention, you'll see that the sequence for "all heart invitations" clobbers our sequence for an invitation with 5-5 majors. Wolpert says, with this hand, "just Stayman followed by 2 ♠. If partner bids 2 NT to accept you can retreat to 3 ♡. It backfires when opener is 2-3 and has a minimum which in reality will happen to you once every couple of years and if you are playing IMPs you can weather the storm." ♦<sup>2</sup>

Playing this way, we don't need a special system over the 5-5 majors sequence at 3 ♦. It remains forcing to game, but is an important step lower than 3 ♡: after opener picks a major, that sets trump in an 8+ card fit at the three level, so serious 3 NT applies! Responder's 3 NT starts serious cue-bidding, or a courtesy cue is a mild slam try.

**6-Card major.** Wolpert says different people play different hand types [1 & 2], which he did not describe, for the 6-card major bids.

A simple way would be to play 3 M [type 2] as a choice of games, when worried about losing three trump tricks. The cheaper bid [type 1], below 3 M, could be a slam try that needs cooperation. Remember that we use Texas instead, if we are ready to RKB.

## Second transfer to a minor – opener’s suggested priorities:

1. 3 M shows 3- or 4-card support, and sets trump.
2. 3 NT shows both side suits are well stopped.
3. A new suit shows this suit is well stopped, highlights the other. The other major is always available, and 3  $\diamond$  is available over a transfer to clubs.
4. 3  $\clubsuit$  over a transfer to clubs shows 4+ clubs.
5. 3  $\diamond$  over a transfer to diamonds is ambiguous. Responder bids as though opener has *clubs*, highlighting spades, because clubs cannot be bid below 3 NT. Whatever the quality of support, 4  $\clubsuit$  is nailed down as RKB  $\diamond$  (crosswood).

This plan is not perfect, but having the extra bid makes it way better than natural bids after transfers.

## Backstory

This framework came to me via updates in 2023 by Gavin Wolpert to his “4-Way Transfers with Range Ask” article on Bridge Winners. I have yet to play them, and they seem to need fleshing out. Suggestions are mine for after a transfer to a minor.

The best way to start down this path is to first assure responder uses Stayman and then 2  $\spadesuit$ , to handle all spade invitations. That sequence means opener is either weak or game-forcing (never invitational) after a transfer to 2  $\spadesuit$ . In turn, this opens up extra slots, employed for 5–5 majors and a second 6-card suit bid, after a transfer to spades.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Heart invitations.** Even if we ditched crawling Stayman – which Wolpert says is too valuable – a 2  $\spadesuit$  Stayman response would prevent responder from bidding an invitational 2  $\heartsuit$  after bidding Stayman.

<sup>2</sup> **5–5 majors invitational.** I came up with a method of handling 5–5 majors, invitational or better, at 3  $\diamond$ . It was not worth printing. Do it Wolpert’s way, which is clearly better when forcing to game.

## Two Notrump As 5-Card-Major Stayman

In this alternative plan, we use 2 NT as 5-card-major Stayman, as opposed to 3 ♣, to avoid a lead-directing double.

The 2 NT response is forcing to game. It shows zero or one 4-card major and/or a 3-card major or two. Our 5-card-major Stayman discovers major-suit fits, but opener never tells 4-card major-suit holdings to the opponents.

The 3 ♣ response denies a 4-card major. It is used when responder has six or more diamonds: in a weak hand; or (if we might not play notrump) in a strong hand.

The 2 ♠ response denies a 4-card major. It is used when responder has an invitational hand, either balanced or with 6+ cards in either minor. The 2 ♠ response is also used when responder has six or more clubs in a weak hand; or (if we might not play in notrump) in a strong hand.

### 5-Card-Major Stayman (2 NT)

The response of 2 NT is made with game values and:

- one 4-card major suit; or
- no 4-card major (but one or two 3-card majors).

By only using the three (or four) responses, opener does not leak any information about 4-card majors in the declaring hand:

O2	R2	1 NT - 2 NT: 5-Card-Major Stayman	
3 ♣	No 5-card major.		
	3 ♦	Unassigned. ♦ <sup>1</sup>	
	3 ♡	Four <i>spades</i> .	3 NT, 4 M = play.
	3 ♠	Four <i>hearts</i> .	Other = cue-bid for slam in M.
	3 NT	Play here.	
3 ♦	Unassigned. ♦ <sup>2</sup>		
3 ♡	Five hearts.	3 NT, 4 M = play. 4 NT = inv.	
3 ♠	Five spades.	Other = cue-bid for slam in M.	
No other responses are defined.			

Unless we find a fit in opener's 5-card major, we have better tools for bidding slam after a 2 ♣ Stayman response.

It's nice when this method finds a 5-3 major-suit fit. More importantly, opener's major-suit holdings are concealed, when opener does not have a 5-card major. We can achieve this, because responder should never have both majors: regular Stayman is sufficient when responder does have both majors, as we don't much care whether opener's major is four or five cards.

## Transfer to Diamonds (3 ♣)

Responder's 3 ♣ denies a 4-card major suit. It is a transfer to diamonds with a weak or game-forcing hand. ♦<sup>3</sup> Responder promises at least six diamonds, but no points. Opener always bids 3 ♦, and responder then chooses:

R2	O3	1 NT - 3 ♣ [♦ weak or strong]; 3 ♦
Pass	All weak hands.	
3 ♥, 3 ♠	Singleton or void in bid suit.	
	3 NT	Double stopper opposite shortness.
	4 ♣	Great fit - RKB diamonds (crosswood).
	4 ♦	Bad fit - suggests playing here.
	3 ♠, 4 ♥	5- or chunky 4-card suit.
	5 ♦	Hope I can make it.
3 NT	Mild slam try (no major-suit shortness).	
4 ♣	RKB diamonds (crosswood).	

## Size Ask (2 ♠) - Clubs or Invite (Balanced or Minor)

Responder's 2 ♠ size or range ask denies holding a 4-card major suit. Except when balanced, it promises a 6-card or longer minor suit.

These are the possible hand types:

- A balanced game invitation - we play 2 NT or 3 NT.
- Invitational with diamonds - we usually play 3 ♦ or 3 NT.
- Weak hand with clubs - we play 3 ♣.
- An invitational hand with clubs - we play 3 ♣ or 3 NT.
- A game-forcing hand with clubs - we play 3 NT or work toward 6 ♣.



O2	R2	O3	1 NT - 2 ♠ [Size Ask]
2 NT	Opener has a minimum hand.		
	Pass	Balanced invitation.	
	3 ♣	Clubs, weak or invitational.	
		Pass	Opener must pass.
	3 ♦	Diamonds, invitational.	
		Pass	Opener usually passes.
		3 NT	Game try.
3 ♣	Opener has a maximum hand.		
	Pass	Clubs, weak.	
	3 NT	All invitational hands, no exceptions.	
	3 ♦	Clubs, singleton or void in ♦ (as 3♥/3♠ below).	
When responder has a game force in clubs, over 2 NT or 3 ♣:			
	3 ♥, 3 ♠	Singleton or void in bid suit.	
		3 NT	Double stopper opposite shortness.
		4 ♣	Bad fit - suggests playing here.
		4 ♦	Great fit - RKB (crosswood).
		3 ♠, 4 ♥	5- or chunky 4-card suit.
		5 ♣	Hope I can make it.
	3 NT	Mild slam try in clubs (no shortness).	
	4 ♦	RKB clubs (crosswood).	

No longer must responder bid Stayman and expose opener's major-suit holdings, just to invite game in notrump (as when we played 2 ♠ as a pure transfer to clubs).

## Key Features

- 2 NT is 5-card-major Stayman with at most one 4-card major, limiting information leaked to the opponents.
- 3 ♣ for diamonds, weak or strong.
- 2 ♠ size ask, invitational (balanced or a long minor); or clubs weak or strong.

## Backstory

We found out about the 2 NT version of 5-card-major Stayman in 2023, but have yet to play it. The 3 ♣ version is described on page 418.

## ♦ Alternative Methods

<sup>1</sup> **Responder's 3 ♦ bid (after 3 ♣ denies a 5-card major).** This can show (4–1)=4=4 shape. Opener's 3 ♥ asks, and responder bids or shows the long major: 3 ♠ for spades (we don't want to bid a singleton spade), and 3 NT for hearts. Opener plays 3 NT, bids four of the major, or suggests a minor suit.

<sup>2</sup> **Opener's 3 ♦ response to 2 NT (5-card major Stayman).** We don't want to leak information likely to be useful to the opponents, so it's fine to leave this bid idle. One suggestion was to use this for 5–4 in the minors, but we don't open 1 NT with 2–2 majors. "1 NT is the new Flannery," attributed to Billy Miller, inspires playing 3 ♦ as 4=5 majors. Nature abhors a vacuum, so I expect this slot to get filled.

<sup>3</sup> **3 ♣ transfer to diamonds.** We exclude the invitational hand, so that opener can be restricted from breaking the transfer. That way, opener won't prevent strong responder from showing a singleton or void in a major suit. When Stewart Rubenstein gave me the outline for this plan, 3 ♣ was used with invitational or better hands. The given method is superior, but both methods are better than having no strength limitation at all.

## Almost 2/1

The methods described here free up jump shifts at the three level to be sensibly used for purposes other than an invitational jump shift – perhaps fit-showing (our choice), mini-splinters, or Bergen raises.

*Unless both you and partner are already comfortable with Almost 2/1 methods, they probably are not worth your effort.*

### Responder Has a Long, Decent Suit

In addition to game-forcing hands, we make a two-over-one response on an invitational hand containing no 4-card major and a long, decent suit (instead of playing an invitational jump shift). Responder plans to show this hand by immediately rebidding the suit. When playing this way, at the top of the convention card, enter as the general approach: “2/1 GF Unless Suit Rebid.” I call this approach *Almost 2/1*, for short.

Usually, responder will hold an opening bid or better for the 2/1, and will force to game. The fundamental rule of *Almost 2/1*:

*If either partner raises or bids notrump, a 2/1 auction becomes forcing to game.*

Consider (again) these hands for responder:

- |    |         |     |          |                |                |
|----|---------|-----|----------|----------------|----------------|
| a. | ♠ A 7 3 | ♥ 9 | ♦ K 10 3 | ♣ A Q 10 8 3 2 | [game force]   |
| b. | ♠ A 7 3 | ♥ 9 | ♦ 10 5 3 | ♣ A Q 10 8 3 2 | [invitational] |
| c. | ♠ Q 7 3 | ♥ 9 | ♦ 10 5 3 | ♣ K J 10 8 3 2 | [weak]         |

After an opening 1♥ bid, both hands [a] and [b] respond 2♣. Unless opener shows extra values, responder plans to rebid 3♣ (non-forcing) with hand [b]; and to rebid 2NT with hand [a]. Any rebid by responder other than 3♣ effectively sets a game force. Hand [c] remains a 1NT response, planning to sign off in 3♣ (or pass 2♥).

### Opener's Rebid after a 2/1 Response

Any rebid by opener below game is forcing.

**New suit at two level.** After a 2/1 response, opener's bid of a new suit at the two level shows a suit of four or more cards, but does not show extra values.

- Specifically, a 1 ♥ opener should always rebid 2 ♠ with four spades. This won't interfere with responder's potential invitational rebid and may be the last chance to find a 4-4 spade fit when responder has game values.
- After a 2 ♣ response to 1 ♦, opener's 2 ♦ rebid is a catch-all, still only promises 3 to 4 diamonds, and does not deny a major suit; bidding a major shows shape (at least five diamonds and four of the major) but not extra values. Over any of these rebids, responder's 3 ♣ is invitational and non-forcing.

After the 2 ♦ rebid, responder's bid of a major suit shows game values; it may show a real suit, or just a stopper. We need a bidding trick to sort this out:

- opener's raise of the major shows 4-card support *without* a stopper in the other major;
- opener's jump to 3 NT shows 4-card support for the major, *with* a stopper in the other major.

**2 NT or 3 NT.** Per the rule, opener's 2 NT sets a game force, and thus requires extra values (a medium hand). Opener also needs a stopper in each of the unbid suits. Opener's jump rebid of 3 NT shows a large hand (at least 18 HCP). The meanings of these rebids differ from playing full 2/1.

**Raise.** Raising responder's suit shows extra values and sets a game force. If the raised suit is hearts, then hearts are trump, and spades cannot become trump (a practical rule subject to discussion). If a minor suit has been raised, then responder's immediate bid of opener's major sets that suit as trump, and the minor suit is no longer trump. If the minor suit is trump and 3 NT cannot be played, it is possible to play in a 5-2 fit in opener's major or a 4-3 fit in the other major.

**Splinter.** Other than 3 ♥, any jump shift by opener is a splinter, promising extra values, at least 4-card support for partner, and a singleton or void in the bid suit.

**High reverse or 3 ♥.** Opener's non-jump rebid of a new suit at the three level shows extra values and often a 5-card suit, is forcing, and promises another bid unless game has been reached. The 1 ♠

opener's jump shift to 3 ♡ promises five hearts and high reverse values; rebidding 2 ♡ and following with 3 ♡ shows a lesser hand.

**2 M and 3 M.** Opener's jump rebid in the opening major suit sets trump and demands control-bidding toward slam. Promising a suit with at most one loser opposite a void, this jump rebid is forcing to game, but no higher. Serious 3 NT applies.

Opener's two-level rebid of the opening major suit is a catch-all. It shows a hand that is unsuitable for any other bid. It may conceal extra values, lacking requirements for a stronger bid (such as a stopper for 2 NT). It may conceal a fit for responder, lacking the values to force to game.

### **Responder's 2-Level Preference to Opener's Major Suit**

Responder may be stuck for a rebid. Suppose the 1 ♠ opener rebids 2 ♡ and responder holds:

♠ K 9   ♡ A 7 3   ♦ 10 3   ♣ A Q 10 8 3 2

We must not raise opener's second suit (hearts) with only three cards, we do not have a diamond stopper for 2 NT, and 3 ♣ would not be forcing. The answer is a preference to 2 ♠, which (being a raise) is forcing to game, but does not commit the partnership to play in spades. Opener should expect a doubleton containing one of the top three honors, or three cards lacking a top honor. With stronger spade support, responder usually jumps to 3 ♠.

If opener instead rebids 2 ♠, we cannot bid that, so we bid 3 ♡, the stopper we have, to force to game. If partner shows four hearts by raising, we can play there in the 4-3 fit; holding one fewer heart, we would convert to four spades. (Since 3 ♡ only shows a stopper, the raise does not set trump, and 4 ♠ is not kickback. Game over slam.)

### **Searching for 3 NT after a Two-Level Response**

#### **Example 1:**

This opening 1 ♡ bid is not strong enough for a 2 NT rebid, so over a 2 ♣ response, opener rebids 2 ♡:

♠ K 10 2   ♡ K 10 8 3 2   ♦ A 9 7   ♣ K 4

With that beautiful club honor and prime stoppers, this hand should convert responder's non-forcing 3 ♣ rebid to 3NT. Here is hand [b] again – 3 NT only requires the clubs to run:

b. ♠ A 7 3 ♥ 9 ♦ 10 5 3 ♣ A Q 10 8 3 2 (invitational)

### **Example 2:**

If opener rebids 2 NT, hand [b] raises to 3 NT. Change hand [b] to:

♠ 7 3 ♥ A 9 ♦ K 10 3 ♣ K J 10 8 3 2

and responder bids 3 ♦ over 2 NT, showing doubt about spades.

Another rule:

*When two suits are in doubt, bidding one of them shows a stopper in the suit bid.*

### **Example 3:**

Consider this related auction:

1 ♥ – 2 ♣; 2 ♥ – 3 ♣; 3 ♦ – 3 ♠

Here is the rule for this 3 ♠ bid:

*When one suit is in doubt, bidding it asks for a stopper, or in a pinch, half a stopper.*

We are definitely in a pinch, with this auction. Opener's 3 ♦ shows a diamond stopper. With a solid spade stopper, responder would bid 3 NT, so 3 ♠ here asks for half a stopper (and shows a half stopper): either ♠ Q-x or ♠ J-x-x. This pair of holdings, one in each hand, cannot be attacked by the defense without yielding the lead to declarer. Responder might hold:

♠ J 7 3 ♥ Q 9 ♦ 10 3 ♣ A K J 8 3 2

If all this stopper bidding and asking does not pan out, we play four or five of responder's suit, or four of opener's major.

## **Avoiding the High Reverse**

Here is a hand I held in a pairs event:

♠ Q 10 9 8 3 ♥ A 10 ♦ 5 ♣ K Q 8 3 2

With 21 Bergen points (11 HCP [all working] + 10 cards in the two longest suits), this is a clear opening bid. 2/1 Bidders open 1 ♠, without a care in the world. If the response is two of a red suit, these folks continue with 3 ♣, since they are already forced to game. Playing 2/1, a *high reverse* is OK with this hand. This may or may not work out well, but the strategy is simple.

Playing Almost 2/1, the high reverse does show extra values. After opening 1 ♠ on my hand, opener would have to rebid 2 ♠ over a red suit response. The club suit could get lost, but this auction is appropriate if spades are much stronger than clubs.

The solution, dating back to Goren and before, is to open this hand with 1 ♣, and then plan to bid spades twice. Since partner is clued in, this works fine, unless the opponents get in the way. Use this method to show a minimum 5-5 hand with the black suits. Open this stronger hand 1 ♠, prepared to follow with a high reverse to 3 ♣:

♠ A Q 10 9 3   ♥ A 10   ♦ 5   ♣ K Q 8 3 2

## Conclusion

Almost 2/1 is my preferred method, with a partner already comfortable with it. It solves significant problems in the 2/1 Game Force system, while keeping responder's jump shifts available for special uses – but the cost of learning it has become too high.

## Backstory

In the 1970s, my ex-wife Val Montanus and I had a string of second place finishes in club games, playing Kaplan-Sheinwold. Switching to strong notrumps improved our results to many firsts – and entry fees back to a young couple. In that era before lebensohl, the weak notrump proved to be a disadvantage at matchpoints, especially when vulnerable.

Strong notrump systems descended from Kaplan-Sheinwold are often called Eastern Scientific. Some of the world champion Dallas Aces played Almost 2/1 methods, described by Bobby Goldman in *Aces Scientific* (1978). A reference on Almost 2/1 methods is Mike Lawrence's *Workbook*.

Many years ago, I laid out two full systems for Almost 2/1 to handle { 1 ♦ – 2 ♣ }, and presented them to Gary. The other is lost to posterity; what I present here is his choice, taken from my article on this auction.

## Tucker over One Heart

Tucker is designed to address these problems after a 1 ♠ response:

- Opener's *major nightmare hand*, three spades and six hearts with extra values.
- Playing in a dismal 4-3 spade fit, or missing a good one.
- Improved bidding to a minor partscore on a major-suit misfit.
- Game-forcing hands with at least five spades, after a 1 ♥ opening bid.

### The Tucker 1 ♠ Response

Over the 1 ♥ opening bid, responder bids 1 ♠ on any hand with *less than game-forcing strength*, four or more spades, and one of these:

- fewer than three hearts,
- decent spades (especially with secondary values), three hearts, and invitational strength, or
- five spades, three weak hearts, and fewer than two sure cover cards. This is a slow-down raise of hearts with spades. [With four spades, bid 1 NT instead.]

Responder has no tools to investigate slam after the 1 ♠ response: there is no fourth suit forcing or new minor forcing. 2 NT and jumps are invitational.

**Exception:** In case slam is in the offing, we try to avoid a 2/1 response in a suit headed by the queen or less. We might respond 1 ♠ with four spades, a balanced hand and 13-14 HCP. We plan a jump to 3 NT or 4 ♥ next. However, with 15+ HCP and 4=3=3=3, we manufacture a two-over-one in a minor.

### Opener's Tucker 1 NT Rebid

The 1 ♥ opener's 1 NT rebid shows exactly three spades and is *forcing*. Opener may have a minimum opening, values to force to game, or anything in between. Responder's priorities are:

1. With five spades, responder has an easy 2 ♠, invitational 3 ♠ rebid, or possibly a jump to game with a double fit.



2. With four spades, take a preference to 2 ♡ on a doubleton (or a slow-down raise); jump to 3 ♡ with a 3-card limit raise.
3. With an invitational hand, but no known major-suit fit, bid 2 NT or three of a long minor.

Now the bad cases – a singleton or void in hearts and only four spades:

4. With a minor suit of at least five cards, bid it. Opener should usually pass this bid with any doubleton.
5. If spades are decent, rebid 2 ♠.
6. With four bad spades, hope our 2 ♠ rebid does not draw action by opener and/or doubles by the opponents. 4=1=4=4 is the problem hand of the system. We could also prefer hearts on a singleton honor. Keep in mind that standard bidders may not have a picnic on this deal.

Faced with the prospect of this last hand and minimum values, responder should consider passing the opening bid or responding 1 NT, but don't pass opener's 1 NT rebid.

Opener is not required to bid 1 NT, on the rare hand with three spades and something more important to describe.

## Opener Has Fewer Than Three Spades

Over the 1 ♠ response, opener rebids as over a 1 NT forcing response, when holding fewer than three spades. With 2=5=3=3 shape, this will mean bidding a 3-card minor suit; we do this all the time over the forcing 1 NT. Again, fourth-suit forcing and new minor forcing do not apply. 2 NT and jumps are invitational.

## The Tucker 2 ♠ Response

The jump shift to 2 ♠ shows a game-forcing hand with five or more spades, and *denies a minor suit of equal or greater length*. Because opener does not have a 2 ♡ rebid available, we need highly structured continuations. Here are opener's priorities:

1. Opener's rare bids above 3 NT are splinters and picture bids.

2. Raise to 3 ♠ with three or more spades. Spades are now trump, and serious 3 NT applies.
3. With a singleton or void in spades, opener always rebids 2 NT. This is key information, and using 2 NT to express it is more likely to right-side a 3 NT contract, compared with 2 NT showing two. Responder's major-suit bid now sets trump; otherwise, responder bids a minor-suit stopper, ostensibly angling for 3 NT – but it might be a 4-card side suit.
4. With six or more hearts and two spades, opener rebids 3 ♥. Responder sets spades trump with 3 ♠. 4 NT over 3 ♥ asks for keycards in *hearts*, since responder has no forcing heart raise. Responder's minor suit is ostensibly four cards, but could be a cue-bid in support of hearts.
5. With exactly 2=5=3=3 shape and at least 5 HCP in each minor, opener rebids 3 NT.
6. With five hearts and two spades, opener rebids a minor-suit stopper, ostensibly angling for 3 NT – but it might be a 4-card side suit.

With a minor suit of length at least equal to the spades, make a two-over-one in the minor. We need to keep these hands out of the 2 ♠ response.

## Interference

After an overcall or double of either 1 ♥ or 1 ♠, Tucker is *off*.

After 1 ♠, over non-jump interference, double or redouble shows exactly 3-card spade support. However, opener is not required to use this *support double*, ♦<sup>1</sup> when another action is appropriate.

R1	O2	R2	Tucker over 1 ♥
1♠	Four or more spades, seldom game values, no NMF or 4SF. 2NT, 3♥ & 3♠ are the prominent game tries.		
	1NT	<i>Forcing</i> : shows exactly three spades.	
		2♣, 2♦	Natural, weak, 5+ card suit, four bad spades, singleton or void in hearts.
		2♥	Natural, weak, four spades, two or three hearts.
		2♠	Natural, weak, four good spades or longer (or any 4=1=4=4).
		2NT	Natural, invitational, only four spades
		3♣, 3♦	Natural, forcing one round, does not promise another bid.
		3♥, 3♠	Natural, invitational.
		3 NT	Natural, 13-14 HCP, balanced, lacking a 4-card minor headed by the ace or king.
		2♣, 2♦	Natural, may be only three cards (as over a 1 NT forcing response).
		2♥	Natural, 6+ hearts.
		2, 3, 4♠	Natural, 4-card support.
		3♣, 3♦	Natural, forcing to game.
		3♥	Natural, 6+ hearts, invitational.
		4♣, 4♦	Splinter: singleton or void, 4-card support.
1NT	Forcing: usually lacking values to drive to game.		
	Pass	Rarely, only with 4=5=2=2 and 11-12 HCP.	
	2♣, 2♦	Natural, agreed 2/1 style. May be 4=3=3=3, 15+ HCP.	
		2♠	Every hand with four spades, does not show extra values.
2♠	Forcing to game with five or more spades and no minor of equal or greater length. [Fit-showing BPH.]		
	2 NT	0-1 spades, tell me more:	
		3♣, 3♦	Natural, 3+ cards, ostensibly aiming for notrump.
		3♥	Hearts are trump.
		3♠	Spades are trump, 0-1 loser suit.

R1	O2	R2	Tucker over 1 ♥
	3 ♣, 3 ♦		Natural, 3+ cards, exactly 2 spades. Responder's 3 ♦ is ambiguous, 3 ♥ or 3 ♠ sets trump.
	3♥		Natural, 6+ hearts, exactly 2 spades. 3 ♠ sets trump; otherwise, hearts are trump for RKB.
	3 ♠		Natural, 3+ cards, sets trump.
	3 NT		Natural, balanced, exactly 2 spades, 18+ HCP. Responder's 4 ♥ or 4 ♠ is forcing, sets trump.
	4 ♣, 4 ♦		Splinter (0-1 cards, 4+ spades).
	4 ♥		Picture bid: fine heart suit, doubleton ♠ A/K/Q, no minor-suit control.
	4 ♠		Picture bid: great spade support, no minor-suit control.

## Backstory

Andrew Hanes and I have been playing the Tucker system since I solidified it; he contributed the 2=6 shape of opener's 3 ♥ rebid over 2 ♠.

Richard Lee introduced to me this idea: *After a one heart opening and one spade response, opener's rebid of 1 NT shows exactly three spades and is forcing. Otherwise, opener rebids as over a forcing 1 NT response.* Many years ago, he got this deceptively simple description from Alan Tucker, a Long Island professional, whose name I applied to our complete structure. This original description has these major defects, which Gary and I discovered in our first practice session for it:

1. After opener's 1 NT rebid, responder has no way to force, to explore for a spade slam. We could play 2 ♣ as New Minor Forcing, but then responder would have nothing sensible to do over 1 NT with:

♠ 10 8 6 4 ♥ 8 ♦ K 5 4 ♣ K J 8 4 2

2. After opener's 2 ♣ rebid, the system does not have an obvious way for responder to bid these kinds of hands:

♠ K J 8 6 4 ♥ J 8 ♦ J 5 4 ♣ A K 8

♠ 10 8 6 4 3 ♥ 8 ♦ K J 7 5 4 ♣ K 8

♠ 10 8 6 4 ♥ 8 ♦ K J 7 5 4 3 ♣ K 8

We could play 2 ♦ weak, as after a forcing 1 NT response, and play 3 ♦ as an artificial force, but that jump chews up a lot of space.

3. After a 2  $\diamond$  rebid, the system does not have an obvious way for responder to bid these kinds of hands:

$\spadesuit$  J 9 6 5    $\heartsuit$  10    $\diamondsuit$  A K 10 4    $\clubsuit$  K J 6 4

$\spadesuit$  10 8 6 4    $\heartsuit$  8    $\diamondsuit$  K 4    $\clubsuit$  K J 7 5 4 3

Unlike the preceding problem, there is only the one club bid available below 3 NT, leaving an unsolvable problem.

These problems are mostly solved by restricting the 1  $\spadesuit$  response to less than an opening bid, but possibly including minimum, game-going balanced hands. The 2  $\spadesuit$  response (natural, game-forcing, and at least 5 cards) rounds out the system.

Once again, it is not sufficient to simply play that the 2  $\spadesuit$  response is a 2/1 in spades. Opener has no rebid at 2  $\heartsuit$ , so this 2  $\spadesuit$  response requires significant agreements.

*Beware simple descriptions of new bridge methods!*

## ♦ Alternative Methods

**<sup>1</sup>Support double.** Eric Rodwell invented the support double. The traditional meaning of this double was “good hand” – often with 3-card support, but primarily, good hand (not penalty). Playing Precision, Rodwell never had the good hand, so his invention used an idle call. Mostly, I play support doubles, but Gary and I play good hand.

**Precision Tucker.** Tucker is a fine fit for the Precision system, where the 1  $\heartsuit$  opening is limited to 15 or maybe 16 HCP. With 4=1=4=4 distribution, there is no need to strain to respond. Passing 1  $\heartsuit$  may work out best. If the hand is too good to pass, then passing opener’s 1 NT is permitted with bad spades, since opener won’t have a huge hand. However, that pass is more of a gamble, as opener may have a very good heart suit. Bypassing spades for 1 NT can make sense.

## Kaplan Interchange over One Heart

Edgar Kaplan's interchange or inversion of the 1 ♠ and 1 NT responses may hit the sweet spot, providing useful value for far less complexity than Tucker or Flannery.

The 1 ♠ response works well. Opener gets to show the spade suit, play in 1 NT on a misfit, and otherwise bid the same as after a forcing 1 NT response. Responder, having a limited hand, has no need to force. A 4-4 spade fit might get lost in competition, so opener's double of a minor-suit overcall shows four spades.

The 1 NT response also works well. If responder needs a way to force when opener shows a small hand, the fourth suit (a minor), or a natural minor over 2 ♥ or 2 ♠, should work.

The Kaplan interchange could be a serious improvement over the recommended methods, without much effort, but I have not played it in over 25 years. Here is what we played then:

R1	O2	R2	Kaplan Interchange over 1 ♥
1 ♠	Forcing,	less than game-forcing values, 0-4 spades.	
	1 NT	Exactly 4 spades, denies values to reverse.	
		Pass	To play.
		Other	Natural.
	Other	Natural, as if over a forcing 1 NT response.	
1 NT	Forcing,	unlimited, promises 5 or more spades.	
	2♣/2♦	Natural (3+ cards), 0-2 spades, small hand.	
	2♥	Natural, 6+ hearts, 0-2 spades, small hand.	
	2♠	Natural, 2+ spades, small hand.	
	Other	Natural, a minor suit is forcing.	

**Note:** this plan assumes that responder, holding exactly four spades in a game-forcing hand, will make a 2/1 response. There is no need for a suit-quality requirement with these methods.

## Backstory

The *Bulletin* published an article by Marshall Miles on the Kaplan interchange in the 1990s, with no mention that it was not legal in events governed by the General Convention Chart (GCC). Jim Negro and I played this for about a year, with success. Then it came up on the last board of the first session against a seeded pair in the Flight A pairs event at a regional in Saratoga, NY. Upon being called, the director offered them the choice of playing the hand or average plus. They took their score and departed, as we revised our convention cards.

Miles wrote the ACBL annually, to request that the interchange be added to the GCC, but he did not live to see it happen. The GCC is gone, and since 2018, the Kaplan interchange has been legal in all ACBL events governed by the Open or Open+ charts.

For more information, see:

- *Modern Constructive Bidding*, pages 81–82, where Miles recommends the Kaplan Interchange (played somewhat differently) and Flannery.
- Articles started by Fedrick, Friedman and March on Bridge Winners.
- Article by Denis Lesage on The Bridge World site.
- My 2011 article, “Flannery and Major Nightmare Solutions.”

Be sure you have read “Spades after a Heart Opening” on page 241, including the alternative methods at the end. Of particular interest, Martin Lindfors explains common Swedish methods, as the first response to the Fedrick reference, on Bridge Winners.

## Delayed Kickback for Hearts

*Delayed Kickback is a good idea that did not catch on: it's simpler to nail down 4 ♠ as the RKB ask, once hearts have become trump.*

As we have seen, when hearts are trump, using 4 NT as the RKB ask can blow up when asker has fewer than two keycards. Also, there is no queen ask when the response is 5 ♦. To solve these problems, when possible, we'll use 4 ♠ as the RKB ask.

When delayed kickback applies, 4 NT takes on the meaning of the displaced 4 ♠ bid (often a control-bid in spades). Delayed kickback applies after:

**Two delays:** Kickback applies if hearts have become trump and the partnership made at least two bids below 4 ♠, *after* the fit has been confirmed, even if one partner has shown a spade suit. An extreme example:

<i>Opener</i>		<i>Responder</i>	
1 ♠		2 ♥	
3 ♥	[sets trump]	3 ♠	[control-bid]
Any		4 ♠	[RKB ♥, even after 3 ♠]

**One delay:** if hearts have become trump and the partnership made one bid below 4 ♠, *after* the fit has been confirmed, so long as neither partner has shown a spade suit. Example:

<i>Opener</i>		<i>Responder</i>	
2 ♣		2 ♦	
3 ♥	[sets trump, demands control-bidding]	Any	
4 ♠	[RKB ♥]		

Another example:

<i>Opener</i>		<i>Responder</i>	
1 NT		2 ♦	[hearts]
2 ♥		4 ♠	[no delay, <i>not</i> RKB, so EKB hearts, ♠ void]

RKB after a Texas transfer. EKB, which must be a jump, after Jacoby.



**No delay:** after hearts become trump at the four level:

Preemptive raise:      1 ♡ - 4 ♡; 4 ♠ [RKB]  
Raise in traffic:      1 ♡ - (3 ♠) - 4 ♡ - (P); 4 ♠ [RKB]  
Bid to make:          (2 ♠) - 4 ♡ - (Pass) - 4 ♠ [RKB]  
Texas transfer:      2 NT - 4 ♦ [hearts]; 4 ♠ [RKB]  
Our preempt:         4 ♡ - 4 ♠ [RKB]      -OR-  
                         4♣ [NAMYATS, good 4 ♡] - 4 ♠ [RKB]

A 2 NT response to our 2 ♡ opening bid sets hearts as trump. After that, it is no longer possible to play in 4 ♠, so we bid a suit instead of 2 NT, if we need to keep that possibility open. (If they overcall our 2 ♡, we can set hearts trump with a cue-bid.)

**In all other cases, when hearts are trump:** 4 NT is the RKB ask for hearts; and 4 ♠ has some other meaning, be that an offer to play, picture bid, control-bid, splinter, or EKB.

## Backstory

Once hearts become trump, nailing down 4 ♠ removes capabilities, so I came up with delayed kickback. For example, a picture bid of 4 ♠ is the best way to bid this hand:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ Q x x x x x	♠ A K x x
♡ A J x	♡ K Q x x x
♦ A x	♦ x x
♣ A x	♣ x x
1 ♠	2 ♡
3 ♡ [forcing]	4 ♠ [four top ♡ & ♠ honors, no control in minors]
7 NT [6♠ + 5♡ + 2 aces = 13]	

If 4 ♠ is kickback, then 4 NT is a picture bid, but going past game on responder's hand sure seems silly. Delayed kickback is better in this unusual situation.

Pairs may not get to a slam at all on this deal, if they play the abomination called fast arrival, where bidding game immediately is required for any minimum hand, once a fit is confirmed in a game-forcing auction. See "Serious Three Notrump" on page 245.

## Suit-Lead Transfers

General principles:

- An immediate jump to 2 NT is always our best raise of opener's or overcaller's major suit.
- Our jump raise is always mixed, except it's weak when a jump cue-bid is available to be mixed at the three level.

### Our One of a Major – Doubled for Takeout

Responder's redouble is standard: 10+ HCP, at most 3-card support, but at least 2-card support for opener's major.

A delayed double shows 10+ HCP with a singleton in opener's major.

When they double our major-suit opening, we play transfers at 1 NT through the suit below opener's. These bids deny the strength to redouble and they request the opening lead, but the suit may not be long. Opener rebids naturally; a pass of 1 NT, completing the transfer, or bidding two of the major with extra length, are all weak.

With extra values, opener may make a natural rebid in a new suit.

1 ♥ – (Double) – ?		1 ♠ – (Double) – ?	
Rdbl	10+ HCP, 2- or 3-card support.		Rdbl
1 ♠	Spades, one-round force.	–	–
1 NT	Transfer to clubs.		1 NT
2 ♣	Transfer to diamonds.		2 ♣
2 ♦	2-3 winner 3-card raise.	Transfer to hearts.	2 ♦
2 ♥	0-1 winner raise.	2-3 winner 3-card raise.	2 ♥
2 ♠	Fit-showing, invitational.	0-1 winner raise.	2 ♠
2NT	Best raise, LR+, 4-card support.		2 NT
3 ♣	Fit-showing jump, invitational.		3 ♣
3 ♦	Fit-showing jump, invitational.		3 ♦
3 ♥	Mixed raise.	Fit-showing, invitational.	3 ♥
–	–	Mixed raise.	3 ♠

We have to give up the free bid of 1 NT, but we get better opening leads and lots of raises.

**Drury** does not apply here; we can redouble and raise instead.

### Examples:

1 ♠ – (Double) – ?

Bid 1 NT, a transfer asking for a club lead, on these hands. Opener may pass!

1. ♠ J 3 ♥ 9 7 6 ♦ 10 6 5 ♣ A Q 10 8 2

If opener bids 2 ♣ on [1], we may play there. On [2], responder takes 2 ♣ back to 2 ♠.

2. ♠ Q J 3 ♥ 9 7 6 3 ♦ 10 6 5 2 ♣ A 8

### Negative Double of Our Major-Suit Overcall

(1 m) – 1 ♥ – (Double) – ?		(1 m) – 1 ♠ – (Double) – ?	
Rdbl	10+ HCP, doubleton A/K/Q support.	Rdbl	
1 ♠	Spades, one-round force.	–	–
1 NT	Transfer to clubs.*		1 NT
2 ♣	Transfer to diamonds.*		2 ♣
2 ♦	2–3 winner 3-card raise.	Transfer to hearts.	2 ♦
2 ♥	0–1 winner raise.	2–3 winner 3-card raise.	2 ♥
2 ♠	Fit-showing, inv.	0–1 winner raise.	2 ♠
2 NT	Best raise, LR+, 4-card support.		2 NT
3 ♣	Fit-showing jump, invitational.**		3 ♣
3 ♦	Fit-showing jump, invitational.**		3 ♦
3 ♥	Weak raise.	Fit-showing, inv.	3 ♥
–	–	Weak raise.	3 ♠

\* A transfer to opener's minor (cue-bid) shows a 3-card limit raise.

\*\* A jump cue-bid of opener's minor shows a mixed (4-card constructive) raise, allowing the jump raise to be weak.

For giving up our free bid of 1 NT, we gain even more ways to raise!

### Backstory

Al Muggia and I have agreed to play these methods; he got them from Jeff Meckstroth. I rephrased the two raises to two of the major in terms of winners, a major benefit, from my perspective.

For the first edition, I expect to update this section and move it to the main body – once I can recommend the methods from experience.

## Decision Checklist

This list includes only the alternatives that I consider worthy of your decisions. This book is chock full of non-standard methods.

Page	Worthy Option or Choice ( <input type="checkbox"/> =recommended).
109	<input type="checkbox"/> Double of own-suit cue-bid asks for a different lead.
109	<input type="checkbox"/> In traffic, the weakest call is a forced-to bid, if any.
120	<input type="checkbox"/> Fit-showing jump is responder's default jump shift. <input type="checkbox"/> Fit-showing non-jump, if free bid impossible. <input type="checkbox"/> Fit-showing jump only by passed hand or in competition.
122	<input type="checkbox"/> Unusual over unusual (cheaper cue-bid has 4 <sup>th</sup> suit).
203	<input type="checkbox"/> Over opener's 6-card rebid, 1NT-responder's new suit is non-forcing, a long-suit invitation with a singleton.
204	<input type="checkbox"/> Plan A - Invitational 3-Level Jump Shifts, Multiple Suits. <input type="checkbox"/> Plan B - Invitational Jump Shift, Only in Clubs.
206	<input type="checkbox"/> Over a forcing 1 NT, opener's 3 NT is balanced 6-carder.
210	<input type="checkbox"/> Plan A - Opener's 2 M Rebid Shows Extra Length. <input type="checkbox"/> Plan B - Opener's Rebid Is a Catch-All.
217	<input type="checkbox"/> Opener's re-raise asks for two winners, aces and trumps. <input type="checkbox"/> Opener's re-raise is preemptive (1-2-3 stop). <input type="checkbox"/> Opener's re-raise is A-K-Q-x-x-x preemptive or asks for a top trump and <input type="checkbox"/> a maximum, or <input type="checkbox"/> another trump/ace.
229	<input type="checkbox"/> Jump major raise mixed only without competition. <input type="checkbox"/> Jump major raise mixed in all cases. <input type="checkbox"/> Jump major raise mixed, but weak when jump cue mixed.
230	<input type="checkbox"/> Plan A - 2/1 with 3-Card Support = Any Game Force. <input type="checkbox"/> Plan B - 2/1 with 3-Card Support = Medium+ Hand.
232	<input type="checkbox"/> Plan A - <i>Standard</i> Jacoby 2 NT (Enhanced Rebids). <input type="checkbox"/> Plan B - <i>Swedish</i> Jacoby 2 NT.
233	Jacoby 2 NT overcalled, responder's double: <input type="checkbox"/> Three or more cards. <input type="checkbox"/> Four or more cards
234	<input type="checkbox"/> Diamond Drury. <input type="checkbox"/> Two-way Drury.
236	Drury is on, if selected: <input type="checkbox"/> Opponent overcalls below 2 $\diamond$ . <input type="checkbox"/> Opponent doubles (not with suit-lead transfers).

304	<input type="checkbox"/> Plan A – Two-Way NMF with 2 ♣ Relay. 2NT over 1 NT: <input type="checkbox"/> Over 1 NT, 2 NT = natural invitation (without support; 2 ♣ followed by 2 NT shows 4-card support). <input type="checkbox"/> Over 1 NT, 2 NT is relay to 3 ♣ (expert, complicated). <input type="checkbox"/> XYZ: system applies over opener's one of a suit.
305	<input type="checkbox"/> Plan B – Standard One-Way NMF <input type="checkbox"/> after NMF = GF, direct = invitational (default). <input type="checkbox"/> after NMF = inv, direct = GF (expert, less intuitive). 1 ♣ – 1 ♦; 1 NT – ? <input type="checkbox"/> Responder's jump to 3 ♣ is forcing. <input type="checkbox"/> Responder's jump to 3 ♦ is forcing; 1 ♣ – 2 ♦ inv. <input type="checkbox"/> Responder's major may be stopper (bidding trick). “Raise” of other minor: <input type="checkbox"/> Artificial GF: both majors.
310	<input type="checkbox"/> Plan A – Fourth Suit Forcing to Game (for 2-way NMF). <input type="checkbox"/> Plan B – Fourth Suit Forcing One Round (for 1-way NMF).
328	<input type="checkbox"/> Plan A – Single Raise Forcing to 3 of the Minor. <input type="checkbox"/> Plan B – Single Raise Forcing to 2 NT or 3 of the Minor.
333	After opener's strong reverse (pick one): <input type="checkbox"/> Plan A – Opener's reverse promises a rebid below game. <input type="checkbox"/> Plan B – Opener may pass only two of responder's major. <input type="checkbox"/> Plan C – Opener may pass only lebensohl 2 NT.
347	<input type="checkbox"/> { 1 ♦ – 1 M; 3 ♦ – ? } Responder's 3 M is ambiguous: club stopper, or long M (remove 3 NT).
349	Wolff with 3 ♦ checkback. 1 m – 1 M; 2 NT – 4 ♣ / 4 ♦: <input type="checkbox"/> Gerber / diamonds. <input type="checkbox"/> Slam try m / RKB m.
428	<input type="checkbox"/> Override: 1NT-opener's redouble always offers to play.
508	<input type="checkbox"/> Plan 1 – 2 ♣ responder's X/XX = bad hand (standard). <input type="checkbox"/> Plan 2 – 2 ♣ responder's X/XX positive. (May trap pass.)
511	<input type="checkbox"/> Plan A – 2 ♥ Bust & Parrish Relay. <input type="checkbox"/> Plan B – 2 ♦ Waiting & Birthright (Kokish Relay).
515	<input type="checkbox"/> Plan 1 – NAMYATS (3 NT is a preempt to four of a minor; 4 of a minor is a good preempt to four of a major). <input type="checkbox"/> Plan 2 – 3 NT to Make – Long Suit and Stoppers.

519	<p>Weak 2-bid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Good suit, 2 NT asks feature: _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Q-J-9-x-x-x or better, Ogust rebids: _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Any 6 cards, Ogust rebids: _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Chunky 5-cards common, Ogust 5BMG: _____</li> </ul>
604	<input type="checkbox"/> Grand slam demand.
607	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plan A – Partner always passes the sign-off.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plan B – Partner always answers queen ask with 3 or 4.</li> </ul>
609	<p>A suit at the six level is an offer to play in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Any suit (killing off most third-round-control asks).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> A suit bid by partner.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> A suit that has been bid and raised.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> No suit.</li> </ul>
705	<p>Opponents bid two suits at one level; bid of opener’s suit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Standard: “Natural in either suit, if opponents have bid two suits” (SAYC, confirmed by BWS).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Michaels: 5-5 (or such) in the unbid suits, possibly landing below 2 NT.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lower-longer: The two unbid suits, with the lower-ranking longer. Double shows suits of equal length, or higher longer.</li> </ul>
713	<p>After our 1 NT overcall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Systems off, with a cue-bid as Stayman, lets advancer sign off in a 5-card minor suit at the two level.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> “Systems on,” sometimes called “front of card,” is commonly played over 1 NT.</li> </ul>
725	<p>Meckwell double is redoubled:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 2 ♣ is pass or correct, with equal length in the majors.</li> </ul>
734	<p>After our reopening 1 NT overcall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Systems off, with a cue-bid as Stayman, lets advancer sign off in a 5-card minor suit at the two level.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> “Systems on,” sometimes called “front of card,” puts the strong hand on lead. 2 ♣ is: <input type="checkbox"/> Stayman.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Crowhurst (game try Stayman): 2 NT = 15-16.</li> </ul>
734	After reopening jump overcall: <input type="checkbox"/> Game tries on.

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## The Embarrassing Episode of Little Miss Muffet

Little Miss Muffet discovered a tuffet,  
    (Which never occurred to the rest of us)  
And, as 'twas a June day, and just about noonday,  
    She wanted to eat – like the best of us:  
Her diet was whey, and I hasten to say  
    It is wholesome and people grow fat on it.  
The spot being lonely, the lady not only  
    Discovered the tuffet, but sat on it.

A rivulet gabbled beside her and babbled,  
    As rivulets always are thought to do,  
And dragon-flies sported around and cavorted,  
    As poets say dragon-flies ought to do;  
When, glancing aside for a moment, she spied  
    A horrible sight that brought fear to her,  
A hideous spider was sitting beside her,  
    And most unavoidably near to her!

Albeit unsightly, this creature politely  
    Said: “Madam, I earnestly vow to you,  
I’m penitent that I did not bring my hat. I  
    Should otherwise certainly bow to you.”  
Though anxious to please, he was so ill at ease  
    That he lost all his sense of propriety,  
And grew so inept that he clumsily stepped  
    In her plate – which is barred in Society.

This curious error completed her terror;  
    She shuddered, and growing much paler, not  
Only left tuffet, but dealt him a buffet  
    Which doubled him up in a sailor-knot.  
It should be explained that at this he was pained:  
    He cried: “I have vexed you, no doubt of it!  
Your fist’s like a truncheon.” “You’re still in my luncheon,”  
    Was all that she answered. “Get out of it!”

And *The Moral* is this: Be it madam or miss  
To whom you have something to say,  
You are only absurd when you get in the curd  
But you're rude when you get in the whey!

*Guy Wetmore Carryl*

## **O Captain! My Captain!**

*(In Memory of Abraham Lincoln)*

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,  
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;  
But O heart! heart! heart!  
O the bleeding drops of red,  
Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;  
Rise up – for you the flag is flung – for you the bugle trills,  
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths – for you the shores acrowding,  
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;  
Here Captain! dear father!  
This arm beneath your head!  
It is some dream that on the deck,  
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,  
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,  
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,  
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;  
Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!  
But I with mournful tread,  
Walk the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

*Walt Whitman*



Pete Matthews Jr is a *regional contender*; the height of success for him is winning a top-flight regional event overall, which happens occasionally, when we play our best. Over his sixty years of playing bridge, Pete has been fascinated by the study of bidding systems and tools.

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Since the free PDF version of this book is easy to search, there is currently no index. We do have an augmented table of contents for each chapter.

*All contents of this ultimate draft are subject to change.*