

Warwick 9/2/11 10AM – A Major Nightmare

Board 30

East Deals

None Vul

♠ 10 9 5 2

♥ 5

♦ A K Q 10

♣ K 10 8 4

♠ A K 4

♥ A K 9 8 7 2

♦ 2

♣ Q 9 7

Presumably, all the non-Precision players in the room opened the East hand 1♥, as I did. Suppose West makes the standard response of 1♠: East has a *nightmare hand*: "six of mine and three of yours". How can East know whether to jump in hearts or angle toward a spade game? This topic and related problems are discussed in detail, in my article "Flannery and Major Nightmare Solutions at Bridge", elsewhere on our web site. Here we'll look at an actual disaster.

In **standard** bidding, responder should seldom bypass a 4-card spade suit to bid 1NT. (I would bid 1NT on ♠T952 ♥K95 ♦Q62 ♣J84, trying to get to only 2♥.) In this situation, where responder's spades could be bad, a 3♥ rebid makes the most sense.

However, we were playing **modified standard**, where responder promises a good spade suit, when only four cards (partner decided 1♠ was the smallest lie). In this situation, a jump raise of 3♠ is acceptable. However, I decided to force to game, to both increase my chance of getting to the correct strain and show my distribution: I bid 3♣. Yes, I should have had the ♣A instead of the ♣Q. Partner won't take clubs seriously, if I raise spades, correct? This auction developed a life of its own:

1♥ - 1♠; 3♣ - 3♦; 3♠ - 4♣; 4♠ - 5♦; 5♠ W

The contract can actually be made, since South has ♣AJ tight, but partner attempted a dummy reversal and was two in the glue. 4♥ is a fine contract, easily making an overtrick when trumps split (spades don't) and clubs behave. My bidding shows a diamond stiff, so pard should probably pass 4♠, but even that is inferior to 4♥.

Now, if we had been playing **Kaplan Interchange** or **Flannery 2♦**, partner would not be allowed to show a 4-card spade suit immediately. If playing the **Tucker 1NT** rebid and related methods, a system I have demonstrated to be superior to the other four, responder has a choice:

(1) respond 1♠, which shows any four spades, but also a limited hand, or perhaps a lackluster balanced game hand. Opener then makes the Tucker 1NT rebid, which is forcing with any strength, showing exactly 3 spades. Responder then bids 2NT or 3NT, and 3NT or 4♥ is played.

(2) respond 2♦, which either is or will become game forcing - a good choice with those three tens. Opener must now bid 2♠ on every hand containing four spades, not showing extra strength, to assure a 4-4 fit is found. (If 2♥ promises extra length, that bid could be preferable to 2♠ when holding six hearts.) On this deal, opener bids 2♥, responder bids 2NT (forcing), and opener can try again for hearts, or more likely, bid 3NT. (If playing standard, responder would jump to 3NT, not bid a non-forcing 2NT.)

Think about it: solution (2) is available to all five systems, and is greatly superior to responding on a bad 4-card spade suit with a strong hand. If opener has a minimum hand, it's easy to force to game and explore all strains. Yes, it distorts the distribution, sounding like a 5-4 hand, but it shuts down the nightmare.

Above is the original posting, with the second paragraph rewritten to express my original intent, and a parenthetical adjustment in the middle of the paragraph for point (2). I also neglected to mention, this was a Matchpoint Pairs event. A teaser posted to the mitdlbc-discuss mailing list elicited many

responses, which I distill below. I plan another update to [Flannery and Major Nightmare Solutions](#) to provide details of additional systems, possibly with analysis, and also to list relevant URLs.

The discussion covered several areas:

- The original auction, better bids within the given system, assessing the blame, and so forth.
- Possible alternative systems not mentioned above.
- Loosely related issues that came up.

Starting at the bottom:

One issue which arose was Walsh-style responses. The web reference given applies to the $1\heartsuit$ response to $1\clubsuit$. Maybe Walsh applies to $1\heartsuit - 1\spadesuit$, but that is new to me.

The usage of a 1NT response was discussed. Paul Perkowski and others like 1NT semi-forcing, the problem being what to do with limit raise and balanced game-forcing hands. Paul uses modified Bergen raises: $3\clubsuit$ response shows a limit raise with 3-card support, and $3\diamondsuit$ shows 4-card support. Arguing the other side, Ron Peacetree says, "in Modern 2/1 GF, it is standard for Flat hands" with minimal GF values to respond a forcing 1NT, "to insure that 2/1's are made with a decent suit and/or a shapely hand." I play this way with Eric Schwartz, who has refined these methods. I agree this treatment is not unusual, but not that it's standard. Steve Willner thinks it's superior. I noted that I would prefer to pass a 1NT response holding $\spadesuit Kxxx \heartsuit Axxxx \diamondsuit Kx \clubsuit Qx$, which I cannot do if partner may hold an opening hand. Steve said, "If I recall the simulation results correctly, you are better off not passing 1NT with this. Sometimes it will be the best contract, of course, but more often there will be a better one."

Alternative systems were mentioned:

Steve Willner and Otis Bricker like the Kaplan-Sheinwold (KS) approach to responding to a $1\heartsuit$ opening – see [Kaplan-Sheinwold Updated](#) by Edgar Kaplan. The modified standard approach that I describe above is a middle ground between standard and KS. Briefly, a four-card major is opened with concentrated values in that major, either with a flat hand or a weaker 5-card heart suit, or $1=4=4=4$. In response to a $1\heartsuit$ opening, the 1NT response is intended as forcing, and is made on most 5-11 point hands with fewer than five spades. After the $1\spadesuit$ response, opener usually bids 1NT (could have a singleton spade), $2\heartsuit$ (could be five cards) or $2\spadesuit$ (four weak spades or any three) to limit his hand to 12-14 points. Opener's $2\clubsuit$ or $2\diamondsuit$ could be a true two-suiter, but otherwise shows 15+, is semi-natural, and is seldom passed. Responder's subsequent preference to $2\heartsuit$ shows 10-11 points: it appears to me it could sometimes be correct in KS to respond 1NT when holding *five* bad spades. KS is a major, established system, and should not be ignored. No doubt there is power here, but many people will find one or more details to hate.

Tim Francis-Wright recalled another system that gives up the natural 1NT rebid: Barry Rigal wrote an article on [GNATS](#) in *The Bridge World* (October, 1996, P. 27). After $1\heartsuit - 1\spadesuit$, opener's 1NT, $2\clubsuit$ and $2\diamondsuit$ are transfers, providing greater capability for describing hands. The article, as summarized by Tim, provides important recommendations not provided in the web summary. (Rigal also blessed a later system of transfer opening bids with the name GNATS, G*d Not Another Transfer System.)

Ron Peacetree would not give up opener's natural 1NT rebid: in his experience he wants to play there on many hands. However, he does not care to play in $2\clubsuit$. He provided an example of a system that could be developed to handle these hands, where $2\clubsuit$ is artificial and forcing. A casually recommended system is likely to have a pit trap built in, so such an approach would require careful study.

Paul Wendt says, "I think it's a mistake to focus attention on $1\heartsuit - 1\spadesuit$. There are many versions of $2\clubsuit$ forcing rebids." The [Gazilli Convention](#) employs a forcing $2\clubsuit$ rebid by opener, and the writer "actually disdains that approach following $1\heartsuit - 1\spadesuit$. If the only problem were strong hands with 3+ support for

responder, I think it would be clear to tinker only with 1X - 1Y; 2NT. But there are too many other strong hands in Standard-family bidding.”

There were so many interesting choices in this auction, let's take it from the top:

Opener (Pete): ♠AK4 ♥AK9872 ♦2 ♣Q97

Responder (Gary): ♠T952 ♥5 ♦AKQT ♣ K1084

1♥ - ?

Gary Schwartz, my partner in this event, said that if he had made the system bid of 1NT (forcing) on this hand, we would not be having this discussion.

Maybe: with Murphy so close to his shoulder, had Gary bid 1NT, I would instead have held ♠A843 ♥AK972 ♦2 ♣Q97. The continuation, with a good spade game available, is unsatisfying:

1♥ - 1NT; 2♣ - 2♠ [good club raise]; 3♠ - 3NT

The initial meaning of opener's 3♠ bid is spade values and concern about diamonds: notrump searches take priority over minor suits, and game over slam. (3♣ would be a signoff, but would appear a bad bargain to opener.) If responder chooses to drive to 3NT on his own, he runs the risk that opener has a singleton *spade*, possibly producing an even worse result. On occasion, the 1NT response might lead to a 4♠ contract, but it's not likely.

With sympathy for Gary's actual 1♠ bid, I agree with Ji Li: "1NT is an underbid, 1♠ is a bad bid, 2♦ is the bid that makes the most sense, and 2♣ is a less superior but OK bid." Steve Willner says that, depending on the system, he would probably prefer 2♣. As we can see, any response but 1♠ should work out fine on the actual deal. Two of either minor should get to a reasonable contract, no matter what opener holds.

The majority find responder's hand to be worth forcing to game – if so, responding two of a minor will simplify the auction. If you judge responder's hand to be only invitational, 1NT was the system bid in this case. In borderline cases, I prefer the bid likely to make the auction easier.

For example, Gary and I play that our 1NT opening is a good 15 to a bad 18. However, I would likely open any 15-count with 4-4 in the blacks 1♣, because it's easy to bid. Gary says he does this even on stronger hands.

Paul Perkowski and Otis Bricker like the Bergen rule of 20 (add HCP and length of the two longest suits), to decide whether a hand is worth an opening bid, with the modification that opener must hold 2 quick tricks. I'm not that rigorous, but I do apply common sense, normal modifiers, wanting honors in long suits, etc. Gary tends to use Zar, which could be even lighter, with more shape. We treat these as real openings, and do not try to catch up later. This could affect responder's choice to drive to game or not.

1♥ - 1♠; ?

The rebids opener might consider after the 1♠ response are: 2♣, 2♥, 2♠, 3♣, 3♥, 3♠. Ron Peacetre evaluates opener's hand at 19 points. I'm not sure it's that good, but it's certainly too good for 2♥ or 2♠. 3♥ works if responder has two hearts, and 3♠ works if responder has five spades. Opener cannot tell. A non-forcing 2♣ will probably work, if responder finds another bid. However, since responder should have a club fit to pass, it would be easy to miss a game, for example ♠QT952 ♥5 ♦864 ♣ K1084.

At matchpoints it is often more important to reach the correct strain than to get to the correct level. A jump shift into a minor after a major suit opening does not promise a four card suit. In a pinch, I have done it on Ax. The essential requirement is to have a sound plan for what happens next. Given that responder promised at least a good four-card spade suit (clearly ♠QT82 or better on this deal) I judged 3♣ to be most likely to reach the correct strain. This was not a popular choice, with several folks weighing in against it. It is indeed an overbid, unless you count the hand to 19, and borders on “mindermasting”. I would do it again.

However, reverse my minor suit holdings, and I would choose 3♥ or 3♠: after a jump to 3♦ there would no longer be a bid for responder before 3♥.

1♥ - 1♠; 3♣ - ?

We play that a return to the jump shifter’s first suit is the catch-all bid, a plan highly recommended to us by Walter Lee. While this can be done on a singleton, that is clearly to be avoided. 3NT would be possible, but does not make sense without the spade stopper opener expects. This leaves 3♦, which saves space, and could be any number of hands, including a slam try in clubs. A singleton heart is highly likely for this bid. (Paul Perkowski says Eddie Kantar would define a direct raise to 4♣ as non-forcing, with the slam try going through 3♦. Gary and I do not have that agreement.)

Eric Schwartz: My wife and I play an interesting treatment after opener’s strong jump shift. If responder rebids the cheapest step, that is artificial and usually weak. Anything else shows better than a minimum response. The one exception: if the next step is opener’s original suit. Then a jump to game in that suit is weak, so if responder subsequently bids opener’s original suit, that shows better than a minimum response.

3♣ - 1♠; 3♣ - 3♦; ?

Having been refused a heart preference (which I would have raised), I bid out my shape, as planned. Having now bid three suits including a jump, my 3♠ promises diamond shortness – no other bid makes sense here. Since I did not splinter, it shows 3-card spade support. Since I could have bid 3♠ or 4♠ over 1♠, I likely have doubt as to strain. This must not be a convenience bid – it must have been part of my plan all along. Responder should recognize that a 6-card heart suit is a distinct possibility, but 3♠ does nothing to confirm or deny a real club suit.

1♥ - 1♠; 3♣ - 3♦; 3♠ - ?

3NT has to be a standout in this situation: spades are clearly stopped, opener’s shortness is triple-stopped, plus two honors opposite the jump shift suit. Apply the brakes with 3NT; send the message: “I only have four spades, and diamonds are safe.” Yes, there could be a club slam, but that has to be odds-against. A 4♣ bid is not without merit, but surely further perils are ahead.

1♥ - 1♠; 3♣ - 3♦; 3♠ - 4♣; ?

Now I’m in a panic. This is a cue bid in support of spades, or worse, a slam try in clubs. Pard did not raise clubs directly, so we are unlikely to have the suit for a club slam, or any slam for that matter. Dare I bid 4♥? No way. That would likely be read as a cuebid in support of whatever partner is slamming in. The only clearly negative bid is 4♠. I’m paying for my overbid of 3♣: “game over slam” would normally apply, making 4♥ an offer to play, but it appears partner has us in the slam zone already.

1♥ - 1♠; 3♣ - 3♦; 3♠ - 4♣; 4♠ - ?

The chance of actually reaching a better contract has to be slim. While 5♣ might be better, or even produce a club slam, 5♦ is virtually guaranteed to strike terror into the heart of opener. Ji says: “I don’t see why West does not just pass and let go of 4♠. After all, even with the overbidding 3♣, West can tell how badly the two hands are fitting and how impossible a slam is waiting ahead.”

1♥ - 1♠; 3♣ - 3♦; 3♠ - 4♣; 4♠ - 5♦; ?

Should I have actually cooperated with a 5♥ cue bid? Maybe. Partner could have held ♠QJ52 ♥5 ♦A73 ♣ KJ1084 or ♠QJ52 ♥5 ♦A7 ♣ AT8643, although either might be an immediate raise of 3♣. Since opener’s 4♦ would then ask for key cards (we play Crosswood), the immediate raise has a lot going for it on those two hands. (In contrast, once a major suit has been raised, playing Crosswood, there is no longer a key card ask for a minor.) Or maybe he had ♠QJT82 ♥5 ♦A73 ♣ KJ104. Nah, a wheel has come off. 5♠.

One thing most of us agree on, they don’t call my hand the “Bridge World Death Hand” or the “Nightmare Hand” for nothing. These, Flannery (4=5), and related hands are real, though occasional, problems.

- Pete Matthews