

Disrupting Precision Minor Suit Openings

Superseded by *EZ-Expert Bidding Tools*

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The strong, artificial, and forcing $1\clubsuit$ opening of Precision and similar bridge bidding systems gets all the attention. When you sit down to play against a Precision pair, it is well to have a defense ready. However, it is more important to be ready for $1\Diamond$, the most common Precision opening.

Standard Modern Precision (SMP) Openings

- $1\clubsuit$ All balanced hands with 17 or more high card points (HCP), except those opened 2NT. All unbalanced hands with 16 high card points or more. Some freak hands with fewer high cards but great playing strength.
- $1\Diamond$ Balanced hands not suitable for $1\clubsuit$, 1NT or 2NT; may have as few as two diamonds and/or have 5-4-2-2 distribution without a 5-card major. Unbalanced hands with 10 to 15 HCP and 3+ diamonds; may have a 5-card major with longer diamonds.
- $1\heartsuit/1\spadesuit$ 5+ cards in the bid major, 10 to 15 HCP (Bergen rule of 19).
- 1NT Balanced hand with 14-16 HCP, occasionally 13. [Treat as a weak notrump opening.]
- $2\clubsuit$ 6+ clubs, 10 to 15 HCP, may or may not have a 4- or 5-card side suit. [Treat as a weak 2-bid.]
- $2\Diamond$ Three-suited with short diamonds, 10 to 15 HCP (4=4=1=5 shape, remove any one card). [Double and $3\Diamond$ show diamonds. Otherwise, overcall on good suits, expecting bad splits.]
- $2\heartsuit/2\spadesuit$ Weak two bids.
- 2NT Balanced hand with 20-21 HCP.

The $1\clubsuit$ opening provides a top limit for other opening bids. Precision players tend to use those limited openings more aggressively, opening all hands with 11 HCP or meeting a Bergen rule of 19¹ – and some bid more aggressively than that. If you are not careful, they will eat your lunch.

¹ The Bergen Rule of 20 has long been a great tool for standard bidders to decide whether or not to open the bidding, especially when the honors are in the long suits. Add the lengths of your two longest suits to the HCP; open the bidding if the total is 20 or higher. A rule of 19 is one point lighter.

Noteworthy Variations

Some pairs routinely open a strong club as weak as 15 HCP, which does not materially affect defending against it.

Some play multi-range 1NT openings. When not vulnerable, the Imprecision² version of SMP plays 11-13 at 1NT. Others play 10-12, 10-13, 12-14, etc. Defending weak 1NT openings is beyond the scope of this article. *Be aware that, when 1NT would be weak, a 1♦ opener may have the stronger balanced hand.*

Old Precision played 1NT as 13-15 balanced all the time. With 11-12 HCP, they opened 1♦. It's an obvious step to expand that range to 11-13, and bump up the stronger range to 14-16 (occasionally 13). Experts recommend treating both ranges as a *weak notrump* opening, including penalty doubles, although many call 14-16 *strong*.

Some pairs do not dedicate a bid to short-diamond hands; their 1♦ opening may promise no diamonds at all.

The One Club Opening

It is wise to have a sensible defense at the ready. Here are some principles to guide your selection:

1. For all the fanfare, the 1♣ opening bid only comes up a few times a session. A Precision pair is unlikely to use it against you, unless you are playing in a team event. Keep your defense simple.
2. When you have a modest hand, don't double the 1♣ bid. It helps the opponents, by adding Pass and Redouble to their repertoire.
3. Responder's double is artificial. At the 1- or 2-level, double usually shows a hand with just below the strength needed to force to game, 6-7 HCP in SMP (5-8 in old Precision), or possibly a stronger hand with no good bid. At the 3-level, the double shows a game-forcing hand with no good bid; responder passes with lesser hands. These situations are the main weakness of the Precision system: neither opponent knows the

² Andrew Hanes and I have been playing SMP since 2014. The folks against whom we declared a typical SMP 1♦ in a 2-1 fit dubbed our efforts Imprecision, and the name stuck to our updated system. The distinguishing feature of Imprecision is the system of responses to the 1♦ opening: Pass usually delivers 4+ diamonds, 1♥/1♠/2♣ responses are non-forcing (0-10), 1NT artificial and invitational (about 12), and higher bids 13+ GF. We also open 1NT with 11-13 when not vulnerable, and play Tucker over the 1♥ opening. We play mostly matchpoints; we find the 1♦ and 1NT systems to be an advantage.

other's shape. With no interference, the Precision pair will likely do at least as well as standard bidders. The defense can gain substantially by taking any reasonable excuse to get in the way, especially at the 2- or 3-level. The same principles apply after the 1♦ response, but remember that the big hand is sitting behind you. With no interference, SMP is adept at finding major suit fits after the negative response.

4. Against the forcing 1♣ bid, your first goal is to produce better results, in the long run, than people facing standard bidders. A main hope is that the opponents will play in the wrong strain or at the wrong level. Two-suiters are less important, because you are hoping more to disrupt, and less to take a sacrifice.³
5. Don't make frivolous two- or three-suited bids when the opponents will likely play the hand anyhow. Expect declarers who trouble to learn Precision to take advantage of any information you give them. It's usually best to wait for 5-5 or better to make a two-suited bid, when a sacrifice is more likely to be profitable.
6. With a strong hand, especially behind the 1♣ opening, you can sometimes make a game.

Overview of Defenses

For years, the defense I played against a forcing 1♣ bid was "bid early and often." This is the right spirit. If you have more important fish to fry, just try this plan.

Out of the many defenses out there, the prominent ones nowadays are:

Mathe	Double for the majors and 1NT for the minors.
CRASH	(acronym) Double shows two suits of the same C olor, 1♦ shows two suits of the same R ank, and 1NT shows two suits of the same S hape (non-touching suits). If they double, redouble is for rescue.

Peter Weichsel, Hall-of-Famer and long-time Precision player, says "They both stink!" He recommends:

³ A two-suiter threatens to make a contract against a strong opening. It provides two places to find a fit, with the hope of establishing the side suit by ruffing. For that reason, when interfering against a strong 1NT opening, these hands should get priority. That's a common, normal situation, and you need a solid defense. Not so much, over a big club.

Not Mathe⁴ 1NT for the majors and 2NT for the minors. Double shows a strong hand. I'll go into this further below.

Other defenses include **Truscott** and Leaping Truscott (bidding a suit promises that suit and the touching suit above), and **TWERB** or **Suction** (where a bid shows the next higher single suit, or the two lower suits), and a combination of CRASH and TWERB. As with Mathe and CRASH, these methods often use the double to show some specific modest hand, in violation of rule 2.

Most defenses are played the same way in the direct seat and over the 1♦ negative response. However, some play transfer overcalls in direct seat, so that the strong club opener has to make the opening lead. While possibly effective, this violates rule 1.

Not Mathe

Not Mathe meets all the guidelines above: (1) It is relatively simple. (2) Double is used only with a strong hand. (3,4) All suit bids are available. (4) You cannot show all two-suiters, but you have the ones that most pairs with standard opponents have: majors (Michaels) and minors (Unusual Notrump). (5) The level of the 1NT and 2NT bids is high enough to discourage frivolous two-suited bids. (6) The double allows exploring for game with a strong hand.

1NT	Majors: at least 5 spades and 5 hearts. 2♣ or 2♦ is to play, with a long suit. Use 2NT as a cue bid showing interest in a major suit game.
2NT	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."
Double	One of three strong hand types: (A) balanced hand with at least a good 17 HCP, (B) a powerful one-suiter, or (C) a powerful two-suiter.

Alternatives to Not Mathe

If you absolutely must be able to show all six possible two-suiters, try **CRASH** using 1♦/1♥/1NT bids, or this modification of **Truscott**, which Andrew Hanes and I play:

1♦/1♥/1♠ The bid suit and the suit above.

⁴ Named by Billy Miller. A defense called Big Mathe uses the 1NT and 2NT bids, but perhaps not the double.

1NT Both minors.

2♣/2♦ The bid suit and the non-touching suit.

Both of these plans could be used with the Not Mathe double.

The One Diamond Opening

It is likely that a Precision pair will open 1♦, when playing against you. Only the bidder knows if the suit is real; but you 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:

Double A typical takeout double promises support for both majors, but might have a doubleton club. Advancer should prefer 1NT more than usual, perhaps with ♦ Jxx or ♦ T8xx, rather than bidding clubs. However, don't double frivolously, as it can help responder.

Optional: If doubler removes clubs to diamonds, he shows a five-card suit, but no extra values, perhaps as little as ♠ AJ43 ♥ KJ2 ♦ KJT62 ♣ 7.

1NT Make aggressive 1NT overcalls when their balanced hand range for 1♦ is around 11-13. Lowering your range by a point makes sense in this situation. Your diamond stopper might be dubious, with compensating values.

2♦ Natural; use clubs as the cue bid.

2♥ Michaels (non-forcing).

3♦ Michaels (strong).

Imprecision uses non-forcing responses of 1♥, 1♠ and 2♣ over the 1♦ opening. If you hear one of those and have a decent suit, get in there – especially with shortness in diamonds or the bid suit – lest partner pass it out. The Imprecision 1NT response is an artificial game invitation, the weakness of the 1♦ system. If you overcall that, they would love to double you (take the money), but they probably can't. If double is the first call they make after your overcall, it's takeout (but any others are penalty). If you have a good suit, get in there. Partner should think 1-3-5-8 or 2-5-8-11, and pass all hands lacking support for overcaller. Fit-showing non-jumps or lead-directing bids make sense when partner overcalls the 1NT response.

The SMP 1♦ opener's 2♣ rebid promises at least eight cards in the minors, but it

could be 5-3 either way (or 4-4). If you leave that one alone, they could land in a 3-3 fit.

If you are on lead with a weak hand at a notrump contract, after a Precision 1♦ opening, consider leading a diamond. If partner has values, but did not bid, diamond length is a likely reason.

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