

Opener's Reverse



By Monroe Ingberman

I. What is a reverse?

It is fundamental that a player who opens the bidding must be prepared to make a comfortable rebid. In particular, opener must try to arrange the bidding so that the partnership can stop in one notrump or two of a suit whenever both players have minimum values. For example, say opener is dealt

♠ 3 ♥ A Q 8 4 ♦ A Q J 5 4 ♣ 8 6 4

If he opens the bidding with one diamond and rebids two hearts over partner's one spade response, he has dug himself into a hole if partner happens to hold a minimum hand. Responder can no longer express a preference for diamonds without going to the three-level, and there is a good chance that a contract at that level will not succeed with the opponents holding half the deck. When opener bids his suits in the fashion described, he is said to have "reversed," meeting the following definition: *A simple change of suit at the two-level is a reverse if it takes the auction beyond two of the opener's first-bid suit.*

Since the hand shown is not strong enough to guarantee safety on the three-level, most players will take one of two alternative actions with it. They will either open one diamond and rebid two diamonds over a one spade response, or they will open one heart and rebid two diamonds at their next turn. The latter approach is favored since in this way opener will at least get to show both of his suits. Then, if his partner prefers diamonds, he can raise or pass, while if he prefers hearts, he can return to that suit; either way, the auction need not go beyond the two-level.

After a response of one of a suit, there are only four possible reverse auctions:

1 ♣ – 1 ♠	1 ♣ – 1 ♠
2 ♥	2 ♦
1 ♣ – 1 ♥	1 ♦ – 1 ♠
2 ♦	2 ♥

Compare these with the following sequences, which are *not* reverses for the reasons stated:

1 ♦ – 1 ♥ Opener's second suit is bid at the *one-*
1 ♠ level.

1 ♦ – 1 ♥ Opener's second suit is bid with a *jump*,
2 ♠ committing the partnership to game.

1 ♦ – 1 ♥ Any bid which permits a preference for
2 ♣ opener's suit at the two-level cannot be a reverse.

1 ♣ – (2 ♦) – 2 ♥ – (P) Competition by the oppo-
2 ♠ nents has prevented opener from bidding spades at the one-level, or rebidding his clubs at the two-level.

II. What are the requirements for a reverse?

In choosing the sequence

1 ♦ – 1 ♠ Opener shows that he is prepared to
2 ♥ play at the three-level even if partner has minimum values for his first response. This is therefore equivalent to announcing a hand worth 18 points. For his reverse opener might have any of the following hands:

♠ A J 7 ♥ A Q 3 2 ♦ K Q J 9 8 ♣ 4

♠ 6 ♥ A K J 7 ♦ A K J 8 6 3 ♣ 10 6

♠ 6 ♥ A K J 8 7 ♦ A Q 10 9 6 3 ♣ 8

Opener should also have at least 3½ quick tricks to go with his 18+ points.

III. Is a reverse forcing?

Most textbooks describe a reverse as a strong bid that is not forcing. Today, however, most experts use it as a one-found force, after which the auction is seldom dropped short of game. After all, in practice both responder and opener will bid again after a reverse about 95% of the time. This means that in order to allow for the remaining 5% you will be compelled to bid unnaturally and awkwardly on many hands, for fear that partner will pass prematurely. It is much more sensible to adopt a style that is convenient 95% of the time, and take your chances on the remainder. Accordingly, we will assume that *the reverse is forcing on responder for one round, and opener promises to bid again.*

IV. How should the bidding develop after a reverse?

The important thing to remember is that any rebid by responder is forcing, since opener has guaranteed another bid. Let us first examine what happens when responder makes a simple rebid in his suit.

1 ♦ – 1 ♠ Responder's bid of two spades shows
2 ♥ – 2 ♠ five or more spades; he need have no more than the six points required for his initial response, although the same two spade bid could be the prelude to a slam try. For example, responder should rebid two spades with as little as

♠ Q J 7 4 3 ♥ K 9 3 ♦ 5 ♣ 8 7 4 3

since opener may have a powerful hand with three-card spade support, needing only to find responder with spade length in order to bid game. Opener rebids as follows:

A. 2 NT

Shows no spade support, but indicates stoppers in the unbid suit. A typical hand would be

♠ 7 ♥ A Q 10 8 ♦ K Q 10 9 4 ♣ A Q 6

After a two notrump bid by opener, there are three ways for the partnership to stop below game:

1 ♦ – 1 ♠	1 ♦ – 1 ♠	1 ♦ – 1 ♠
2 ♥ – 2 ♠	2 ♥ – 2 ♠	2 ♥ – 2 ♠
2 NT – P	2 NT – 3 ♦	2 NT – 3 ♠
	P	P

B. 3 ♠

Opener usually has a doubleton honor in spades, e.g.:

♠ A 4 ♥ A K 10 4 ♦ A K 9 7 2 ♣ 8 6

The three spade bid is not forcing, but any further bid by responder commits the partnership to game.

C. 4 ♠

This shows three-card support, but *no club control*, e.g.

♠ K Q 4 ♥ A K 3 ♦ A K 8 5 2 ♣ 9 6

This hand is too strong to open 1 NT, and a rebid of 2 NT would be unnatural with no club stopper. The forcing reverse of two hearts on the second round is the least of evils. Once responder has shown a 5-card spade suit, opener can afford to risk a game contract.

D. 4 ♣

This is an extension of the fragment bid* (see August and September articles). It shows spade support and a singleton club. Opener might have this hand:

♠ A 6 5 ♥ A Q 9 7 ♦ A K 10 7 3 ♣ 2

E. 3 ♣

This bid is forcing, and infers that opener cannot find an accurate limit bid. Here are two possibilities:

♠ 6 ♥ A K 9 7 ♦ A K Q 7 3 ♣ A 4 2

Opener is strong enough to insist on game, but if the final contract is to be 3 NT, it will almost surely play better from partner's side of the table.

♠ A 4 ♥ A Q 9 2 ♦ A Q 10 8 3 ♣ A 7

Again opener wishes to play game, but he needs more information before he can place the contract.

F. 3 ♥

This shows six diamonds and five hearts, e.g.:

♠ 6 ♥ A K J 8 7 ♦ A Q 10 9 6 3 ♣ 8

The three heart bid is not forcing.

G. 3 ♦

Opener usually has six diamonds and four hearts, e.g.:

♠ 6 ♥ A K J 7 ♦ A K J 8 6 3 ♣ 10 8

The three diamond bid is not forcing.

Now let us examine what happens when responder, after the auction 1 ♦ – 1 ♠ – 2 ♥, holds a weak hand without five spades. The natural inclination of most players would be to give opener a simple non-forcing preference to his first suit, or to make a simple non-forcing raise in his second suit, or attempt to sign off in two notrump holding a club stopper. However, simple preferences and raises are best played as forcing bids, for reasons that will be discussed shortly. This leaves the two notrump bid to serve as an all-purpose response on weak hands. Let's see how this works:

1 ♦ – 1 ♠ *The two notrump bid requests opener*
 2 ♥ – 2 NT *to bid three diamonds.* Most often, it warns opener that responder has a weak hand. When opener does rebid three diamonds, responder continues as follows:

A. Pass

Responder has a weak hand and wishes to play three diamonds.

B. 3 ♥

Similarly, responder wishes to sign off in hearts.

C. 4 ♥

Responder has four-card support for hearts with adequate support for hearts, but no slam ambitions.

D. 3 NT

Responder wishes to play game in notrump, but as in C, has no interest in slam.

While on most hands opener will heed his partner's request to bid three diamonds, there are of course some hands where opener can disregard partner's advice. For example:

♠ 7 ♥ A K 9 2 ♦ A K J 10 4 ♣ A J 10

Here, opener does not want partner to pass three diamonds, for a notrump game should be odds-on opposite any initial spade response. Therefore he raises partner's two notrump directly to three.

Another case:

♠ 6 ♥ A K J 8 7 ♦ A Q 10 9 6 3 ♣ 8

Here, opener should complete the description of his hand by rebidding three hearts (showing 6-5 distribution), since game in hearts will have play whenever responder has three-card support.

One other example of note:

♠ A J 7 ♥ A Q 3 2 ♦ K Q J 9 8 ♣ 4

With this hand, opener *should* rebid three diamonds if partner asks him to, despite the spade support, since partner can have no more than four spades. *With any minimum hand that contains five spades, responder must rebid two spades rather than two notrump.*

Now we will take up the cases where responder holds a good hand following a reverse.

1 ♠ – 1 ♣ The three diamond bid is forcing, and usually leads to game or slam. If three diamonds were not forcing, responder would have an impossible rebid with

♠ A J 9 4 ♥ K 4 2 ♦ Q 8 6 ♣ 6 4 3

He could not bid beyond 3 NT, since that could be the only makeable game, yet he could hardly bid three notrump himself with no club stopper. The forcing three diamonds provides a flexible solution: opener can rebid three notrump with club stoppers, but can also bid the proper game or try for slam when he holds other distributions.

Remember that if responder is dealt a weaker hand such as

♠ K J 8 4 ♥ 6 4 ♦ Q 8 3 ♣ 8 7 4 2

he should rebid two notrump, rather than give a direct preference to diamonds. When opener then makes the forced diamond response, responder passes.

1 ♠ – 1 ♣ It must first be realized that for this 2 ♥ – 3 ♥ auction responder must hold at least five spades and four hearts – it is assumed that with four cards in each major, he would have responded initially with one heart. *The three heart bid is forcing to game, and shows interest in slam.*

Responder's hand might be

♠ A Q 8 5 4 ♥ K J 9 2 ♦ Q 6 ♣ 10 3

But what if responder has a hand such as this:

♠ K J 8 5 4 ♥ K J 9 2 ♦ 7 6 ♣ 10 3

He wishes to play in game and knows there is no hope for slam. Calling again on the all-purpose two notrump, the sequence would be:

1 ♠ – 1 ♣ This warns opener not to bid beyond
2 ♥ – 2 NT game.

3 ♦ – 4 ♥

P

And if responder's hand is even weaker, e.g.:

♠ Q J 7 4 ♥ K 9 3 ♦ 5 ♣ 8 7 4 3 2

1 ♠ – 1 ♣ the auction might end below game.

2 ♥ – 2 NT

3 ♦ – 3 ♥

P

1 ♠ – 1 ♣ This is a natural sequence showing
2 ♥ – 3 ♣ spades and clubs together with substantial values that might suffice for slam, e.g.:

♠ A Q 7 4 2 ♥ Q 3 ♦ 7 6 ♣ K J 8 3

On rare occasions, responder may wish to jump after opener's reverse. Let us examine some of these bids.

1 ♠ – 1 ♣ This shows a hand with concentrated
2 ♥ – 4 ♥ values, such as

♠ A 7 4 3 2 ♥ K Q 8 5 ♦ 9 3 ♣ 8 6

The jump raise guarantees good trumps, generally two honors, and little outside responder's bid suits. It is a limited bid and *not* forcing. (With a stronger hand, responder bids three hearts, which is unlimited.)

1 ♠ – 1 ♣ This is similar to the four heart bid just
2 ♥ – 4 ♦ discussed, but this time responder has diamond support. The four diamond bid is forcing.

1 ♠ – 1 ♣ The jump in spades announces a
2 ♥ – 3 ♠ self-sufficient suit that contains no more than one loser – even opposite short-ness in opener's hand, e.g.:

♠ K Q J 10 8 4 ♥ A 8 ♦ 6 3 ♣ 7 5 4

1 ♠ – 1 ♣ This bid is rarely needed, and often
2 ♥ – 3 NT leads to disaster. Avoid it!

Most of the methods presented here can be adapted to sequences that start with a jump shift by opener at the two-level, such as

1 ♠ – 1 ♥ For example, responder can bid three
2 ♠ spades as a slam try, or he can bid two notrump and then support spades with a weaker hand, and so on.

* Ingberman's *fragment* bid is now known as a *splinter*, and a fragment is a partial suit.

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