

Major Suit Slams - Superseded

[Pete Matthews Jr](https://3nt.xyz) - <https://3nt.xyz> - © March 27, 2026

With permission, the author has reassembled and repaired the three parts of “Improving 2/1 Game Force” by Fred Gitelman; they are available on 3NT.XYZ. The methods described here are derived from that series and earlier materials no longer available on the Internet. These methods have served the author well for at least two decades, but they are not what other experts play. This material has been copied from a draft of the third edition of *EZ-Expert Bidding Tools*.

Fast Arrival or Picture Jumps

⊗ Common Fast Arrival

In the past, 2/1 systems used the space-wasting jump to game to show a small hand, and a lower (but forcing) raise to preserve space when holding a medium or large hand. Some texts still teach it this way. Experts now know better. Here’s why:

1. ♠ A K J 8 6 5 ♥ 5 ♦ A Q 5 ♣ Q 9 5
1 ♠ - 2 ♦; 2 ♠ - 4 ♠

Responder’s 4 ♠ opposite our hand [1] is fast arrival, showing a small opening bid. We have an intractable large-small problem:

- a. ♠ Q 7 4 ♥ A 6 3 ♦ K J 6 4 ♣ K 3 2

We have a laydown slam if responder holds hand [a].

- b. ♠ Q 7 4 ♥ A Q J ♦ K J 6 4 ♣ 8 3 2

However, the five level would be unsafe, opposite partner’s hand [b]. In our methods, responder bids 3 ♠ on both those hands. We then bid 3 NT (which we’ll see shows serious slam interest), 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 or six level opposite hand [b].

Common fast arrival is losing bridge. Some misguided souls play fast arrival in notrump, wiping out their medium-strength bid.

Choose one of these options that are suitable for a jump to game in a major suit fit, in a game-forcing auction:

- Picture jump:** four of the top six honors, across two bid suits; no side control.
- Limited fast arrival:** a terrible hand with no keycards.

○ Picture Jumps

A picture 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:

2. ♠ 6 2 ♥ K Q 9 3 ♦ A K 9 6 4 ♣ 7 6
1 ♠ - 2 ♦; 2 ♥ - 4 ♥

4 ♥ shows four top honors in responder's red suits on hand [2].

3. ♠ A Q 6 4 3 ♥ K Q 9 5 ♦ 9 7 ♣ Q 4
1 ♠ - 2 ♥; 4 ♥

Our picture bid jump to 4 ♥ on hand [3] (even without the ♣ Q) shows four top honors in the major suits we have bid, but no first- or second-round control on the side.

4. "The Bidding Box" (7), January 2023.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ A 4 2	♠ J 8 5
♥ A J 9 3 2	♥ K Q 7
♦ J 6	♦ A K Q 3 2
♣ A 9 4	♣ 8 5
1 ♥	2 ♦ [natural game force]
2 NT	4 ♥ [picture bid]
Pass	

The moderator did not pick up on 4 ♥ being a picture jump. 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 \diamond response and 2 NT rebid, responder's best shot is to bid 3 \heartsuit , and then control-bid in diamonds – hopefully, twice, showing \diamond A-K-Q. Here's another way:

1 \heartsuit		3 \diamond	[FSJ, inv or slam]
4 \heartsuit	[accepts game try]	5 \diamond	[no black suit control]
6 \heartsuit	[getting the picture]		

5. A grand picture.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
\spadesuit Q 10 7 6 5 4	\spadesuit A K 9 3
\heartsuit A J 4	\heartsuit K Q 8 7 2
\diamond A 4	\diamond 6 2
\clubsuit A 3	\clubsuit 5 4
1 \spadesuit	2 \heartsuit [5+ cards]
3 \heartsuit [forcing]	4 \spadesuit [picture bid]
7 NT [count 13 tricks]	

The 4 \spadesuit 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. We've given up waiting for this deal – we play kickback (4 \spadesuit asks for keycards in hearts), once hearts have been raised.

While a hand suitable for a picture bid is easy to describe and highly effective when used, we may wait a long time to get one.

❑ Limited Fast Arrival

Fast arrival makes sense with truly bad hands:

- Jump to game to show a terrible hand with no keycards.
- Raise and then bid game (refusing to cooperate for slam) to show a bad hand with a keycard in trump, and none other.

6. \spadesuit K Q 8 7 6 \heartsuit A K J 4 3 2 \diamond 2 \clubsuit 4

1 \heartsuit – 2 \clubsuit

2 \spadesuit – 4 \spadesuit [no keycards]

On hand [6], we have a slam when partner has two aces. Partner showed none, so we get to make exactly four spades.

7. ♠ K J 3 ♥ K J 6 3 2 ♦ Q 5 ♣ Q J 3

We respond 2♥ on hand [7], and raise to 3♠ next. If opener then bids toward slam, we do not cooperate – we just bid 4♠.

If we choose to play picture bids instead, we still bid the same way on hand [7] or worse – but not with hand [a or b] from example [1].

Serious 3 NT and Last Train

Serious 3 NT allows us to systematically decide between game or slam in a major suit. [♦¹⁵](#) It applies when a fit in a major suit of at least eight cards is confirmed [♦¹⁶](#) in a non-competitive, game-forcing auction, *below 3 NT*. [♦¹⁷](#)

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*. [♦¹⁸](#) Before asking for keycards, we want the partnership to have:

- serious intent to bid a slam, and
- 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, we sign off in game. No practice control-bids!

- A. A bid of 3 NT shows serious slam interest [♦¹⁹](#) and is forcing. We cannot play in 3 NT.
- B. A control-bid that bypasses 3 NT is a courtesy, denying serious slam interest. If partner then bids a control over that, it shows serious slam interest.
- C. Responder's control-bid in the 2/1 suit:
 - promises two of the top three honors – holding at least the ace or king is assumed – make it so, or drag our feet!
 - promises the ace or king, as with any other bid suit – this removes the need to hold ace or king in a 2/1 suit – a possibly crucial reduction of information.
- D. 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. [♦²⁰](#)

- E. Bypassing a suit denies a control in that suit. A control-bid by partner now also promises control of the bypassed suit.
- F. With a spade control, a control-bid of 3 ♠ is required. It neither shows nor denies serious slam interest. [♦²¹](#)
- G. With a bad hand, at most an unprotected king to show, responder bids trumps (game, if not a jump).
- H. We employ these methods with a Jacoby 2 NT raise.
- I. Serious 3 NT is *off in competition*. We may need to play 3 NT to avoid a potential ruff. Italian control bids still apply.

8. “The Bidding Box” (1), January 2023 *Bulletin*:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ K 10 7	♠ Q
♥ K Q 10 9 8 5	♥ A 6 4 2
♦ A K 2	♦ Q J 6
♣ 10	♣ A K Q 7 2
1 ♥	2 NT [too good for splinter]
3 ♥ [medium+, short ♣]	3 ♠ [spade control]
4 ♠ [large hand, RKB ♥]	5 ♦ [two, without ♥ Q]
6 ♥ [one key feature missing]	Pass

Over 2 NT, 3 ♣ would show any small hand. After that come NLMH5 bids with a medium or large hand: 3 ♦ denies shortness (N), and 3 ♥ shows short ♣ (L). Control-bidding commences with 3 ♠, which shows first or second round control in spades; being below 3 NT, it neither shows nor denies serious slam interest. However, responder could have tried to sign off in 4 ♥ with a hand that has become unsuitable for slam due to secondary values in clubs.

Opener should rate this a large hand, 15 fine HCP, plus a singleton. The obvious bid would be 3 NT (serious); however, that would be incorrect. If either partner knows that we have both serious slam interest and first or second round control in every suit, that partner immediately asks for keycards. We’ll see that we play kickback in hearts and therefore ask for keycards with 4 ♠.

Over 3 ♠, opener’s courtesy cue bid of 4 ♦ would have shown first or second round control there, with only medium values. It would also

deny a club void or singleton ace. No matter: responder is at least medium and was always driving to slam opposite a medium opener, given a diamond control.

Here's a possibility: responder asks for keycards with 4 ♠, gets a 5 ♥ (2 with) reply, and ... decides the ♠ Q is good enough to stick it in 6 NT, for a matchpoint top.

9. ♠ Q 8 ♥ K Q 5 4 3 ♦ K 5 4 ♣ Q J 2
 1 ♠ - 2 ♥; 3 ♥ - ?

Don't make a control-bid with terrible hand [9] - just bid 4 ♥. The only permitted control-bid would be 4 ♦. See also hand [7].

Serious 3 NT is highly effective when one partner has a small opening bid, and the other has a large (serious) hand. The difficult slams 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 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.

Last train logic. Study these examples. (If the 2/1 response does not promise a control, more system is required. ♦²²)

10. 4 ♥ is last train (would have signed off with no ♣ control):

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-----|------------------------|
| 1 ♠ | 2 ♦ | [includes ♦ control] |
| 2 ♠ | 3 ♠ | |
| 3 NT [serious] | 4 ♦ | [2/3 top ♦, no ♣ ctrl] |
| 4 ♥ [♣ but no ♥ control] | | |
- [4 ♥ instead of 4 ♦ shows ♥ control but neither 2/3 top ♦ nor ♣.]

11. 4 \diamond is last train:

1 \heartsuit	2 \diamond	[includes \diamond control]
2 \heartsuit	3 \heartsuit	
3 NT [serious, no \spadesuit control]	4 \diamond	[\spadesuit control, no \clubsuit ctrl]

12. 4 \heartsuit is last train:

1 \spadesuit	2 \heartsuit	[includes \heartsuit control]
2 \spadesuit	3 \spadesuit	
3 NT [serious]	4 \clubsuit	[\clubsuit , no \diamond (would RKB)]
4 \heartsuit		[\diamond , values problem]

13. 4 \heartsuit is last train with serious slam interest:

1 \spadesuit	2 \heartsuit	[includes \heartsuit control]
2 \spadesuit	3 \spadesuit	
4 \clubsuit [courtesy, \clubsuit control]	4 \heartsuit	[serious, no \diamond control]

14. 4 \heartsuit is last train:

1 \spadesuit	2 \heartsuit	[includes \heartsuit control]
2 \spadesuit	3 \spadesuit	
4 \diamond [courtesy, \diamond , no \clubsuit]	4 \heartsuit	[serious, \clubsuit , no \heartsuit]

15. 4 \diamond is a courtesy and *not* last train:

1 \heartsuit	2 \diamond	[includes \diamond control]
2 \heartsuit	3 \heartsuit	
4 \diamond		[courtesy \diamond , no \spadesuit or \clubsuit]

Values problem. Last train could be used when the bidder is looking for extra general strength; in other words, the issue is the ability to actually take 12 tricks. Many partnerships use this as a primary meaning for a last train bid, but we hope to avoid this hit-or-miss situation. The opportunity for a values last train only occurs once in the admittedly difficult examples above. Its most likely application is by a partner who has shown serious slam interest with marginal (i.e., medium) values. We have too much going on to reliably sort out the medium-medium problem with last train – we do it earlier, if we can.

Opener's major suit is the most likely place to find a slam. When GF responder has 3-card support, we need Plan B on page **Error!**

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Heart keycard issue. When hearts are trump and 4 NT is the keycard ask, a 4 \diamond last train could mean, we have all the controls, but I only have one keycard (4 NT causes a disaster on a 5 \spadesuit response.)

Last train does not apply when the auction is below 3 NT. 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.

Last train in other situations. When there is only one bid available below our suit, that bid takes on an artificial last train meaning: interested in bidding on, but cannot commit to it. These bids often occur in competition at the three or five level, for example:

16. 1 \spadesuit - (2 \diamond) - 2 \spadesuit - (3 \diamond); ?

3 \spadesuit is competitive; 3 \heartsuit is the only game try.

17. Lots of good stuff here:

Opener

\spadesuit A K Q J 9 2

\heartsuit A 8

\diamond 9 4

\clubsuit Q 7 2

1 \spadesuit

3 \spadesuit [spades trump, slam try]

4 \heartsuit [last train, \heartsuit , no \diamond]

5 \diamond [0 or 3 keycards (1430)]

6 \clubsuit [yes, and \clubsuit queen!]

Responder

\spadesuit 10 9 3

\heartsuit 9 2

\diamond A 10

\clubsuit A K 10 9 5 4

2 \clubsuit [\clubsuit A or K]

4 \clubsuit [courtesy, 2 of top 3 clubs]

4 NT [\diamond control, RKB \spadesuit]

5 \heartsuit [queen ask]

7 NT [count = 13 tricks]

Responder has shown two of the top three clubs, so opener gets to show the \clubsuit Q. We cannot expect so much to fall together all the time, but it sure is nice when it works!

18. 13 tricks but two top losers:

Opener

\spadesuit Q 9

\heartsuit A K Q J 2

\diamond K 9 2

\clubsuit K J 3

1 \heartsuit

2 \heartsuit [catch-all (no \spadesuit stop)]

Responder

\spadesuit 10 8 4

\heartsuit 10 6 4

\diamond A Q

\clubsuit A Q 9 8 7

2 \clubsuit [with hearts, \clubsuit A or K]

3 \heartsuit [hearts are trump]

3 NT [serious, no ♠ control] 4 ♥ [no ♠ control, either]
 Pass

19. Responder's 4 ♥ (not 4 ♦) would be last train (one ♦, no ♥):

Opener

♠ K 9 7 4

♥ A J 5 4 3

♦ K 6 4

♣ 7

Responder

♠ A Q 10 8

♥ Q 7

♦ A Q 7 2

♣ A 5 3

1 ♥

2 ♠ [required with 4 ♠]

4 ♣ [courtesy, ♣ control]

4 NT [RKB (all suits controlled)]

2 ♦ [♦ A or K]

3 ♠ [spades are trump]

4 ♦ [serious, 2/3 top ♦, no ♥]

...

Why does 4 ♦ deny a heart control? (Responder would have asked for keycards, having serious intent and all side suits controlled.)

Key Features

- With picture bids, 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 an 8-card major-suit fit is confirmed below 3 NT in a non-competitive game-forcing auction. Bidding 3 NT shows serious slam interest (extra values); a control-bid bypassing 3 NT is only a courtesy (expected values).
- 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.
- Either partner, knowing we have both serious intent and controls in all suits, immediately asks for keycards; knowing one requirement is lacking, immediately sign off in game.
- In competition, serious 3 NT is off, but our control-bidding methods still apply.

Backstory

The second edition of this book offered the picture jump, an excellent tool that almost never comes up. They have been removed. Limited fast arrival is also useful and comes up all the time. Limited fast arrival was inspired by Rodwell; example [6] is his.

Serious 3 NT was invented by Eric Rodwell, multiple world champion, renowned bridge theorist and Precision player. His partner, Jeff Meckstroth, provided 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. Eric Schwartz and I learned serious 3 NT from materials that I can no longer find online. Check for practice deals at 3NT.XYZ.

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.

Standard and Precision ranges. Playing Precision, a regular opening bid is typically made with 11 to 15 points. That breaks easily into two ranges, bad (~12) and good (14+). For opener, this is a 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), the source of the medium-medium problem.

◆ 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.*

¹⁵⁻⁴ **Control Ask.** GLM Stephen 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. His methods also apply when a major-suit fit has been confirmed after a minor-suit opening. Clearly, as with serious 3 NT, we need to believe there is sufficient strength for slam.

¹⁶⁻⁴ **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 beyond the scope of this book.

¹⁷⁻⁴ **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 would be serious, some people play that this 3 NT denies a club control, which opener would otherwise bid. However, opener can make a serious 4 \diamond 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.

¹⁸⁻⁴ **Old-fashioned control-bidding**, colloquially called cue-bidding. In the 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 are much more efficient, keeping the auction low enough to check for keycards.

¹⁹⁻⁴ **Non-serious 3 NT**. Many 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. Rodwell wrote the same in an online comment and in his book.

²⁰⁻⁴ **Partner's suit**. Shortness in partner's A-x-x-x suit can be highly valuable, but these methods have no way to distinguish shortness from the more generally valuable honor. 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.

²¹⁻⁵ **Spade interchange**. Some pairs flip the meaning of 3 \spadesuit and 3 NT when hearts are trump: 3 \spadesuit 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.

²²⁻⁶ **Lackwood**. Auctions [10 to 15] are by Gitelman, who does not insist on an ace or king in a 2/1 suit. His methods differ from ours, requiring lackwood here: five of the major asks for keycards while denying a control in the last train suit! That assumes we have enough keycards for slam, if we have a control in the last train suit.

Rodwell's book does not include lackwood, perhaps because it is seldom necessary and should be avoided. (It's in the contents of his next book of topics.)

When responder's 2/1 with support for opener promises the ace or king in the 2/1 suit, the occasion for lackwood seldom arises. Our serious 3 NT is simpler and more reliable than others, even when the medium-medium problem arises.

Topless suit. If we find ourselves in a serious 3 NT auction, having opened or responded in a suit without an ace or king, we must be very careful. With a queen-high suit, maybe we can get partner to show a control in our suit. Discuss with partner the possibility of refusing to control-bid with a topless suit – or some other mechanism to avoid a disaster.