

One-Under Raises of a Major Suit

[Pete Matthews Jr](https://3nt.xyz) - <https://3nt.xyz> - © September 21, 2023

The material in this article may eventually be included in my book, but it's not ready for prime time. Comments will be appreciated.

Many expert pairs play the 1 NT response to a major suit opening as semi-forcing: opener may pass without the values to accept any invitation, usually with 5-3-3-2 distribution. The point is to play 1 NT when responder would have invited with 2 NT or three of the major. However, this can easily land us in the wrong strain when responder has a slow-down raise, a 3-card limit raise, or an unbalanced hand with a long suit. Vulnerable, this could mean going down by hundreds in 1 NT.

Before we get into the details, here is the chart of the responses to a major suit opening, when playing the one-under (2 M - 1) raise: \diamond^1

R1	Responses to a Major Suit Opening Bid
1 NT	Forcing. {1 ♠ - 1 NT; 2 m - 2 ♥} implies spade tolerance
2 ♣	Artificial game force, at most two cards in the major suit, and an unbalanced hand.
2 ♦	[over 1 ♠] hearts, either drop-dead or GF.
2 M - 1	Good raise: 3-card limit raise or any GF raise.
2 M	2- to 3-winner semi-constructive raise.
Jump oM	Balanced GF, medium, exactly 2-card support.
2 NT	Balanced GF, small or large, exactly 2-card support.
3 ♣	Natural, 6+ good clubs, invitational.
3 ♦	4-card limit raise.
3 M	Mixed raise.
3 ♠	[over 1 ♥] Game splinter.
3 NT	Raise to 4 M on high cards, a small hand.
4 ♣	Game splinter.
4 ♦	Game splinter.
4 ♥	[over 1 ♠] Game splinter.
4 M	Preemptive.

The one-under (2 M - 1) raise provides these advantages:

- The 3-card limit raise can be refused at the two-level, so playing 1 NT as forcing is more palatable.
- We gain more space for our step-bids: we always get to show a good 5-card club suit, unlike when playing our Jacoby 2 NT.
- Improved bidding of hearts over 1 ♠.
- Natural, small or large game force at 2 NT; the jump shift in the other major shows a medium, balanced game force.
- Better handling of hand strength.

However, we have these disadvantages:

- Major changes, lots to learn.
- The artificial, unbalanced game force at 2 ♣ is harder to play than natural 2 ♣ and 2 ♦ responses.

After the One-Under Good Raise

To refuse a limit raise, opener bids 2 M; with a smallish game force, opener bids 2 NT.

2 ♠ is a strong reverse. With hearts trump, 2 ♠ is not part of our step responses. A double of 2 ♠ could beget interference, and ALMH5 starting at 2 NT would have opener bidding the actual short minor suits (yet more doubles). We can afford to skip this bid, always using 2 NT for opener to show a smallish game force.

The plan beyond this consists of applications of ALMH5 and NLMH5 bids, which should soon become intuitive:

Step	ALMH5 and NLMH5 bids:
1	Asks NLMH5; or No shortness.
2	Low (club) shortness.
3	Middle (diamond) shortness.
4	High (other major) shortness.
4 Suit	5-Card suit with 2 of top 3 honors.

The first step is an ask (usually without shortness), if *partner* has not had an opportunity to show shortness since the 2 ♦ response. Otherwise, the first step simply shows no shortness.

Serious 3 NT applies when opener shows a medium or large hand, or when responder shows slam interest over 2 M or 2 NT.

O2	R2	O3	1 M – 2 M-1: 3-Card LR or GF Raise	
2 M	Refuses	bad limit raise. Responder may bid...		ALMH5 at 3 ♣, Slam Interest
	Pass	3-Card limit raise.		
	4 M	To play.		
2 ♠	Natural, strong reverse.			
2 NT	Smallish GF. Responder may bid 4 M, or bid...			
	3 ♣	Asks NLMH5 (slam interest):		
		3 ♦	No shortness.	
		3 ♥	Low (club) shortness.	
		3 ♠	Middle (diamond) shortness.	
		3 NT	High (other major) shortness.	
		Other	5-card suit with 2 of top 3.	
	3 ♥	Low (club) shortness.		Slam Splinter
	3 ♠	Middle (diamond) shortness.		
	3 NT	High (other major) shortness.		
	4 M	No slam interest.		
	Other	5-card suit, 2 of the top 3 honors, slam interest.		
3 ♣	Asks NLMH5 (see responses to 3 ♣ above).			Medium or Large Hand
3 ♦	Low (club) shortness.			
3 ♥	Middle (diamond) shortness.			
3 ♠	High (other major) shortness.			
Other	5-card suit, 2 of the top 3 honors.			

ALMH5 starts at 3 ♣, so that we don't bid the short suit.

Hand strength: We divide hands of opening strength into *small* (~13 points), *medium* (~16 points), and *large* (~19 points).

The *medium-medium problem*: when both partners have medium strength, we are in the slam zone, but if neither knows partner's strength, moving toward slam can be perilous. We look for ways to announce medium strength.

Competition: Double is penalty. After a lead-directing double, pass denies a control in the suit, and a bid shows one. A redouble in the pass-out seat restarts the bidding.

After the Artificial Game Force without a Fit (2 ♣)

The 2 ♣ response is an artificial, unbalanced game force with at most two cards in opener's major suit. We have more work to do than with natural minor suit responses, and space is tight. This plan allows us to explore for game or slam in a major suit, notrump, or a minor suit:

O2	R2	O3	1 M – 2 ♣: Artificial GF, no fit
2 ♦	Catch-all, usually a small hand. Responder bids (oM)BCD.		
	2 ♥	B: At least 5-5 minors.	
	2 ♠	C: Primary clubs.	
	2 NT	oM: Stopper in oM.	
	3 ♣	D: Primary diamonds.	
2 ♥	6+ cards, any strength. Responder bids (oM)BCD or raises.		
	2 ♠	B: At least 5-5 minors.	
	2 NT	Stopper in oM.	
	3 ♣	C: Primary clubs.	
	3 ♦	D: Primary diamonds.	
	3 ♥	Doubleton support, medium+, M is trump	
	3 ♠	Doubleton support, small, M is trump	
2 ♠	4+ cards, any strength. Responder bids BCD or raises.		
	2 NT	B: At least 5-5 minors.	
	3 ♣	C: Primary clubs.	
	3 ♦	D: Primary diamonds.	
	3 ♥	4-card support, medium+, oM is trump	
	3 ♠	4-card support, small, oM is trump	
2 NT	Medium+ hand, oM stopped.		
3 ♣	Medium+ hand, 4+ clubs, oM not stopped.		
3 ♦	Medium+ hand, 4+ diamonds, oM not stopped.		
3 M	The major is trump, start cue-bidding.		

We cannot afford natural rebids for opener, whose priorities are:

1. Bid 2 ♠ to show four cards in the other major, which may or may not be spades.
2. Bid 2 ♥ to show 6+ cards in the original major, which may or may not be hearts.
3. Make a higher bid with a medium or large hand.
4. Bid an artificial 2 ♦, the catchall, usually a small hand.

Responder then bids (oM)BCD. The priority is to set a major suit as trump, if opener bid 2 ♥ or 2 ♠:

Step	Responder's (oM)BCD rebids.
2 NT	Stopper in the other major – other steps skip 2 NT!
1	Both minors, at least 5-5.
2	Clubs is the primary minor, probably no oM stopper.
3	Diamonds is the primary minor, probably no oM stopper.
3 ♥	Opener's just-shown major is trump, medium or large.
3 ♠	Opener's just-shown major is trump, small hand.

After a Balanced Game-Forcing Response

Responder's 2 NT response shows a small or large balanced game force with exactly two cards in the major suit. All opener's bids are natural. ♦² With a large hand, responder moves toward slam at an appropriate time.

A jump shift into the other major shows a medium balanced game force with exactly two cards in the major suit. All opener's bids are natural.

Backstory

This plan was inspired by the system notes of Allison Howard and Mike Cappelletti. Allison graciously sent them to me when I showed interest in the system while watching them play a session. Unfortunately, they are sketchy.

Most of this is mine, and as I write, I have never played it. The idea of the one-under strong raise is intriguing, but there is little to read about it. If you play anything like this, please let me know what works for you.

♦ Alternative Methods

¹ **Small GF raise alternatives.** We could take the small hands out of the 2 ♦ response, and respond 3 NT with them instead. Better might be to dedicate 3 ♦ for that hand – include the 4-card limit raise in 2 ♦, and allow responder to raise a 2 M refusal of a limit raise, when holding a good 4-card limit raise.

² **Cappelletti rebids for opener over the 2 NT response:**

- 3 ♣ Minor suit Stayman.
- 3 ♦ Stayman.
- 3 M Balanced slam try.
- 3 oM Unbalanced slam try.