

# Semi-Natural Spiral Raises

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Spiral raises are often used when opener may have raised responder's major suit holding only three card support. To be specific, the four auctions under immediate consideration are:

|     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1 ♣ | 1 ♥ | 1 ♣ | 1 ♠ | 1 ♦ | 1 ♥ | 1 ♦ | 1 ♠ |
| 2 ♥ |     | 2 ♠ |     | 2 ♥ |     | 2 ♠ |     |

When holding a hand worth moving forward, responder needs tools to sort out the eventual level and strain. Quite a few versions of spiral raises are out there. Playing basic spiral raises, responder bids 2NT, and opener responds in steps, easily described as 3-3-4-4:

|     |                                |         |
|-----|--------------------------------|---------|
| 3 ♣ | 3-card support, minimum values | [3-min] |
| 3 ♦ | 3-card support, maximum values | [3-max] |
| 3 ♥ | 4-card support, minimum values | [4-min] |
| 3 ♠ | 4-card support, maximum values | [4-max] |

This method is OK, but we can do better.

## Key Features and Methods

- Opener should have a weak shortness for a 3-card raise: weak doubleton (up to J x), singleton or void. (Q x or three small is deemed suitable for a rebid of 1 NT.)
- For a 3-card raise, opener must therefore have at least a 4-card minor and may have a true side suit (could even be 5=4, 4=5 or 5=5 minors).
- With game interest and 4-4 in the majors, responder should show spades over a 2 ♥ raise, hoping to find a 4-4 fit, when hearts are 4-3. (For opener to bid 1 ♠ over 1 ♥, and then raise hearts over 1 NT, would show extra values.)
- Other than showing spades, any suit is a natural game or slam try, promising at least a 5-card major. These bids set the major as trump.
- With a game-forcing-only (semi-)balanced hand and both side-suits stopped, responder should jump to 3 NT, eschewing other tools. (Our methods rely on this.) Holding 4-card support, opener usually converts to game in the major suit, or passes otherwise.
- When holding exactly four cards in the major (or possibly five small),

responder uses an asking bid to inquire about opener's holdings.

- g) If opener has a 4-max, at least game will be bid. Our methods gain bidding space by assuming that game is four of the major [4 M], not 3 NT.
- h) If opener has a 3-min, a partscore or 3 NT is most likely.
- i) Opener may, unfortunately, be weak in both side suits.
- j) Three small opposite three small should play in 3 NT.

## System Goals

1. The system should be as simple and natural/grounded as possible. It should also promptly separate 3-min, 3-max, 4-min and 4-max hands from each other.
2. When opener has a 4-max, expose no features of opener's hand unless responder tries for slam. However, do preserve space for slam exploration.
3. When opener has other than a 4-max, assure the auction can always end at three of the major [3 M].
4. When opener has a 3-min, permit stopping at three of the minor [3 m], but also permit exploring for 3 NT. (Our system also lets responder offer a choice between 3  $\diamond$  and the major, when the minor is clubs.)
5. When opener has a 3-max, explore reliably for 3 NT.

Our methods meet the goals above, but not the goals below that some other methods achieve.

6. When the 1  $\diamond$  opener has a 3-min and four or more clubs, permit stopping in 3  $\clubsuit$ . (We can only stop there on a 3-max with clubs.)
7. Facilitate deciding between 3 NT and 4 M with a 4-4 fit. (Our other auctions are facilitated by suppressing this capability.)
8. Opener only bids NT first, if going to declare NT. (From the perspective of opener's weak suit this makes sense, but opener's minor or the fourth suit may turn out to be the real problem. It's a crap shoot with two hands of similar strength; and besides, for us, responder bids 2NT half the time.)
9. Responder can inquire with any and all hands when a 4-card major is raised. (In our methods, a wheel may come off, if you fail to bid 3NT when appropriate, or to show spades.)

## Semi-Natural Spiral Raises - Next Step Inquiry

In order to achieve our goals, we need to use the next step for responder to inquire about opener's hand. This means 2 NT over 2 ♠, and 2 ♠ over 2 ♥.

Using M for the suit of the raised major, our shorthand for the inquiry bid is 2 M+1. Over the inquiry, opener chooses among these bids:

- 3 m Bidding the minor shows a 3-min. Over this bid, responder has these choices:
- Pass Likely best place to play.
  - 3 ♦ Offer to play with 5+ cards. Opener passes or bids 3 M.
  - 3 M To play.
  - 3 oM The other major [oM] is stopped. Asks for 3NT with the other minor [om] stopped.
  - 3 NT om is stopped, but not oM. Remember, a game-going responder has denied having stoppers in both side suits by not having jumped to 3 NT. If you forget this, hope the other major splits 4-4!
- 3 M Bidding the major shows a 4-min and may be passed. Other continuations are equivalent to those after 3 M+1.
- 3 M+1 The next step after three of the major (3 ♠ or 3 NT) shows a 4-max, forcing to game with four spades, with both partners using these continuations:
- 3 NT Serious slam interest; to avoid confusion, we do not play 3 NT with a 4-4 fit.  
[Alternative: offer to play.]
  - 4M No slam interest.
  - Other The cheapest first or second round control.
- 4 m Exactly 6-3-2-2 shape, a 3-max with no secure side stoppers.
- 3 om The other minor is semi-natural, a 3-max with at least three cards or a stopper in the suit.
- 2NT/3♥ The other bid below 3 M is semi-natural, a 3-max with at least three cards or a stopper in the other major.
- Opener's 3-max bid is not forcing. If opener pulls 3 NT to 4 m, this shows six cards with a singleton or void in the fourth suit, and no side stopper after all.

[Using 3NT to show om and deny oM is the only method covering all four cases when a single bid shows a 3-min – even when playing 3-3-4-4 – that always lets us both stop at 3 of either suit, and determine whether we have stoppers for 3 NT without bypassing it. We could get around this pit trap by using 3 ♠, but only when clubs are trump. The alternative of using two or more 3-any bids to show or deny stoppers would work, but cause other problems.]

Here is another view of the responses to the 2 M+1 inquiry:

**Hand Bid – Continuations**

3-min 3 m – responder may pass, or see above (includes 3 NT pit trap)

3-max 3 om – oM short (stopper or length in om), non-forcing

2NT/3♥ – om short (stopper or length in oM), non-forcing

4 m – 6-3-2-2, no side stopper, non-forcing

4-min 3 M – responder passes, bids game or tries for slam

4-max 3 M+1 – responder bids game or tries for slam

**2 NT Shows Spades over 2 ♥**

When hearts have been raised, responder’s 2NT shows *four spades*. This is not going to happen very often, and three suits are stopped, so play these basic responses:

3♥/3♠ 4-card raise, non-forcing, sets trump. Usual continuations.

4♥/4♠ 4-card raise, maximum, sets trump. [At least we find the right strain.]

3 m 3-min, wing it.

3 NT 3-max, natural, stopper in om (short oM).

3 om 3-max, *denies* stopper in om. [Only one suit is in doubt.]

**Examples**

1 ♠ – 1 ♠; 2 ♠ – 2 NT; 3 ♠ [3-min]      ♠ Q 10 7 2 ♥ 6 5 ♦ K J 7 4 ♣ A 6 5

No longer interested in game, responder passes with 4-card support.

1 ♣ – 1 ♠; 2 ♠ – 2 NT; 3 ♣ [3-min]      ♠ Q 10 7 2 ♥ 6 5 ♦ A J 7 6 5 ♣ K 4

No longer interested in game, responder offers to play in 3 ♠.

1 ♠ – 1 ♠; 2 ♠ – 2 NT; 3 ♣ [3-max]      ♠ Q 10 7 2 ♥ 6 5 ♦ K 4 ♣ A J 7 6 5

No longer interested in game, responder chooses to pass opposite 3+/stopper.

## Summary of Alternative Methods

| After Minor Suit Opener Raises Responder's Major Suit – Part 1 |  |   |  |          |  |                |
|--|--|---|--|----------|--|----------------|
|  | Wolpert Spiral   |   | Dutch Spiral   |          | Semi-Natural Spiral  |                |
| Inquiry  | Over 2 ♡   | Over 2 ♠                                      | Over 2 ♡   | Over 2 ♠ | Over 2 ♡   | Over 2 ♠       |
|  | 2 ♠ *  | 2 NT  | 2 ♠ *  | 2 NT     | 2 ♠ *  | 2 NT           |
| <b>Other</b>   | Sets the major as trump; natural game or slam try.   |   |  |          |  |                |
| <b>3-min</b>   | 2NT =<br>balanced  | 3♣ =<br>balanced                              | 3 m  | 3 m      | 3 m; continuations:<br>Pass = to play<br>3 ♢ = offer to play<br>3 M = to play<br>3 oM = stopper<br>3 NT = om stop but<br>no oM stop  |                |
|  | 3♢ =<br>short om<br>3♥ =<br>short oM   | 3♥ =<br>short om<br>3♠ =<br>short oM          |  |          |  |                |
| <b>3-max</b>   | 3NT =<br>balanced  | 3NT =<br>balanced                             | 3 om   | 3 om     |  |                |
|  |  |   |  |          | 2 NT =<br>3+ oM  | 3 ♥ =<br>3+ oM |
| <b>4-min</b>   | 3♣<br>3♠/4om<br>= splinter<br>4M =<br>5-4-2-2  | 3♢<br>4om/4♥<br>= splinter<br>4M =<br>5-4-2-2 | 3 M  | 3 M      | 3 M  | 3 M            |
| <b>4-max</b>   | 3♣<br>4m =<br>4-5-2-2  | 3♢<br>4m =<br>4-5-2-2                         | 2 NT   | 3 ♥      | 3 M+1  | 3 M+1          |
| <b>Notes</b>   | "short" (3-min & 3-max combined responses) and "balanced" are undefined; 0-1 cards assuming opener has at least a doubleton? Complicated; finds 3 NT with 4-4 fit; not as good as Cooper at avoiding 3NT without stoppers. |   | Basic: "Next step asks shortness". Preferred: "Next step asks shortness if opener had 4-card support, but asks for unstopped suits if opener had 3-card support". Low-middle-high (LMH) responses. |          | To avoid problems, responder must instead use 3 NT with 4 cards & both side suits stopped; must instead use 2 NT over hearts with 4-4 majors. "xxx opposite xxx plays 3 NT." |                |

\*2 NT shows 4-4 majors over 2 ♡.

### After Minor Suit Opener Raises Responder's Major Suit – Part 2

| Standard  |                | Cooper  | Bethe  |
|---|----------------|---|--|
| Only a new suit is forcing [optional: 3 m forcing].<br><br>Only 3 M (invitational) promises more than 4 trumps. | <b>Inquiry</b> | 2 NT  | 2 NT   |
|   | <b>Other</b>   | Sets M as trump; natural  | game or slam try.  |
|   | <b>3-min</b>   | 3 m   | Below 3M natural & non-forcing.                                |
|   | <b>3-max</b>   | 3 x = this stopper<br>3 NT = <i>no</i> side stop                            | 3 NT   |
|   | <b>4-min</b>   | 3 M   | 3 M  |
|   | <b>4-max</b>   | 4 x = splinter  | Above 3 NT.  |
|   | <b>Notes</b>   | Typical 4-max is undefined; 4 M?<br>"Easy to remember and works very well." | Better 3-level partscores, not as good as Cooper for stoppers. |

### References

1. "Spiral Raises," Gavin Wolpert (Kitty Munson Cooper, Paul Bethe, et. al.), 2010, <http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/spiral-raises/>.
2. "Dutch Spiral," Jan Jansma, 2019, <http://bridgewinners.com/article/view/dutch-spiral/>.
3. *Commonsense Bidding*, William S. Root, 1986, pp. 58-59.