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EZ-EXPERT BIDDING TOOLS

**FOR
DUPLICATE BRIDGE**



Second Edition

Pete Matthews Jr

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PETE MATTHEWS JR

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Foreword

This book is for duplicate bridge players looking to step up their bidding game. Properly learning your partnership's choices from these tools should provide a substantial return on your effort.

The book started out as a gathering of articles from my web site and some new material. I planned to polish up my best bidding tools and recommend that you play them. I would include variations and competing ideas, but recommend few. Reality intervened.

Competing tools are often worthy contenders, so the top two or more may be presented, for your partnership to make a choice. Some tools and options are better for matchpoints, some for IMPs. Some are easier to learn and remember, but others cover more situations. There are trade-offs to be made. This book helps you to choose the best quality tools for *your* partnership.

Make it better! If you find a way this book could be better, please let me know at PETE.3NT@GMAIL.COM. Errata will be posted on the web, and I acknowledge my sources – get yourself into print, in a future edition. This is not for profit – let's have the best book we can!

The tools. Some of the tools in the book are highlighted on the back cover and last page. Discovering and solidifying new tools on your own is not easy. That work has been done for the tools in this book.

This book is not comprehensive. I only write about topics on which I have something important to say, or that provide a foundation or context for other topics. The reader is assumed to have basic knowledge – this is not a beginner book – and to be able to read further as needed. But do write me with questions.

Practice. Any time, without the book, write out the chart for a tool that you plan to play (a sample is on page 12). Then, when you have time, check your work against the book. This will improve your knowledge, even if you make mistakes. Practice bidding hands with your partner, using the deals provided on [HTTPS://3NT.XYZ/](https://3nt.xyz/) > Bridge > Practice. Ask me for deals that are not provided, if you need them. Research shows that rereading the text may only make the material

familiar. Testing and practicing should engage your mind and help to make these tools yours. (See Daniel Willingham’s article.)

References. Sources are credited only briefly in the text, so look them up in “References,” starting on page 311. My own articles upon which this book is based may contain far more detail, especially regarding alternatives, but this book has often progressed well beyond the articles. The PDFs for the articles and practice materials are available FREE on my web site, [HTTPS://3NT.XYZ](https://3NT.XYZ). Some newer articles did not make the cut for inclusion in the book.

Backstory & Alternatives. History, references, and prominent alternatives are presented at the end of each major section, as needed. They are in a smaller, different font, not so much to save space, as to make it easier to keep within the primary material.

Example deals are often from the *Bridge Bulletin*, the official publication of the American Contract Bridge League, where there is further discussion. I encourage looking them up, as noted in “References.” Note that scoring in “The Bidding Box” is matchpoints.

Personal pronouns. This book is written primarily in the first-person plural – we should be in this together.

When referring to an unknown other person, such as partner, RHO or declarer, I insist on a gender-neutral pronoun. I extend the plural pronoun “they” and its plural constructions to this singular situation. So, I refer to a known person as what he wishes, what she wishes, or *what they wish*. I hope the reader finds this soon flows as smoothly *for them*, as I find it now does for me.

Style and links. This book mostly adheres to Richard Pavlicek’s excellent “Bridge Writing Style Guide.”

For reading the ebook, which is a replica of a PDF, an endnote reference is a link, and the page number preceding the endnote is a link to get back. I did a full proof-reading of the book as a PDF in “landscape” mode using Adobe Reader on my Android phone. (These links, in both directions, are implemented with bookmarks in Word.)

Thanks to Gary Schwartz, my tournament partner for well over two decades. His final proofreading inspired major improvements.

Andrew Hanes and I explored the Unbalanced Diamond and Standard Modern Precision (SMP) systems, before returning to 2/1. We are the only pair I know that plays Tucker over 1 ♡. Thanks!

Thanks also to Stewart Rubenstein, Tim Hill, Al Muggia, Jim Negro, Richard Lee, Brian Duran, Eric Schwartz, Phyllis Rye, and other partners, past, present, and future, who have helped me to better understand and enjoy our wonderful game.

Thanks to the many contributors on Bridge Winners who have taken polls posted by me and others, and participated in lively discussions.

Thanks also to readers who commented on release candidates of the first edition: Andrew Hanes, Adam Wildavsky, Tom Breur, Jim Negro, Rod Roark, Mark Aquino, and Bob Lavin.

When it mattered most, my sister, Andrea Matthews, applied her prodigious technical editing skills to improve the consistency and presentation across the whole book. Thanks!

Huge thanks to my wife and bridge-widow, Karen, for her patience with this enormous project, and for help designing the cover – and thanks to my daughter, Morgan, for the cover art.

Rife with rules. I'm a rules kind of guy: make them, follow them, break them, change them; and this book is full of them. Gary pointed out that having a rule can be far superior to forgetting the theoretically best method.

Thanks for reading and discussing. I'm sure that you, reader, will agree there is good stuff here, but you and your partner may not agree about any given part. More than anything, this is a book for discussion between partners – perhaps in bits and pieces – to resolve issues this book addresses.

Dedication. This second edition is dedicated to **Jim Negro**, long-time friend, and bridge partner when I made life master.

Pete Matthews Jr – February 2025

Topic Format, Definitions, and Notation

Each of the many topics in this book is presented in a consistent format. The main text describes the recommended methods, including any examples. Alternatives or options are presented with checkboxes (○ = worthy or □ = recommended). Less important decision points are flagged with a diamond and note number (◇ⁿ). Otherwise, the main text should be relatively uncluttered.

Definitions

min/max Within a given range, a hand is minimum or maximum. For example, a minimum small opening hand refuses a limit raise, while a maximum small hand accepts.

Hands with opening strength (held by opener or responder):

Small A *small* hand would open the bidding, but would not initiate a game try – a hand of about 13 points.

Medium A *medium* hand would open the bidding and initiate a game try – a hand of about 16 points.

Large A *large* hand would open the bidding and drive toward game – a hand of about 19 points.

Further definitions:

Advancer is the partner of overcaller or takeout doubler. Advancer's action is an advance.

BBO Bridgebase Online (see References).

BPH By passed hand.

BWS *Bridge World Standard* (see References).

DJS Double jump shift.

EKB Exclusion keycard Blackwood.

GF Game-forcing.

GLM Grand Life Master: A winner of a world championship or qualifying North American Bridge Championship (NABC) event, who also has at least 10,000 ACBL masterpoints.

HCP	High card points.
JS	Jump shift.
LHO	Left-hand opponent.
Mixed raise	A constructive (2-winner or 10 SP) raise with an extra trump, often with its own bid.
RHO	Right-hand opponent.
RKB	Roman Keycard Blackwood.
SAYC	Standard American Yellow Card is a basic convention card, originally printed on yellow paper, published in 1988 by the ACBL. It's on BBO as ACBL SAYC, not SAYC.
SP	Support points: HCP plus distribution.

Notation

- \diamond^n This symbol flags a decision point explained in Alternative Methods below. See note number ($n-11$) at the end of the current topic. \diamond^n and (page) 11 are links!
- Check box for worthy choice or option.
- Check box for *recommended* worthy choice or option.
- A distribution given with dashes specifies suit lengths in any order. For example, 4-4-4-1 means any singleton. (The dashes may be omitted.)
- = A distribution with equal signs means the specific order given ($\spadesuit=\heartsuit=\diamondsuit=\clubsuit$), so 4=4=4=1 means a singleton club.
- () Parentheses are used to contain part of a distribution. For example, 1=3=(5-4) means one spade, three hearts, and 5-4 minors, either way. Within an auction, parentheses enclose (a bid made by an opponent).
- [] Brackets enclose a comment about a call within an auction.
- { } Braces enclose an auction or partial auction, such as { 1 \spadesuit - 2 \spadesuit ; ? }, when it is in line with text.

- M A capital M indicates the first major shown.
- oM The other major.
- m A lower case m indicates the first minor shown.
- om The other minor.

Sample bidding chart. The Jacoby 2 NT response to a major suit opening shows at least 4-card support and game-forcing values. This chart shows basic continuations (see improvements on page 78):

O2	R2	Basic Continuations to Standard Jacoby 2 NT
3 ♣		Singleton or void in clubs.
3 ♦		Singleton or void in diamonds.
3 M		No shortness, large hand.
3 oM		Singleton or void in the other major.
3 NT		No shortness, medium hand.
	4 M	No slam interest (small hand).
4 ♣		5-card suit, two of top three honors.
4 ♦		5-card suit, two of top three honors.
4 ♥		[spades trump] 5-card suit, two of top three honors.
4 M		No shortness, small hand (fast arrival).

The O2 column shows possible actions at opener's second turn. Similarly, the R2 column shows responder's second action. The title of the chart fills out the end of the top line.

Key Features

- This section hits the highlights of the topic.
- If you are just exploring, seek out this section.

Backstory

This section contains history and references – in a smaller, different font.

♦ Alternative Methods

ⁿ⁻¹¹ **Decision point.** This section contains a brief discussion of competing methods and opinions, flagged ♦ⁿ on page 11 – again in a smaller font.

The smaller font saves a little space, but is mostly so that the reader can easily distinguish the primary material from supplementary sections.

1. General Principles and Tools

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Two-over-One Game Force

Most advanced duplicate bridge players in North America play that an opening bid in a major suit promises at least five cards in the suit, and that a two-over-one response forces the auction to game. \diamond^1 This system is called *two-over-one*, or simply *2/1*. If you are not playing 2/1, your time would be better spent learning it, rather than reading this book. Much of this book assumes that you are already playing 2/1.

However, this chapter has good information for everybody: general principles, a variety of information you will need for the rest of the book, and bidding tools that don't fit within a single chapter.

The Balanced-Hand Ladder

Let's start with a softball. We play a ladder such as this for opening the bidding on balanced hands:

HCP	Bidding Plan
12–14	Open one of a suit, and rebid 1 NT.
15–17	Open 1 NT.
18–19	Open one of a suit, and rebid 2 NT.
20–21	Open 2 NT.
22–24	Open 2 \clubsuit , and rebid 2 NT.
25+	Open 2 \clubsuit , and rebid 3 NT (or other system).

Backstory

Harold Vanderbilt developed the game of *contract bridge* in the fall of 1925. With the cachet of the Vanderbilt name, it quickly superseded whist, auction bridge, and other variants. Ely Culbertson was the first prominent American contract bridge professional. His method of hand evaluation was *honor tricks*, which are modern *quick tricks* (page 18), augmented a little for lesser honors and distribution. Strong players still consider hands that are rich in quick tricks to be superior.

After World War II, Charles Goren promoted Milton Work's 4–3–2–1 method, which he called *Point-Count Bidding* (the title of his sixth book, in 1949). The Culbertson and Goren systems both opened four-card major suits.

In the 1950s, Alvin Roth, playing with Tobias Stone, developed a system that included sound opening bids, five-card majors, 1 NT forcing, 2/1 almost

forcing to game, negative doubles, weak two bids, 2 ♣ opening forcing to game, weak jump overcalls, and unusual 2 NT. Roth-Stone foretold of modern 2/1 methods, but had little impact on Goren's popularity.

In 1957, Edgar Kaplan and Alfred Sheinwold employed their system to finish first and second in the annual ACBL masterpoint race. Their subsequent book describes the Kaplan-Sheinwold (K-S) system, which is still in occasional use in North America. Most prominent of many distinctive features was the use of the weak 1 NT opening (12–14 HCP or AK-A), and sound minor-suit openings (a rebid in notrump promised 15–17 HCP). Their 2/1 was forcing to game, unless responder rebid their suit. *The Bridge World* web site is the repository of Edgar Kaplan's final K-S system.

Starting with Roth-Stone methods, Richard Walsh developed a system in the 1960s sometimes called *Western Scientific*. Max Hardy formalized this work in *Five Card Majors – Western Style* (1974 & revisions); Hardy's final version is two books, *Standard* and *Advanced Bridge Bidding for the 21st Century*. I refer to Hardy's books repeatedly in my writing.

More basic texts include Paul Thurston's superb presentation and the popular offering by Audrey Grant and Eric Rodwell. The content of both left something to be desired, when I was thinking of teaching 2/1 to my adult son, but either might set you up well for this book.

◆ Alternative Methods

¹⁻¹⁵ **Eastern Scientific** is based on K-S (see above), but with a strong 1 NT opening; responder's 2/1 is forcing to game, unless the suit is rebid. While Gary Schwartz and I have been playing these methods since the mid-90s, I do not recommend them for anyone not already comfortable with K-S or Eastern Scientific. The added complexity provides only modest gains. Described in my article "Almost 2/1," these methods work well with the tools in this book.

Hand Evaluation

We don't just evaluate a hand at the start of the bidding, and use that for the whole hand. Stuff happens, and we need to adjust. Here are some examples of stuff, and relative evaluations:

Stuff	Good	Bad
Partner bids a suit.	Length and fitting honors.	Short in the suit.
Opponent bids a suit.	Behind opponent: length and honors. In front: short.	In front of opponent: length and honors. Behind: short.

Length behind an opponent means that – beyond our honors being well placed – on offense or defense, partner may get to ruff behind the other opponent. Similarly, *shortness* behind an opponent who has not been raised means the other opponent may get to overruff us – and partner's honors will be poorly placed.

Point for point, the queen of partner's suit may be the best card in the deck. We should feel good when partner opens in our Q-x-x or even Q-x suit.

Watch for more of the many events that affect hand evaluation.

Bergen Rule of 20 \diamond^2

Marty Bergen's rule says to add the length of our two longest suits to our HCP. If the total is 20 or more, we open the bidding. This is a good rule, but it needs adjustment. Look at these hands:

1. ♠ A J 10 4 2 ♥ 7 3 ♦ A J 10 7 6 ♣ 5

Hand [1] is a great rule-of-20 opening, with 10 cards in the two long suits, and 10 HCP, for a total of 20. We could have an unbeatable 4 ♠ opposite ♠ K-x-x and ♦ K-x-x. In contrast, hand [2] is a mess:

2. ♠ J 10 7 4 2 ♥ A 3 ♦ J 10 7 6 5 ♣ A

The honors in hand [1] are all in the two longest suits, helping out the minor honors there. The aces in hand [2] are in the short suits, primed to capture air. We need most of the honors to be in the long suits. Hand [3] is a minimum rule-of-20 opening:

3. ♠ QJ 10 4 2 ♥ K 7 3 ♦ 6 ♣ A J 9 3

If partner has hearts, that king will be a joy. In contrast, hand [4] is not close to an opening bid, as the ♦ K is likely wasted:

4. ♠ QJ 10 4 2 ♥ 7 6 3 ♦ K ♣ A J 9 3

Properly applied, the rule of 20 defines a true opening hand. Don't sell the hand short later in the auction: it's not light.

Adjustments for Opening the Bidding

Three quick tricks. Add one point. Within each suit:

$$A = 1 \quad K = 1/2 \quad A+K = 2 \quad A+Q = 1 1/2 \quad K+Q = 1$$

Usually, we want two quick tricks to open the bidding, so if partner makes a penalty double, we can hold up our end. Having only 1½ makes hand [3] a marginal opening bid, but the ♠ 10 adds offense.

5. ♠ A K 4 ♥ 7 6 3 ♦ 10 9 3 2 ♣ A 9 3

Hand [5] is a Bergen 18. Even with three quick tricks, it falls short.

6. ♠ A K 4 ♥ 6 3 ♦ 10 9 3 2 ♣ A 9 7 3

Hand [6] is a Bergen 19. Adding a point for three quick tricks brings us to 20. Open 1 ♦, in any seat.

Fewer than two quick tricks. Subtract ½ to 1 point.

Spade suit. According to this old rule, add one point for a spade suit, which is a competitive advantage. Apply this rule as a final decider, or in second seat. (Partner would pass out a decent hand in fourth seat, holding 14 or fewer Pearson points [HCP + spades].)

Singleton honor. Subtract 1 to 2 points – especially from a singleton honor for suit play with 4-4-4-1 distribution – even if a trick is established in the short suit, a discard may not be useful.

Honors in short suits – competition. In competition, honors in short suits argue for defending. On offense, the defenders will pick them off; on defense, the ignorance of declarer may work in our favor. When partner is silent and both opponents are bidding, it's worse: we discount these points, but they are removed from the pool of points that partner might hold; there are only 40 HCP in the deck.

No tweeners. There is no range between opening one of a suit and opening a weak two-bid in the suit. Don't pass – pick one – but...

Two flaws. Avoid an action with two flaws, which creates two ways to lose. For example, some partnerships allow opening 1 NT with a singleton high honor in a suit, which might land us in an undesirable contract. We might also open 1 NT with a 5-card major, which could cause us to miss a good fit in that major. Don't open 1 NT with both.

7. “Mike’s Bridge Lesson” (2), May 2023 *Bulletin*:

Matchpoints, both vulnerable:

♠ 6 5 4 2 ♥ A 5 3 ♦ K 4 2 ♣ Q J 4

West	North	East	South
	1 ♠	Pass	?

Lawrence chose 2 ♠, a bid for which I have sympathy. It's surely more attractive than a limit raise. However, 2 ♠ has two flaws: ten HCP and four trumps. Declarer made 4 ♠, holding:

♠ Q J 8 7 3 ♥ 8 ♦ A Q 7 ♣ K 9 8 3

The fourth spade might be used to ruff the fourth club; depriving the opponents of that trump means that they are less likely to engineer a ruff. Look at the perfection of this fit: declarer has two tricks in the minors, on average. Dummy comes down, and now there are five!

Instead of 2 ♠, we should find a bid between that and a 4-card limit raise, either a mixed raise, or start with 1 NT (a 3-card limit raise). I'm a fan of the latter with a hand like [7].

Two ways to win. The flip side of two flaws is having extra ways to win. For example, suppose the opponents are bidding hearts and we are bidding spades. The opponents bid 4 ♥, and we have to choose between pass, double, and 4 ♠. Bidding has multiple ways to win:

- We might make 4 ♠, or it might be a good save. Sometimes the finesse that makes or sinks 4 ♥ may sink or make 4 ♠.
- The opponents may bid 5 ♥ – either to make or save – and go down there.

Don't Buy a Problem

Some hand shapes are likely to be difficult to bid. In these cases, don't open the bidding on minimum values.

8. ♠ 7 ♥ A K 6 3 ♦ 10 9 3 ♣ A 9 6 5 3

Hand [8] is a Bergen 20. Adding a point for three quick tricks brings us to 21, yet we should pass with this hand. Odds are, if we open 1 ♣, partner will respond 1 ♠. What now? We are not strong enough to reverse into 2 ♥, our clubs are too anemic to rebid, and we absolutely must not rebid 1 NT (see the rule, page 107). Why buy a problem on this minimum hand? Instead, we hope for an opponent to bid spades, so we can double.

Turn the ♣ 5 into the ♣ K, and we must open – fortunately, then we can stand to rebid our clubs.

9. ♠ 7 ♥ A K 6 3 ♦ 10 9 5 3 ♣ A 9 6 3

A singleton spade can be a problem with a 4-4-4-1 hand as well. As with hand [8], we pass with hand [9]. If the opponents bid spades, we have a fine takeout double.

Turn the ♦ 5 into the ♦ K, and we must open – bid 1 ♦, planning to rebid 2 ♣. We'd prefer to have five diamonds and four clubs for this, but at least we won't hate a diamond preference from partner.

10. ♠ 7 4 ♥ A 6 ♦ K 10 9 3 ♣ A K 9 6 3

All these considerations apply to hands with four diamonds and five clubs, with 2-2 or 3-1 shape in the majors. On must-open hand [10], plan to rebid in clubs after opening 1 ♦ (my preference) or open 1 ♣ and rebid clubs.

False preference. Because the 1 ♦ opener may have any strength below a jump shift for a 2 ♣ rebid, keeping the bidding open can be important. Make a false preference to 2 ♦ with:

11. ♠ Q 8 6 3 2 ♥ K 7 2 ♦ K 4 ♣ 10 7 2

but pass to assure at least a 4-3 fit with almost no chance for game:

12. ♠ Q 8 6 3 2 ♥ K 7 2 ♦ J 4 ♣ 10 7 2

The New Gadget

Don't agree to play a method, just because it is easy to describe, until both partners understand the details. My article, "Tucker over One Heart," provides an example of a great-sounding idea that needed lots of work to be playable.

Key Features

- Hand evaluation should change as information is gained from the auction.
- Use the Bergen rule of 20 *appropriately*, to define the minimum for a true opening bid.
- Add a point for three quick tricks, and in a pinch or second seat, for a spade suit.
- Subtract a point or two before counting a singleton honor.
- Subtract up to a point for fewer than two quick tricks.
- No hand lies between an opening bid and a weak two-bid.
- Avoid an action with two flaws; look for two ways to win.
- With a difficult hand shape, avoid opening the bidding on bare minimum values.
- Don't buy a problem!

◆ Alternative Methods

²⁻¹⁷ **Other Bergen Rules.** For more aggressive openings, such as when playing Precision, simply use a lower Bergen number.

Games and Slams

Heavy Invites, Light Accepts

An invitation should be just that. Sometimes we accept, and sometimes we decline. However, it makes a difference when we choose to invite or accept. Experts often use heavy invites and light accepts, to reduce the chance of going down when the invitation is refused. \diamond^3 This plan is designed for invitations at 2 NT or higher, but we don't need to change it when the invitation can be declined below 2 NT. The intent is to accept about 75% of the time. For most of the book, we assume heavy invites with this general rule:

Rule: *Refuse an invitation only with a dead minimum.*

Heavy invites and light accepts.

Medium invites and accepts.

Example:

Over a typical 1 NT opening showing 15 to 17 HCP (or a good 14), only invite 3 NT with a decent 9-count. Opener then accepts with a good 15 HCP or better.

Odds for Game and Slam

The preferred odds for bidding a game or slam depend on:

- The odds of the contract making, and
- What happens at other tables.

The decision to bid on or stop may also be affected by soft factors such as the bidding, skill, and table presence.

All other factors being equal. At matchpoints, the break-even point is 50%: we want to be in game if we would make it more than half the time, and to stop short if we would go down more than half the time. The closer the odds are to 50%, the more the choice resembles a coin toss. (Readers of this book may prefer bidding close games, hoping to capitalize on their superior declarer play!)

At IMPs, the break-even point varies with the vulnerability and whether the decision is for a game, small slam, or grand slam:

	Push to Game	Push to Slam	Push to Grand
Not Vul	45.5%	50.0%	56.0%
Vulnerable	37.5%	50.0%	56.7%

IMP conclusions. In a team game, the opponents are often faced with the same decision, where they will have the same odds as we do. Small slams are a 50% proposition. We talk about grand slams soon.

Better than 40% is a sensible goal for bidding a vulnerable game, because the listed odds do not consider the possibility of going down two, possibly doubled. If both partners are aggressive, we can wind up in bad games. Whether playing heavy invites (where only inviter can get more aggressive), or medium invites, here is our rule:

Rule: *Vulnerable at IMPs, invite game medium, and accept light.*

When *nonvulnerable*, undertricks will usually be inconsequential, so we want to bid all those games that are almost 50% (or better). Playing heavy invites, the same rule applies, but invite a touch heavier than medium; the light accepts are unchanged.

Matchpoint conclusions. As with many considerations, the odds are more complicated at matchpoints, as they depend so much on what happens at other tables. To the extent that everyone faces the same decision, matchpoint games and slams are a 50% proposition.

Grand slams. Events at other tables are prominent for a grand slam. Suppose half the field plays in game, and half bids and makes a small slam. Bidding the small slam wins 75% of the matchpoints on the board. Bidding a grand slam on this deal, and being wrong, costs us 75%. Stopping in the small slam and being wrong costs us only 25%. We need at least 3:1 odds (75%) to balance the actual risks. (See Kit Woolsey's superb *Matchpoints* for more about matchpoint strategy and "cost of being wrong" analysis.)

Grand slams can be hard to bid accurately, and it turns out that the hypothetical analysis above is generally appropriate. The goal for a grand slam should be 75% or better. A grand slam is inflexible. We cannot lose a trick to rectify the count, execute a throw-in, fork an opponent, or duck to establish a long suit; we need all the tricks. Ideally, we should count 13 tricks, but that's too limiting. It's right to

bid a grand slam when we can count 12 tricks, and the bidding suggests two or three prospects for a 13th.

Rule: *We don't bid speculative grand slams.*

Game over slam. An ambiguous bid should be assumed to be searching for the best game, rather than trying for slam. We should also design our system to put game-bidding first.

Further Considerations

Strain over level. At matchpoints, finding the correct strain may be sufficient to assure a good score.

1. Playing fragment spiral (page 125), as responder, we hold:

♠ Q 10 7 2 ♥ 6 5 ♦ K J 7 4 ♣ A 10 5

Opener

1 ♦

2 ♠

3 ♣ [3 ♠, max, ♣ fragment]

Responder

1 ♠

2 NT [fragment spiral inquiry]

?

Hearts are wide open, so we are not playing 3 NT. Our main choices are 3 ♦, 3 ♠ and 4 ♠, since our bare minimum is unlikely to be sufficient to make 5 ♦. The heart shortness is duplicated, a bad fit. With about 24 HCP between us, we might try 4 ♠ vulnerable at IMPs, but even that is aggressive. Otherwise, the safe bid at IMPs is 3 ♦ – partner has at least four.

At matchpoints, 3 ♠ making three (+140) beats 3 ♦ making four (+130), so making 3 ♠ should earn a good score. Pushing to 4 ♠ would risk that score, trying to win the board a second time.

♠ K 9 2 ♥ 3 2 ♦ A Q 10 3 ♣ K Q 9 3

Visualize opener with this fine hand. With three top losers, 4 ♠ is a bad bargain, but 3 ♠ could earn a top – or a heart attack could kill it.

Raise of a second suit. A raise of partner's second suit promises 4-card support.

Hand sizes. The foundation of standard American bidding is:

opening bid + opening bid = game

Rewriting this using the small-medium-large terms defined in “Topic Format, Definitions, and Notation” on page 10:

small hand + small hand = game

Slam zone. We are in the slam zone when we think we might have at least a 50% chance of making a slam. Here are two prominent cases:

large hand + small hand = slam zone.

medium hand + medium hand = slam zone.

In the first case, the holder of the large hand can usually take charge, after finding out partner has opening values. The second case is more difficult. Either partner may be asking themselves, does partner have a small hand, or extra values? It sometimes comes down to a guess – and guessing wrong can mean a missed slam or getting too high. To help with this “medium-medium” problem, look for a way to announce a medium hand!

Of course, freak distribution and great fits can put us into the slam zone with less strength. That brings me around to Culbertson’s rule:

Rule: *Invite a slam (i.e., make a slam try), if a perfect minimum holding for partner will make it a laydown.*

For Culbertson’s rule to apply, we are talking about cashing tricks on common distribution – no extra values, finesses, or 3-3 splits.

2. “The Bidding Box” (8), February 2023 *Bulletin*.

West

♠ A J 6 4
♥ 9 7
♦ A 10 6 5
♣ A 7 4

East

♠ K Q 3
♥ A J 8 2
♦ J
♣ K Q J 9 6

Our auction 1:

1 ♦
2 ♠ [natural, not 5 ♦]
3 ♣ [natural, ♥ issue]
4 ♥ [0 or 3 keycards]
5 NT [no side king]

2 ♣ [forcing to game]
2 NT [natural]
4 ♦ [RKB, ♣ trump]
5 ♦ [king ask, have all KCs]
6 ♣

East has a misfit for opener's suit, but a fine suit, extra HCP, and a spade fit – surely enough to sustain a contract of 4 NT, if necessary. This is a large hand.

The top matchpoint contract of 6 ♠ might be reached:

Possible auction 2:

1 ♠		2 ♣	[forcing to game]
2 ♠	[spade suit]	2 NT	[small or large hand]
3 ♣	[natural, ♥ issue]	3 ♠	[3-card support]
4 ♠		4 NT	[RKB, ♠ trump]
5 ♠	[0 or 3 keycards]	5 NT	[king ask, have all KCs]
6 ♠	[no side king]	Pass	

All of a resource. When personally holding A-K-Q of trump or all four aces, bid more aggressively. Holding no aces or no top trumps, bid more conservatively. If we do hold all of a resource, and partner bids aggressively, full speed ahead!

Ace or king in a 2/1 suit. We avoid making a 2/1 response in a suit not containing the ace or king, especially when opener's major suit is likely to be trump. When we get to Serious 3 NT, on page 97, we'll see that our cue-bid of our own suit promises two of the top three honors – we have no way to show or deny a control in our suit, so the 2/1 should supply one.

3. “The Bidding Box” (7), February 2023 *Bulletin*.

West	East
♠ A Q J 9 8 7 4	♠ K 10
♥ 2	♥ Q 8 7 4
♦ A 10 3	♦ K J 9
♣ K 4	♣ A Q 9 7

Our auction:

1 ♠		2 ♣	[forcing to game]
3 ♠	[sets ♠ trump]	3 NT	[serious slam interest]
4 NT	[RKB]	5 ♥	[2 keycards w/o the Q]
6 ♠		Pass	

The ♣ K-4 is wonderful opposite partner's likely ace in the 2/1 suit. With controls all around, it's worth upgrading this marginal spade

suit to set trump and imply slam interest. Holding two fabulous spade honors, East qualifies to show serious slam interest, ... easy.

Our auction 2:

1 ♠		2 ♣	[forcing to game]
2 ♠	[catch-all]	3 NT	[balanced, medium hand]
6 ♠	[we should have a play]	Pass	

If West rebids 2 ♠, fog rolls in, unless East shows medium values. Trumps have not been set, so 4 NT by opener would be natural.

Doubts about 3 NT. When exploring for a notrump game:

- With two suits in doubt, we bid the stopper we have, implying doubt about the other suit.
- With one suit in doubt, bidding it asks for a stopper in that suit – in desperation, for half a stopper (Q-x or J-x-x). When an opponent shows a long suit or a fit, that is the one suit.

❑ Double of own-suit cue-bid denies a strong suit.

The double of the cue-bid in his or her own suit by opener or overcaller *denies a strong suit* and suggests leading something else. The double does promise length, lest an opponent redouble. (Changing the normal lead is a useful message; doubling to show strength gives the opponents information and more bids.)

❑ The weakest call, in traffic, is a forced-to bid.

When we have a fit, are forced to a specific level, and the opponents compete, bidding our suit at the forced level is the weakest call. \diamond^4

4. ♠ A Q 3 2 ♥ 9 2 ♦ J 10 3 2 ♣ K 10 8

West	North	East	South
------	-------	------	-------

	Pass	Pass	1 ♠
--	------	------	-----

Pass	2 ♦ *	2 ♥	?
------	-------	-----	---

* Diamond Drury, 3-card limit raise

We open the bidding in third seat, and partner shows a 3-card limit raise. When RHO sticks in a 2 ♥ bid, our weakest action is 2 ♠. Having opened light, that's what we do on hand [4]. We certainly do not want to offer West the option to bid 2 ♠!

5. ♠ A 7 5 3 2 ♥ Q 2 ♦ J 10 3 ♣ K Q 8

With hand [5] instead of hand [4], we have no interest in game, but we have five spades and a full opening bid, so we pass. Partner may wish to contest the partscore – or make a “do something intelligent” (DSI) double – if the opponents bid again. With a better hand, we could try for or jump to game.

Take the money at IMPs. When investigating game with balanced hands, and an opponent sticks in a bid at the three level, a penalty double is likely best. For example, vulnerable at IMPs, we hold:

♠ A 8 5 3 ♥ J 9 6 ♦ Q 9 6 ♣ A K 8

We open 1 ♣ and partner jumps to 2 NT, invitational. Our 3 NT is automatic, but RHO bids 3 ♦ first. Our odds of making 3 NT have just gone down:

- We are not going to get help on the opening lead.
- RHO probably has entries along with a good suit.
- Suits, starting with diamonds, won't be breaking well.

Back in the day, I did a major study of this deal: it's right to double, unless we are absolutely certain RHO has seven diamonds.

Simon's Rule. Paraphrased from S. J. Simon's excellent book:

***Rule:** When the balance of the evidence indicates a misfit, stop bidding.*

Buttinski has 8 HCP:

***Rule:** When only the opponents are in the bidding, a non-jump action promises at least 8 HCP.*

The Buttinski rule provides a protective floor and is not permission to bid on garbage. It applies to bids that could provide solid values:

- An overcall.
- A two-suited bid.
- A reopening double or overcall.
- A lead-directing double.

6. "It's Your Call" (2), December 2023 *Bulletin*. Matchpoints. North-South vulnerable.

♠ 7 ♥ A 10 5 3 2 ♦ J 8 9 7 6 ♣ Q 5

West North East South
2 ♠ Pass Pass ?

11 of 15 panelists passed, a strong indication that actual high card values are needed to enter the auction. (There were also three doubles and a Michaels adventure.)

Violating the Buttinski rule turns partner into center-hand opponent! They may get us into big trouble, through a basic action. Board 4 is an example:

Board 4

West Deals

Both Vul

♠ K J 9 8 7 5
♥ J 10 8 5
♦ 10 9 4
♣ —

♠ 6 3	N W E S	♠ A Q 10
♥ 6 4		♥ K Q 9 7 2
♦ A 6 2		♦ K Q J
♣ Q J 10 9 8 5		♣ 7 3

♠ 4 2
♥ A 3
♦ 8 7 5 3
♣ A K 6 4 2

EW 3N; EW 4♣; EW 2♥; W 2♦; W 1♠; E 1♦;
Par -600: EW 3N=

West	North	East	South
	<i>Buttinski</i>		<i>CHO</i>
Pass	Pass	1 NT	Pass
2 ♠	Dbl	3 ♣	Dbl
All pass			

CHO expects the magic +200 score at matchpoints. CHO takes four tricks, when declarer mistakenly shortens dummy's trumps, but

Buttinski takes none. Buttinski can see this coming, as CHO's double implies a poor spade fit. Being vulnerable, any bid by Buttinski should be doubled and set at least 800, so there is no place to hide.

Key Features

- Invite heavy and accept light. At IMPs, invite games medium.
- Other considerations being equal, bid a game or small slam at matchpoints when it is better than 50%. However, results at other tables can change these odds substantially.
- At IMP-scored teams, bid small slams when better than 50%; bid vulnerable games when better than 40%; and bid nonvulnerable games when almost 50% or better.
- At any form of scoring, bid grand slams at 75% or better (perhaps more aggressively at high-level teams). Don't bid speculative grand slams.
- Build a system and resolve ambiguities to prioritize bidding game over slam.
- Finding the correct strain can be more important than the correct level, at matchpoints.
- The raise of a second suit promises 4-card support.
- The slam zone commonly consists of a small (normal opening) hand plus a large hand, or two medium hands, the latter often being harder to bid. Announce or deny a medium hand, if possible.
- For 2/1 response, especially when the final contract is likely to be in opener's suit, have the ace or king in the suit.
- For 3 NT, with two suits in doubt, bid the stopper we have; with one suit in doubt, bidding that suit asks for a stopper (half a stopper in a pinch).
- Opener's double of a cue-bid in the opening suit shows length, but weakness; it suggests leading something else.
- If we have a fit and are forced to a level, the forced-to bid is weakest in traffic.
- Take the money at IMPs.
- When the balance of the evidence indicates a misfit, stop bidding.
- Buttinski has 8 HCP.

Backstory

GLM Adam Wildavsky noted errors in the rough odds I was using, so I created this spreadsheet to calculate the actual odds above for games and slams. He also recommended “invite heavy and accept light” and the Bridge Winners article quoted below. “Yes, I think this is popular among experts. Some are instead in the ‘light invite, light accept’ camp. It makes little sense *a priori*, but their experience with typical defenders means it leads to good results!”

Break-Even Risk-Reward Odds at IMPs		Push to Game		Push to Slam		Push to Grand	
		Opps	Us	Opps	Us	Opps	Us
Not Vul	Push Makes	170	420	480	980	980	1510
	Our Net		250		500		530
	Our IMPs		6		11		11
	Push Fails	140	-50	450	-50	980	-50
	Our Net		-190		-500		-1030
	Our IMPs		-5		-11		-14
	Break Even Odds		45.5%		50.0%		56.0%
Vul	Push Makes	170	620	680	1430	1430	2210
	Our Net		450		750		780
	Our IMPs		10		13		13
	Push Fails	140	-100	650	-100	1430	-100
	Our Net		-240		-750		-1530
	Our IMPs		-6		-13		-17
	Break Even Odds		37.5%		50.0%		56.7%

Mike Nelson pointed out that Jeff Rubens quoted Culbertson’s rule in his *Secrets* book; I found it on page 44. However, I got it from Bill Placek in college; we graduated in 1970, after the hardcover *Secrets* was published, but before my paperback copy was printed. Bill did not say where he got the idea, which he phrased differently, and I assumed he had figured it out himself. The idea is obvious, once we hear it; good ideas grow in multiple places.

My “Anatomy of a Bridge Deal” article studies the “take the money” deal.

The Buttinski rule is mine.

◆ Alternative Methods

³⁻²² **Invite heavy and accept light.** “Only inviter may stretch,” a sensible-sounding plan that I used to share, was proven inferior on Bridge Winners (in comments to a posting by Ron Steele):

Mike Nelson: Conservative invites and aggressive accepts result in fewer 2NT and 3M contracts. These contracts are never optimal in uncontested auctions.

Michael Hargreaves: This is exactly right. Assuming that there will be as many hands on which the inviter could stretch as there are hands on which acceptance of an invite would be a stretch, both philosophies (light invite, sound acceptance/sound invite, light acceptance) will reach the same number of games, with equivalent chances of success. They will each miss the same number of games, again with equivalent chances of success. They will miss different games...not better or worse, on average. They will reach slightly different games...most games will be bid by both styles, but the ones they miss will be different.

So, there will be no net gain nor loss, on balance, to either approach.

The difference between the two styles arises from the fact that the light inviters get to the three level on hands where the sound inviters stay at the two level (in a major suit contract). Also, the light inviters will reach 2N when the sound inviters stay in 1N (or 2 minor, etc.).

Now, when one player has some extras and the other does not, the 3 level will often and usually work out, but it will sometimes fail. There is no penalty for being in 2S making 3. There is a penalty for being in 3S making 2.

That's the difference between the two styles.

I had a long discussion with my current partner about this. I think the most important point is to understand that the invite heavy, accept light, is not a conservative style, any more than invite light, accept sound is an aggressive style and the differences between the two are subtle. As an advocate of the former style, I'd guess that I don't invite on maybe 5-10%, at most, of the hands on which the latter style would invite.

Daniel Zenko: Agree, the meta rule should be: "decline invite only with dead minimum" meaning heavy invites/light accepts is way to go.

4-27 Weakest call in traffic. Many partnerships have no specific agreement, and fall back on a default of pass being weakest. This is only a good plan, if we fear that we are about to get doubled and go for a number – that is, forcing to that level was a mistake. It seems nutty to play a system designed to recover from such a mistake. It also allows the opponents to cue-bid our forced-to bid; we should take that away from them.

However, I am told that the strongest player in New England plays that pass is weakest. Maybe change "mistake" to "aggressive bid?"

Having an agreement on this issue is important. Gary taught me to play that the forced-to bid is weakest. It works well – with other partners, too.

System-Building Decisions

Building a system requires trade-offs, in advance. Unlike in football, we don't get to "call an audible" to change the meaning of a bid. Coverage, frequency, and memory are important. The best tools win on the balance of these factors and more.

Example 1 – Jacoby Transfers:

♠ 9 5 2 ♡ A Q 9 6 3 ♢ 7 6 ♣ ? ? ? ?

Partner opens 1 NT. In the old days, depending on our club holding, we would choose from:

- 2 ♡ to play, or
- 3 ♡ forcing; opener bids 3 NT, or 4 ♡ with 3+ hearts.

Nowadays, we play Jacoby transfers, so our choices include:

- 2 ♢ 5+ hearts, planning to pass 2 ♡ (to play),
- 2 ♢ 5+ hearts, planning to bid 2 NT (invitational), or
- 2 ♢ 5+ hearts, planning to bid 3 NT (... 4 ♡ with 3+ hearts).

Coverage. The old natural responses did not include an invitation, although one could be handled through Stayman, consuming sequences there. Natural responses frequently wrong-side a heart contract, exposing opener's other suits to the opening lead.

Jacoby transfers provide the invitation without invading Stayman. We lose the natural 2 ♢ response (to play), but gain the 2 ♡ and 3 ♡ responses, for whatever purposes. Transfers frequently right-side a heart contract, protecting opener's other suits from the opening lead. However, a transfer is exposed to a lead-directing double.

Frequency. All three of the listed Jacoby sequences are common.

Memory. Jacoby transfers are not as easy to play as natural bids. Back in the day, we did not have much trouble learning them and remembering them in the heat of battle. Even beginners learn them now. Easy on the memory means easy to play.

Jacoby transfers are taken for granted now. Their flexibility provides substantial coverage for frequent issues, at minimal memory costs.

Absolute (Plan A) vs. Flexible (Plan B)

When there are serious choices to be made, we present them as plans A and B, with a checkbox (○=worthy or ◻=recommended), to pencil in a choice. Often, flexibility is a key to the issue. The absolute or less flexible choice will be Plan A, while the more flexible will be Plan B. Absolutes often come with a coverage cost – there may be some hands that cannot be bid properly. Flexibility may come with a memory cost – more complicated or less intuitive. Here are some examples, to be discussed in detail later in the book, with some costs:

Situation	Absolute	Flexible
Opener rebids their major, after 2/1	Promises 6+ cards: typical 5-3-3-2 must rebid 2 NT, regardless of stoppers.	Catch-all: harder to sort out 5-card vs. 6-card suit.
Fourth suit forcing (4SF)	To game: occasionally, responder may need to invite with 2 NT, regardless of stoppers.	One round (responder's subsequent bid at the three level forces to game).
{ 1 m – 1 M; 1 NT – ? } New minor forcing (NMF)	Two-way: cannot (offer to) play in two of opener's club suit.	One-way: opener jumps to force; responder bids as 4SF above; other issues.
Inverted raise to 2 of a minor	Forcing to 3 m: cannot play 2 NT, possibly worse for matchpoints.	Forcing to 2 NT or 3 m: opener rebids a stopper, not 2 or 3 NT, with game values.
Strong takeout-doubler's cue-bid	(1) Huge hand: quandary with 3-card support. (2) 3-card support: huge hand issues.	Usually 3-card support, but could be a huge hand: need to jump or cue-bid again, to show a huge hand.

Absolute methods are popular, being easier to learn. The best choice is the method the partnership agrees upon and then plays well.

Value of a Method

A system method may provide advantages (gains or benefits) and/or disadvantages (losses or liabilities) for events associated with the method. The *expected value* of the method depends on the frequency with which those events arise. If we knew the average value (v) and the frequency (f) with each type of system event, we could multiply v times f for each event, combine them, and we would have an estimate of the expected value of the method. We don't know these values, but we can make WAGs (wild-ass guesses) and work from there.

Example 1 (continued):

Let's guess that a Jacoby transfer will come up for our partnership once a session, on average. \diamond^5 Let's consider some events that might arise when the transfer comes up, with some WAGs on effects:

- 50% of the time, declarer plays the hand in the major suit. Breaking that down, maybe 25% = it's a true advantage that opener declares. 20% = does not matter. 5% = it would be an advantage for responder to declare.
- 30% of the time, responder bids 2 NT after the transfer, a sequence not available with natural responses, and half of that time (15%) it makes a difference.
- 2% of the time, an opponent doubles the transfer, and half of that time (1%) it hurts us.

We have laid it out, and we can try to calculate the results. Instead, back in the day, people said, hey, we are going to gain useful sequences and right-side a bunch of contracts; it won't happen often, but if they double our transfer, we'll work it out. It's clear that saying "hey" is a more than adequate justification for the convention, in this case. We should keep an eye on any new method: does it actually come up, does it work, are there additional things to consider?

At matchpoints, a reasonable estimate of a significant effect on the score is half a board, roughly 2% of the total score for the session. Examples include a system win (or loss), an error by any player, or when half the field bids and makes game, and half plays a partscore.

At IMPs, the value of such an event varies, and each deal has its own value. A slam swing could easily determine the result of a 7-board match, overshadowing all other results. As a result, methods that improve bidding and making slams are highly important at IMP scoring; partscore methods, not so much.

Cost of Changing

Any change to our system increases the chance of a mistake. A system that we know and play well is better than one that is technically superior, but that we mess up.

It's important to only make changes that will provide benefits that exceed the pain of the transition period – and it's possible that we'll never truly get the new method right.

Key Features

- Coverage, frequency, memory, and absolute vs. flexible are key issues related to adopting a bidding method.
- At matchpoints, all boards count the same. A typical swing is about half a board, or 2% of the score for a session. On frequency, partscores are more important than games, which are more important than slams.
- At IMPs, the value of a swing varies widely, with slams being most important, and games after that.
- Any change to a system must be learned and remembered. Mistakes will probably be made during the process.

◆ Alternative Methods

⁵⁻³⁵ **Simulations.** For the computer-savvy, simulations can easily calculate the frequency of various hands and deals, based on HCP, hand shapes, and more. Analyzing opening leads is also relatively straightforward. However, computer programs don't bid very well, and they range from mediocre to useless on methods that are not built in. The program has to handle all features of all the methods being compared. Simulations are beyond the scope of this book, but see my three articles in the references, or search the site for "simulation" – there are individual deals as well.

Jerry Scott wrote me about his many simulations. Some of them are on [HTTPS://WWW.MOBALABRIDGE.COM/](https://www.mobalabridge.com/). My writing has kept me away from them.

General Tools

Mixed Jump Raises

Experts have largely given up the weak jump raise. That bid encourages the opponents to bid, highlights shortness in the hand of an opponent's partner, and makes their declarer play easier.

Instead, after we open or overcall one of a suit, our default jump raise to the three level is mixed, a constructive raise with an extra trump. When we get to major suits, we'll see our official definition is two "winners," a doubleton, and 4-card support. Over a minor suit, the mixed raise shows the same strength, but at least five trumps are required over a possibly 3-card minor. Here are the prominent options over an opening bid or one-level overcall:

- All three-level jump raises by responder or advancer are mixed.
 - A three-level jump cue-bid is a mini-splinter: invitational 4-card raise including a singleton or void in the bid suit.
- All three-level jump raises by responder or advancer are mixed.
Exception: a jump cue-bid at the three level after partner's overcall is mixed, making the jump raise weak.
- Only jump raises of opening bids are mixed, with the exception above.
- Only jump raises of major suit opening bids are mixed, with the exception above.
- Only the exception above is mixed.

Jump Shifts by Responder and Advancer

There are lots of ways to play jump shifts. We are going to consider two of the best: fit-showing, and invitational with a good suit.

Weak jump shifts are easy to describe and minimize discussion. However, they don't help us much and can cause problems. If the partnership is currently playing weak jump shifts, a superior plan is invitational jumps shift responses to an opening bid, through 3 ♣. (We'll learn about the 3 ♣ cap, soon.)

Fit-Showing Jump (FSJ) – Default

For any jump shift response or advance of partner's overcall, our *default* meaning is fit-showing. This plan applies unless we have agreed on a specific exception. For simplicity, while discussing the FSJ, I'll use opener/responder to also mean overcaller/advancer.

A fit-showing jump shift (FSJ) typically provides:

- support for opener's suit,
- at least five cards in the bid suit, which contains *secondary honors*, with or without an ace, and
- game-invitational or slam-invitational (not game-only).

Exceptions: a jump shift into a suit shown by an opponent, above three of our suit, is a splinter, showing a singleton or void in the suit, with at least 4-card support. \diamond^6 We'll see other exceptions.

Responder may have slam interest for the FSJ when the opponents are silent and responder is an unpassed hand; this FSJ is forcing. \diamond^7 If responder is a passed hand or an opponent is in the bidding, the FSJ is strictly invitational and opener may pass.

The FSJ is our default.

FSJ only by a passed hand, or in competition.

No FSJ.

FSNJ (fit-showing non-jump).

We also play a fit-showing non-jump at the three level, when free-bid strength is logically impossible.

Over a minor suit, the FSJ promises at least 4-card support. When partner has bid a major suit, 3-card support is sufficient, and the major suit is trump. \diamond^8

A fit for the jump suit makes game likely, while a misfit suggests staying low. (A-x-x-x is a terrible FSJ suit, because that ace is working in any contract.) Hand [A], below, is a FSJ to 2 ♠ over 1 ♦.

With hand [1], opener jumps to 4 ♠. We might need a spade finesse, but if so, responder should have a side ace or king. On the actual cards, we have 10 tricks, once we get in. We only go down when the ♣ A is behind the king and they take their four tricks immediately.

Responder [A]

♠ K Q J 9 4
♥ 9 8
♦ K J 9 2
♣ 7 2

Opener [1]

♠ A 10 7
♥ 10 6 4
♦ A Q 8 7 3
♣ K 6

Opener [2]

♠ A 7
♥ 10 6 4
♦ A Q 7 3
♣ K 6 4 3

Opener [3]

♠ 10
♥ A J 10 3
♦ A Q 7 3
♣ K Q 10 9

With hand [2], we can choose to pass 2 ♠, when it is not forcing. Otherwise, we bid 3 ♦. Opener will always have either three cards in the major or four in the minor – check it out! Hand [3] is a misfit, but has enough strength to bash out 3 NT.

Competition

When the opening bid is doubled or overcalled in a suit, responder's jump shift is a fit-showing invitation. *Not a weak jump shift!*

Invitational Jump Shifts

The invitational jump shift described here is a response to an opening bid only. It shows a good suit of at least six cards in an invitational hand and denies a 4-card major. Think of this as a top-of-range weak two-bid with a good suit.

Three-Level Invitational Jump Shifts

Three-level jump shifts are sometimes known as “jump shifts under,” being lower-ranking than opener's suit. Over a 3 ♣ jump, both unbid suits are available at the three level to show a stopper for 3 NT. This is the essential invitational jump shift – it works well, and without it, we almost never have a good way to bid such a hand.

The invitational jump to 3 ♦ (over a major suit opening) does not work well, because 3 ♣ is gone. Two suits are at issue, so by our rule, the other major over 3 ♦ shows a stopper in the suit. As with opener's “Jump Rebid at 3 ♦” on page 165, we could play:

- **Ambiguous major.** Over responder's invitational 3 ♦, opener's repeat of their major is ambiguous, suggesting a stopper in clubs. Opener's subsequent removal of 3 NT to either of our suits shows six cards in the major with no side stopper – non-forcing – a specific exception to our rule in “Forcing to Game” on page 56.

Not 3 ♦ invitational is better. The 3 ♦ response is valuable as a limit raise, with standard Jacoby 2 NT. An invitational jump shift to 3 ♥ wastes more space and can be more obnoxious than 3 ♦.

○ Plan A – All Three-level Jump Shifts Are Invitational

□ Plan B – Three-level Invitational Jump Shift, Only in Clubs

Two-Level Invitational Jump Shifts

This option can let us play a refused invitation at the two level:

- **2 ♠ response to 1 ♥:** A good suit with invitational values.
- **Any two-level jump shift:** A good suit with invitational values.

Important: For any suit in which a two-level invitational jump shift is available, after a one level response in a suit, responder's three-level jump rebid in that suit is *forcing*. People forget this!

When the two-level jump shift is not a long-suit invitation, responder's three-level jump rebid in their suit is invitational.

Consider these auctions, where responder is always showing a suit of at least six cards:

- 1 ♦ – 2 ♥ [we agree 2 ♥ is invitational, perhaps:]
♠ 8 6 3 ♥ A Q J 7 5 2 ♦ 7 6 ♣ K 9
- 1 ♦ – 1 ♥
1 NT – 3 ♥ [then 3 ♥ is forcing with a good suit:]
♠ K J 3 ♥ A Q J 7 5 2 ♦ A 6 ♣ K 9
- 1 ♦ – 1 ♥
1 ♠ – 3 ♥ [3 ♥ is forcing with a good suit]
- 1 ♦ – 1 ♥
1 NT – 2 ♣ [1-way NMF]
2 ♦ – 3 ♥ [3 ♥ is forcing with a weaker suit]

On auction [b], responder's 3 ♥ should be a slam try. Since opener is limited with at least two hearts, responder would bid 4 ♥ without slam interest. In auctions [b & c], 3 ♥ should be agreed to mean: hearts are trump, start control bidding.

Competition

Invitational jumps are *off* in competition. We just bid our suit, showing at least constructive values. The action by the opponent means that we don't need to bid on junk, just to keep the bidding open. *We employ the fit-showing jump shift in competition.*

Unusual over Unusual

The unusual over unusual (U/U) convention may be employed when an opponent makes a 2-suited overcall and *both suits are known*. As commonly played, the lower cue-bid shows invitational or better values in the lower of our suit and the fourth suit; the higher cue-bid similarly shows the higher suit. This is a memorable but *inferior method*. Consider this auction, with some possible hands for opener:

1 ♥ – (2 NT) – 3 ♦ [spades] – (Pass); ?

1. ♠ K 6 3 ♥ A Q 7 5 2 ♦ J 7 ♣ K 9 5

With hand [1], we are pleased to bid 3 ♠. Whether responder passes or bids 4 ♠, we arrive in a sensible contract.

2. ♠ K 3 ♥ A Q 7 6 5 2 ♦ J 7 ♣ K 9 5

With hand [2], we have an easy 3 ♥ bid, showing extra heart length and denying primary spade support. We have clarity here, too.

3. ♠ K 3 ♥ A Q 7 5 2 ♦ J 7 6 ♣ K 9 5

With hand [3], we are in a quandary, with five hearts and two spades. Our hearts are nothing special, so we might judge to bid 3 ♠. That should be fine if responder has six spades. However, if we require responder to have six spades, then on hand [1], we cannot find a 5-3 spade fit. So, sometimes we'll play in a 5-2 spade fit with a better contract available. It's even worse, if we have hand [4]:

4. ♠ 9 3 ♥ A Q 7 5 2 ♦ K 7 6 ♣ K J 5

If we insist that 3 \diamond , the cue-bid commonly showing spades, promises game values, then we have an easy 3 NT bid on hand [4] – but then responder is prevented from inviting game with a 5-card spade suit.

Consider the 3 \clubsuit cue-bid, showing hearts in this common method. The intervening 3 \diamond bid is mostly wasted for us, but could easily help the opponents. Here is the superior method:

Rule: *In U/U, the cheaper cue-bid shows the fourth suit.*

1 \heartsuit – (2 NT [minors]) – ?

- Dble Penalty oriented, able to double at least one suit.
- 3 \clubsuit Invitational or better in spades, the fourth suit.
- 3 \diamond Invitational or better in hearts, partner's suit.
- 3 \heartsuit Competitive in hearts.
- 3 \spadesuit Competitive in spades (decent suit of 6+ cards).

Playing this way, instead of 3 \diamond , responder bids 3 \clubsuit to show a good hand with spades. With hands [1 & 2], we rebid a major as before. With hands [3 & 4], we rebid the now-available 3 \diamond . This denies both primary spade support and six hearts, kicking the problem back to partner. If responder bids 3 \heartsuit , we show our fine doubleton spade with hand [3] or pass with hand [4]. This is not perfect, but far superior to the common method over an opening bid of 1 \heartsuit .

An acceptable alternative to U/U is to use both cue-bids as raises of opener and the fourth suit as natural and forcing.

- We play U/U with the cheaper cue-bid showing the fourth suit.
- We play U/U with the lower cue-bid for the lower suit. [inferior]
- Both cue bids raise opener: bid the better high-card strength.

They have both majors (Michaels). Since we have minors, it makes more sense for either cue-bid to show a stopper for notrump.

Double. Whether playing U/U or not, a double of the 2-suited bid shows values and the ability to penalize at least one of their suits. I suggest that when only one suit is known, the double means to penalize either that suit or both of the possible second suits.

Only one suit known: U/U does not apply; the cue-bid of the known suit is a limit raise or better of opener's suit, as usual.

Penalty Doubles

Two down. Doubling when expecting a one-trick set is usually losing bridge. The penalty double should be based on a real hope for two down, avoiding disaster if something goes wrong.

One down when they are vulnerable at matchpoints. A double of a vulnerable partscore at matchpoints is a top or bottom bet – an expectation of setting the contract more often than not. This double may be necessary to protect (and improve) the positive score we expected in our own contract. However, when they are nonvulnerable, we need to set them two to obtain protection.

Thread-the-needle exception. If our contract would make less than 100 points, then down one, doubled, nonvulnerable, provides protection for that partscore. However, if pairs who played a partscore our way made 110 or 120, then 100 points is little protection – a risk taken for almost nothing.

Partscore doubled on high cards. When we double on high cards, a trump lead is often best and may be essential. With fewer high cards, declarer's main threats are ruffs in the short hand and a cross-ruff. A penalty double is attractive when we hate partner's suit.

Our contract. Our first priority is our contract. If we have a fit, doubling comes second. One of the riskiest actions is a penalty double holding undisclosed primary support for partner. Support with support!

♠ 6 4 2 ♥ 10 8 3 ♦ J 7 4 3 2 ♣ 10 6

2 ♣ 2 ♦ Dble* Pass * bad hand, by agreement

2 ♠ 3 ♦ ?

Partner's auction says we have at least nine tricks if we have a modest spade fit – support with support! Double would imply “hate spades,” and we only have *one* diamond trick. Partner's hand:

♠ K Q J 9 7 5 ♥ K J 3 ♦ – ♣ A K Q 8

We have a ruff for partner and the ♥ 10 assures a tenth trick.

Don't double the only contract we can set! Don't tell them to run – pigs wind up on the wrong end of the cleaver. Pass smoothly.

Backstory

Mixed Raises

Another option for the mixed raise is an artificial jump shift into a new suit, such as a Bergen constructive raise after one of a major. The opponents can double that bid easily for takeout: if they would rather not take it out, we probably cannot afford to leave it in! Our mixed jump to three of our major is more effective.

Marty Bergen first used the term *mixed raise*, specifically for a jump cue-bid, in his second volume (1986), page 108. Tom Breur wrote me, touting a one-under jump as mixed, "In fact, using the jump cuebid is considered evidence of being a dinosaur :-)" I advise against an exception for the jump cue-bid.

Jump Shifts by Responder and Advancer

In a copy of Stewart Rubenstein's notes for playing with Adam and Zach Grossack, I found that they play invitational jump shifts over a major suit only in spades and clubs. Good ideas grow in multiple places.

Gary Schwartz pointed out that playing a jump shift response as invitational means that responder's jump rebid is forcing – and is often forgotten. Some top pros in his area play all jump shifts invitational with their clients. That is a better plan than playing them all weak.

Board 12	♠ 4 3		
East Deals	♥ 6 4 3		
N-S Vul	♦ A K Q 9 7 3		
	♣ 5 4		
♠ K 10 9 5		♠ 8 7	
♥ K 9 7		♥ A Q 10 8 2	
♦ J 8 2		♦ 6 5	
♣ J 9 6		♣ 10 8 3 2	
		♠ A Q J 6 2	
		♥ J 5	
		♦ 10 4	
		♣ A K Q 7	
West	North	East	South
		Pass	1 ♠
Pass	3 ♦ ¹	Pass	?

¹ Good 6+ card suit, invitational.

Board 12, from an online matchpoint pairs game, demonstrates one way that responder's invitational jump to 3 \diamond can be a problem. Our agreement is that a bid of 3 \heartsuit would show a secure stopper, because two suits (hearts and clubs) are in doubt. Experts sometimes ignore clubs, so their bid of 3 \heartsuit would *ask* for a stopper; but we did not have that agreement. Still, if partner has \heartsuit Q-3-2, 3 NT should have play. That's what I bid. Good news – the opening lead was a “safe” diamond! I took 10 tricks, eschewing the spade hook.

Playing the ambiguous major, I would have bid 3 \spadesuit , implying a club stopper, and we would have played 4 \diamond .

Not playing the invitational jump, North would respond 1 NT, and we would rebid 2 \clubsuit . North would choose the invitational 3 \diamond . North could have bid 2 NT with a secure heart stop, but maybe not with Q-3-2. We could pass, or bid 3 \heartsuit , asking (since we have bid clubs on this auction, only the heart suit is in doubt). Either way, we play a diamond partial, making four on decent defense.

Responding 1 NT with this hand, North would have limited options over opener's potential 2 \heartsuit rebid. 2 \clubsuit (possibly 3 cards) is more likely than 2 \heartsuit .

We got a great score on board 12, as played, while “better” methods produce a ho-hum diamond partial. Luck trumps science, as usual. However, playing for luck elevates the chances of weaker players, at our expense.

Unusual over Unusual

U/U is not an important convention, but playing it properly can be important. As I recall, decades ago, Mike Lawrence wrote of using the cheaper cue-bid to show the 4th suit. In 1986, Marty Bergen recommended U/U with the cheaper cue-bid being a raise of opener, which suffers from the same problem over an opening 1 \heartsuit bid as the common method. Of course, if the opening bid is 1 \spadesuit , there is an intervening bid with all three methods.

♦ Alternative Methods

A great reference on the fit-showing jump shift, plus the fit-showing non-jump, is *Partnership Bidding at Bridge* by Robson & Segal.

⁶⁻³⁸ **FSJ vs. Splinter.** Once an opponent names a suit, it's less important to show shortness in an unbid suit. We prefer standard, natural game tries in these situations. In competition, pairs often play that responder's jump shift into an unbid suit is a splinter. We don't. The FSJ is our default, and we play it in unbid suits after an overcall, for example:

- e. "It's Your Call" (4), March 2023 *Bulletin*. In competition, we can get frisky with the FSJ:

♠ A 9 7 6 5 4 ♡ – ◇ Q J 8 5 4 ♣ 6 3

West	North	East	South
	1 ♠	2 ♡	?

This hand is great for a 4 ◇ FSJ.

Reverse Flannery. BWS (after our minor-suit opening): *A jump-shift to the two level is ... five-plus spades, four-plus hearts.* Study is strongly advised before adopting this plan.

Invitational. I don't currently play the natural, invitational jump shift to the two level – your mileage may vary.

⁷⁻³⁸ **Slam invitation vs. non-forcing.** When the strong FSJ comes up, it can be a winner. However, it does not happen often. The FSJ over a minor suit opening could benefit from removing the slam option. Opener might want to pass the FSJ, especially into a major suit.

An FSJ over a 5-card major suit is effectively forcing to three of the major, so there is little advantage to removing the slam option in this case.

⁸⁻³⁸ **3- vs. 4-card support.** Some partnerships require 4-card support in opener's major suit for an FSJ.

2. Major-Suit Openings

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Forcing One Notrump & Jump Shift Responses

Our two-over-one response is forcing to game. We also have jump responses, and $1\spadesuit$ is available over $1\heartsuit$. When none of those apply, our catch-all response to a major-suit opening is $1NT$, forcing except by a passed hand. \diamond^1 Bidding after this $1NT$ forcing response can get tricky: it includes invitational hands as well as weaker ones.

Opener Rebids a Long Major Suit

Opener's rebid of their initial major suit over $1NT$ promises at least a 6-bagger. Without interest in game, responder passes, period. \diamond^2

If we have two cards in opener's suit, we have an 8-card fit. If we also have an invitational hand, we are in business. We can try for game with $3M$, or jump to $4M$ with a 3-card limit raise. $2NT$ is a rare game try with a singleton or maybe small doubleton support.

Major-Suit Opener Rebids a Lower-Ranking Suit

Over the forcing $1NT$ response, opener's rebid of a new, lower-ranking suit promises four cards in hearts, but only three cards in a minor (or two clubs, exactly $4=5=2=2$ shape). This new suit is not forcing, but opener could have 17 points or so – anything not good enough for $2NT$ or a game-forcing jump shift – so responder tries to keep the bidding open. Responder routinely bids two of opener's major suit with a doubleton (or more) in support.

Rule: *Raise opener's second suit with 8 HCP and 5-card support, or (when unsuitable for $2NT$) 10 HCP and 4-card support.*

This bid is constructive or invitational. \diamond^{2a} When the opening bid was in hearts, this raise is purely constructive, because an impossible $2\spadesuit$ bid shows a true invitation.

Responder's non-jump new suit shows a long suit in a *weak* hand; opener usually passes. If that suit is between opener's suits, life is good: the bid is cheap, and a jump to three of the suit is available to show a decent long suit in an invitational hand.

However, when the $1NT$ -responder's bid at the three level would be weak, responder's only invitational rebids are $2NT$, three of the

major, and a raise of the second suit; there is no invitational bid announcing a long suit. This problem arises when responder:

- has long clubs; or
- has long diamonds and 1 ♠ opener bids 2 ♥. Opener's 2 ♣ (3+ cards) is more likely than 2 ♥ (4+ cards).

Responder Has a Long, Decent Suit

Consider these hands for responder, after an opening 1 ♥ bid:

- ♠ A 7 3 ♥ 9 ♦ K 10 3 ♣ A Q 10 8 3 2 (game force)
- ♠ A 7 3 ♥ 9 ♦ 10 5 3 ♣ A Q 10 8 3 2 (invitational)
- ♠ Q 7 3 ♥ 9 ♦ 10 5 3 ♣ K J 10 8 3 2 (weak)

With hand [a], respond 2 ♣, forcing to game. With hand [c], respond 1 NT, planning to rebid cheaply in clubs (3 ♣), showing a hand with little value unless clubs are trump.

With hand [b], respond 3 ♣, an invitational jump shift, as described in “Three-Level Invitational Jump Shifts” on page 39. \diamond^3 Opener may pass; any bid below game is forcing. \diamond^4 A new suit shows a stopper and asks responder to bid 3 NT with the fourth suit stopped.

Responder's suit is clubs in the examples, because once opener bids over the forcing 1 NT, responder can never bid 2 ♣. This invitational jump shift gives by far the most bang for the buck.

Opener's Jump to 3 NT over the Forcing 1 NT

1. “The Bidding Box” (4), January 2023 *Bulletin*:

1 ♠ – 1 NT; 3 NT

♠ A K 9 8 7 6 ♥ A 5 4 ♦ Q J ♣ A 7

The jump to 3 NT over the forcing 1 NT is:

balanced with a six-card major, or like 2 NT, only better.

The 1 NT Response Is Overcalled or Doubled

Overcalled. The literature did not help, so I asked Gary Schwartz what doubles by opener and responder should mean, when a forcing 1 NT is overcalled: \diamond^5

Opener's double should be for takeout with a good hand, and if opener passes, responder's double is for takeout with the unbid suits, which opener can convert.

No matter how many of overcaller's suit are held by responder, they are unfavorably located, which to my mind makes the second part of the above paragraph an excellent plan. With that as a given, there is a fair chance that opener will be able to convert a takeout double, and does not have to make a penalty double to get the penalty. Thus, by making opener's double for takeout, you gain on all the hands where takeout is what was needed, and also gain on some of the hands where a penalty double would have been ideal.

Gary's method seems to be the way many experts play now. ◆⁶

1 NT Doubled. The standard meaning of this double is takeout of opener's major suit. In practice, this is likely to bother us only when we have a misfit with minimum combined values. Otherwise, opener's values are over doubler's and we should be fine.

Here are some basic ideas for opener, over 1 NT doubled:

Rdbl A good hand without a clear direction, suggests penalties.

2 M Six or more cards.

3 M Strong and invitational, clear direction.

JS Natural and forcing jump shift, clear direction.

Opener may choose to bid a second suit. However, a bid of diamonds or hearts would prevent responder from escaping into two of a lower suit. If opener and advancer both pass, then responder decides.

Key Features

- **Lower-ranking suit.** Over the forcing 1 NT response, opener's rebid in a lower-ranking suit is made with a wide range of strength. Responder tries to keep the bidding open, routinely preferring opener's major on a doubleton. Responder raises opener's second suit with 5-card support and 8 HCP, or 4-card support and 10 HCP. Responder's non-jump bid in a new suit is weak; a jump is invitational.

- **Repeats own suit.** Opener rebids their major suit over 1 NT with at least six cards in it. With a misfit, responder usually passes, but may bid 2 NT to invite game with a singleton. Does a new suit show a long-suit invitation?
- **Decision:** over the forcing 1 NT response, does opener's jump to 3 NT show a balanced game force with a 6-card major, or is it like 2 NT, only stronger?
- When the forcing 1 NT response is overcalled, opener's double is for takeout with a good hand; responder's double is for takeout and may be converted. Discuss this with partner.

Backstory

Long ago, I decided to raise opener's second suit with 8 HCP and 5-card support, or (unsuitable for 2 NT) 10 HCP and 4-card support, as the 1 NT responder. This plan has stood the test of time. Some conventions operate in this space (see below).

In the Appendix to *2/1 Game Force*, Grant and Rodwell suggest, but discount, the idea of playing Almost 2/1 in clubs only, over a 1 \diamond , 1 \heartsuit , or 1 \spadesuit opening. This inspired me to investigate the three-level invitational jump shift in detail, concluding it should probably be played only in clubs. The other jump shifts can be given other meanings, or employed with the partnership default.

♦ Alternative Methods

In the Precision system and others, an opening bid of 1 \clubsuit shows a strong hand; other opening bids are limited. Our methods can still be used, but this book does not take the limits into account.

¹⁻⁴⁹ **1 NT semi-forcing.** Many top pairs allow opener to pass 1 NT with a bad 5-3-3-2 hand. It's certainly nice to stay low, but playing this way undermines the utility of the slow-down raise (responding 1 NT on a bad hand with 3-card support, as discussed later in this chapter). If opener passes 1 NT, we risk getting a bad board by missing an 8-card major-suit fit. Since the slow-down raise is weak, it can be particularly important to play in the major, where ruffs may keep declarer in control to get eight tricks. The slow-down raise is crucial to our game-try and raise methods, so I advise against 1 NT semi-forcing.

When responder has a weak, unbalanced hand and nothing to respond but 1 NT, opener's pass may work out poorly. Some pairs play semi-forcing only when nonvulnerable, to avoid going down by hundreds in 1 NT.

Semi-forcing pairs hope to play 1 NT when 2 NT or 3 M would fail on a refused invitation, or to gain because opener's new suit will usually be four cards.

Avoiding the 3-card limit raise. The ACBL Open convention chart now permits responder to use a 2 ♣ response as a combination 3-card limit raise and artificial game force. This approach is beyond the scope of this book. For yet another plan, see my article, "One-Under Raises of a Major Suit."

2. "It's Your Call" (2), March 2024 *Bulletin*:

♠ A J 5 ♥ 10 ♦ Q 7 4 2 ♣ J 9 7 4 3

1 ♥ 1 NT [semi-forcing]

2 ♦ ?

Except with 4=5=3=1 or 3=5=3=2 shape, opener should hold at least four diamonds. That makes it safer for us to bid 3 ♦ on this mediocre 8-count with only four diamonds, in case opener has a maximum. In fact, a 3 ♦ raise was part of the problem statement, with only one complaint by a panelist. Several noted that the impossible 2 ♠ would have shown a solid raise to 3 ♦. Without this second way to 3 ♦, our rule would apply, and we would pass this junk.

²⁻⁴⁹ **Over opener's rebid of their suit.** Applying Simon's rule, except to invite game, responder passes with fewer than two cards in the suit. Paul Thurston concurs it would be silly to take a bid. Even when we are void, opener may be able to bring the contract home; bidding on risks a large penalty. The only example I found of bidding a new suit was in Kaplan-Sheinwold (1962), a mediocre example of using a new suit as a non-forcing, long-suit invitation. (Just don't pick up a bad hand with an 8-card suit!)

Kaplan-Sheinwold Updated includes an exception: when opener's major is spades, 3 ♥ shows "Long hearts (7 cards), weak hand."

^{2a-49} **Keeping the bidding open vs. heavy invites.** When the opening bid was 1 ♥, the impossible 2 ♠ is available, and the rule for 1NT-responder's raise of opener's second suit is quite compatible with heavy invites. After a 1 ♠ opening, we don't have that luxury. We need to raise on any hand where we are confident that we can make three of opener's second suit. The need for this decreases, when partner would routinely open 1 NT with five spades.

3. ♠ 6 5 ♥ 6 5 ♦ A 8 7 3 2 ♣ K Q 9 4

1 ♠ 1 NT [semi-forcing]

2 ♦ ?

On the last board of an online speedball matchpoint pairs game, I followed the rule and raised to 3 ♦; partner made it, +110 for a 66% score on the deal. Had I passed, LHO might well have discovered their 9-card heart fit. Beyond

the possibility of having a game, the preemptive effect of 3 \diamond gave us a second chance to win. It's worth noting, however, that a gentle 2-card spade preference would probably have had the same effect here.

A 3 \diamond raise that could be either constructive or invitational leaves something to be desired. Conventions operate in this space, notably:

Gazzilli was invented in 1959 by Leo Gazzilli of Milan, an Italian national champion. It has many variations, some of them quite complex. Opener's 2 \clubsuit includes all strong hands, plus one specified minimum hand type. Opener's jumps show decent hands with shape. In the original (*Encyclopedia*, Simon, and Frederick Staelens) versions, the minimum hand contains 4+ clubs; in modern (Yuan Shen and Robert Todd) versions, the minimum hand instead contains 6+ cards in the major. Methods often have a hole when playing a forcing 1 NT response, when opener is minimum with 5–3–3–2 or specifically 5=3=2=3. If interested, start with Robert Todd, who covers both main versions well.

Bart was invented by GLM Les Bart; it applies only when the opening bid was 1 \spadesuit . Opener's rebid in diamonds promises four cards, an improvement. Opener's 2 \clubsuit promises at least two clubs; responder may pass with five. (With a singleton club, opener will always have six spades or a four-card red suit to bid.) Responder's 2 \diamond over 2 \clubsuit is the only force, with either exactly five hearts and two spades or one of several types of invitational hand. My "Bart" article shows what GLM Lew Gamerman and I played in 2013.

Lisa, a *Simpsons* reference, flips Bart: responder's 2 \diamond shows 6 to 9 HCP. GLMs Adam and Zach Grossack play Lisa.

Gazzilli and Bart are considered briefly in my article "Flannery and Major Nightmare Solutions."

³⁻⁵⁰ **Weak jump shifts**, across the board, are simple – one phrase with a new partner, and move on – but not so fast! Discuss the consequence that, after 1 NT forcing, responder's new suit at the three level becomes invitational. Unfortunately, compared with a 1 NT response, a weak jump shift can get in the way of opener bidding out a strong hand, especially a two-suiter. The weak jump shift to the three level should promise the values for a normal response, but not enough to invite game. The wide range of a good 5 to 9 HCP may be a problem, and I've seen opponents play lots of hopeless weak-jump-shift contracts at the three level. Playing 3 \clubsuit invitational, we can still have the important capabilities of Bergen raises: 3 M is mixed, with a limit raise at 3 \diamond . Weak jump shifts rule out that limit raise. BWS plays all three-level jump shifts as invitational, but 2 \spadesuit over 1 \heartsuit is strong.

⁴⁻⁵⁰ **After the invitational jump shift**, some partnerships play that opener's return to three of the original suit is non-forcing; it can either require responder to pass, or permit a raise. A Bridge Winners poll showed a clear preference for this bid to be forcing.

⁵⁻⁵⁰ **Penalty over 1 NT forcing**. Karen Walker confirms that experts play opener's double as takeout with a good hand. The old way was penalty, for both doubles, when they overcall our forcing 1 NT. Discuss this matter with partner, before making any assumptions.

⁶⁻⁵¹ **1 NT response overcalled**. Board 26 (matchpoint pairs) raised the issue:

Board 26											
South Deals	♠ 4										
Both Vul	♥ K 10 9 4										
	♦ A 6 5 2										
	♣ Q 7 5 4										
♠ 10 5 3	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td style="background-color: #cccccc;"></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A 9 7 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A 6 2		♥ Q J 8 7 5 3									
♦ J 3		♦ K 7									
♣ A 10 8 3 2		♣ 6									
	♠ K Q J 8 6										
	♥ —										
	♦ Q 10 9 8 4										
	♣ K J 9										
NS 4♦; EW 2♥; NS 1♠; NS 1♣; Par +130; NS 3♦+1											
West	North	East	South								
			1 ♠								
Pass	1 NT ¹	2 ♥	All pass								
	1. Forcing.										
	2 ♥ by East	Made 2 — EW +110									

We had no understandings about this situation. If South's double is takeout, partner may pass, and we have no trump to lead. This is not an easy situation. North has too many hearts to reopen – it's amazing that West did not raise, as it is. The winning call is 3♦, a contract we make easily. This could have been a disaster, but our second 5-card suit beckons. Responder should not raise 3♦ with a misfit for spades and a likely effective 6-count – cut pard some slack.

General Two-over-One Issues

Forcing to Game

What does it really mean, that a two-over-one response is forcing to game? The practical answer is a contract of 3 NT or higher. The values required to make a contract of 3 NT are about the same as those required to make four of a suit (with a fit). Those values may not extend to five of a minor, so the auction should be permitted to stop at four when both partners are minimum.

Stopping in four of a minor is an extreme measure, reserved for when neither partner bids 3 NT. In particular, a player who removes 3 NT to four of a minor is *slamming*, not weak.

After a 2/1, Opener's Rebid of 2 M, 2 NT, or 3 NT

Opener's rebid of 2 NT is natural, either a small hand (about 13 HCP) or a large hand (about 19 HCP). Opener wants to have stoppers in both unbid suits, but whether that is always the case depends on what a 2 M rebid would mean.

Opener's jump to 3 NT shows a medium balanced hand (about 16 HCP). This important announcement lets a medium-strength responder go slamming. Slams are relatively easy to investigate when one partner has a strong hand. Good slams are often missed when both partners have medium values – or the partnership gets too high when one hand turns up small. There should be no “fast arrival” jump to 3 NT, for any partnership. (This customary but slam-killing method is discussed in “Common Fast Arrival” on page 94.)

○ Plan A – Opener's 2 M Rebid Shows Extra Length

Many partnerships play that opener's rebid in the original major (2 M) shows extra length – we have at least a 6-bagger.

1. ♠ K J 8 7 3 ♥ A Q 9 ♦ K 3 ♣ 8 3 2

However, if the 1 ♠ opener holds hand [1] and gets a 2 ♦ response, opener must rebid 2 NT, without a club stopper. Now there is no way to protect responder's possible club stopper from the opening lead; and responder will continue to 3 NT, club stopper or no, on a

relatively balanced hand. We ignore the occasional silly 3 NT contract – or profit when the opponents do not set the contract with a suit wide open – playing for good luck, instead of with skill.

2. ♠ K J 8 7 3 ♥ A Q 9 ♦ K 3 2 ♣ 8 3

On hand [2], opener might raise to 3 ♦ on only 3-card support, to avoid bidding 2 NT with two small in the fourth suit. That would create problems sorting out 3 NT, the obvious target – similar to “Jump Rebid at 3 ♦” on page 165. Plan B is better.

❑ Plan B – Opener’s Rebid Is a Catch-All

It is more sensible, but not as simple, to play opener’s rebid in the original major as a *catch-all*, meaning that no other bid is suitable. Playing this way, opener’s 2 NT rebid promises stoppers in the two unbid suits. Lots of players prefer “extra length.” *This is a must-discuss issue for a new partnership.*

Defensive tip. If the opponents conduct an auction such as this:

1 ♠ – 2 ♦; 2 NT – 3 NT

Before selecting an opening lead, ask if 2 ♠ instead of 2 NT would have promised extra length. If the answer is no, declarer is likely to have a stopper in both side suits. If yes, then lean toward a more aggressive lead in an unbid suit.

The High Reverse

In the chapter on minor suits, we’ll discuss opener’s strength-showing reverse: opener’s rebid in a new suit higher than the first means we cannot play in the original suit below the three level.

A high reverse is opener’s non-jump rebid at the three level. Since we are already forced to game by responder’s 2/1 response, we have choices for the implications of a high reverse. Consider these hands with the methods that follow, after this start:

1 ♥ – 2 ♦; ?

3. ♠ 7 6 ♥ A Q 10 8 2 ♦ K 7 ♣ Q J 9 7

4. ♠ 6 ♥ A Q 10 8 2 ♦ K 7 ♣ Q J 9 7 3

5. ♠ A 6 ♥ A Q 10 8 2 ♦ K 7 ♣ Q J 9 7

○ **The high reverse shows a biddable suit in any hand.**

We rebid 3 ♣ with any of hands [3 to 5]. If a 2 ♥ rebid would promise extra length, then we pretty much have to play this way. However, because we have neither found a fit nor limited our hand, this is an inferior plan if either partner is considering a slam.

□ **The high reverse shows either a 5-card suit or sound values.**

We rebid 3 ♣ with hand [4 or 5]; only hand [3] rebids 2 ♥ (catch-all).

○ **The high reverse shows a 5-card suit.**

We would only rebid 3 ♣ with hand [4]. Hands [3 & 5] rebid 2 ♥.

Key Features

- “Forcing to game” means a contract of 3 NT or higher, although it is unusual to stop in four of a minor suit. Removing 3 NT to four of a minor is a forcing slam try.
- Decision: is opener’s rebid of their major a catch-all (recommended) or does it show extra length?
- Opener’s rebid of 2 NT is made with a small or large balanced hand. Only if 2 M shows extra length, might opener might have an unstopped suit for a rebid of 2 NT. The jump to 3 NT shows a medium balanced hand – *no fast arrival in notrump*.
- Decision: a high reverse can be made on a 4-card suit in any hand (best only when 2 M shows extra length), with either extra values or a 5-card suit, or only with a 5-card suit.

Backstory

In *Standard Bidding*, Max Hardy wrote that a high reverse shows a 5-bagger or sound values, so rebidding the major might be only five cards. Similarly, Hardy wrote that a raise of responder’s suit often provides 4-card support, but may be the best bid with sound values and three to an honor.

Bridge teacher Andrew Hanes likes the high reverse to promise a 5-card suit. This makes sense, perhaps putting strain over level, and we have agreed to play it. He says he got the idea from me, but I only remember specifying a 5-card suit at the three level for an opener or overcaller with a silent partner.

Major-Suit Game Tries

Let's consider opener's game tries, after either of these auctions:

1 ♡ - 2 ♡ or 1 ♠ - 2 ♠

Once responder raises, opener re-evaluates the hand, counting distribution. It's common to add these points to the high cards:

doubleton=1, singleton=3, void=5

We have tools to decide whether or not to try for game. If the points come to 16 or more, we have a candidate. We try to visualize likely holdings for partner that would let us make a game. If we are not sure, then we turn to the losing trick count.

Losing Trick Count and Cover Cards

If we have trouble deciding whether to try for game, the *losing trick count* (LTC) can help. \diamond^7 Using this method, each of the first three cards actually held in a suit is a *loser*. However, an ace is never a loser, a king is only a loser if singleton, and a queen is only a loser if singleton or doubleton. Strictly speaking, *the losing trick count applies only when an 8-card trump fit has been found*, but players often make a preliminary evaluation of an unbalanced hand in losers. A small (normal) opening bid in a major suit typically has seven losers.

A *cover card* is a high card in responder's hand that is likely to cover one of opener's losers. Initially, that's any ace or king; that's also a queen, when opener is known to have at least three cards in the suit. We count shortness cautiously, since it could be wasted opposite partner's strength.

It's important to understand that LTC is counting distribution. LTC treats cards beyond three in a suit as non-losers. Any method of hand evaluation can produce disappointing results when values do not fit well between the two hands of the partnership. Secondary honors held in a suit where partner is short are often worthless, while they should be "working" in suits where partner is long, especially with fitting cards.

Examples are coming, but we need more first.

Game Try Principles

At this point, we are going to assume that a single raise of a major-suit opening will actually cover two to three of opener's losers, no more, and no less. The next topic, on major-suit raises, will help us to make this assumption a reality.

If opener makes a game try, we evaluate how many of opener's losers our hand will cover. We need to cover three losers (a maximum) to accept the game invitation. Opener should have six losers; our three winners reduce the total losers to three. We should be able to take 10 tricks (game in a major), with three total losers.

If opener has five losers, responder should cover at least two of them. Opener jumps to game, expecting at most three total losers. If responder happens to cover three losers, opener will likely take eleven tricks, so we should not miss a good slam.

However, we need a slam plan in case opener has four losers and responder might cover three of them. Opener makes a game try, and if responder accepts, opener expects to have only one loser. Opener could ask for keycards and bid slam if we have enough of them. If responder refuses the game try, the slamming opener signs off in game: two losers are likely.

“Heavy invites” means pessimistic counting of losers by opener. Here is opener's plan after a single raise of the major-suit opening:

Opener Losers	Total Losers	Expected Tricks	Opener's Action
7	4-5	8-9	Pass
6	3-4	9-10	Game Try
5	2-3	10-11	Jump to Game
4	1-2	11-12	Slam Try

Accurate bidding with this method depends on responder covering two to three losers, no more and no less. Too few, and bad games will be bid. Too many, and good slams will be missed. Again, the topic on major-suit raises will help us to assure this is true.

Examples:

Our 1 ♠ opening has been raised to 2 ♠.

1. ♠ A Q 8 5 2 ♥ K 6 ♦ Q 6 ♣ K 8 3 2

Is 14 HCP hand [1] worth an aggressive game try? Visualization can help. Even if partner has the excellent ♠ K, ♦ K, and ♣ Q J 4, we would still need both black suits to split and ♥ K to win. No way.

2. ♠ A Q J 5 2 ♥ K 6 ♦ Q 6 ♣ K 10 9 2

Filling in the spades and clubs would make hand [2] more robust. Even so, those fitting 9 HCP leave us with a game that is at best 50%, depending mostly upon whether the ♥ K wins or loses. Suppose we skip visualization to count our losers for hand [2]:

♠ = 1 (K)

♥ = 1 (A)

♦ = 2 (AK, Q is droppable)

♣ = 2 (AQ)

1 + 1 + 2 + 2 = 6 total losers; we would make a game try that probably won't work out well. LTC alone does not provide the correct answer, with potential finesses in three suits, and the ♦ Q not pulling its weight.

3. ♠ A Q J 5 2 ♥ K Q 6 ♦ 6 ♣ K 10 9 2

With 18 support points on hand [3], we would have good chances opposite ♠ K and ♥ A; adding the ♣ J or a doubleton club would be even better. This 5-loser hand is worth a jump to game. The value of our honors are improved by being combined with others in this hand.

4. ♠ A Q J 6 5 2 ♥ K J 9 ♦ 6 ♣ K J 2

On hand [4], we need three winners, but they can be cheap ones, due to the fitting jacks. This hand is perfect for a 3 ♦ short suit game try: Partner should accept with ♠ K, ♥ Q, and ♣ Q – or better.

5. ♠ A Q J 5 2 ♥ A 6 ♦ 9 6 ♣ K J 10 2

Hand [5], is a marginal game try. Game would be good opposite ♠ K, ♥ K, and ♣ Q, but bad opposite the unsupported ♥ Q, which is sufficient for hand [4]. Using the invite heavy principle, pass.

6. ♠ A Q J 5 2 ♥ A J ♦ 9 6 ♣ K J 10 2

With hand [6], we have a nice invitation. The unsupported ♥ Q would give us a chance, especially on a heart lead.

Game and Slam Try Specifics

A *sure cover card* or *winner* will cover a loser in declarer's hand, even if declarer has a singleton in the worst possible location. We'll go into this in detail on page 74.

To accept an invitation, responder must provide three winners, covering three of opener's actual losers. With only two winners, responder signs off at three of the major. Opener would have jumped to game with a 5-loser hand.

Unfortunately, the opponents are listening; anything we say may be taken down and used against us. A game try must trade off accuracy against disclosure of declarer's hand.

Nondescript game try. Our usual game try is the next available bid, 2 ♠ over 2 ♥, or 2 NT over 2 ♠. This is a *nondescript game try*. ♦⁸ With scattered values, responder bids game with a maximum, or signs off with a minimum, deciding the issue immediately. The scattered maximum is likely to cover the necessary three of opener's losers. If opener happens to have a singleton, only the values in one suit should be wasted, leaving a working minimum in the other three suits. All this, and the opponents get little information.

Counter-try. Responder may have two sure cover cards, but not know if a third card is working. Responder's bid of a new suit shows a *secondary* value in that suit (2 NT for spades), usually a holding of at least three cards:

○ Containing a king or queen.

This time-tested, flexible approach is less aggressive, perhaps a better match for a medium invite by opener.

○ Containing a queen.

This clear approach is more aggressive, because any side king is counted as a winner. This seems better for opener's heavy invite, but it may fail when opener has a singleton opposite a king.

Opener bids game with a fit for the counter-try suit; with no fit (often shortness), opener signs off.

Here is game try hand [6] again:

6. ♠ A Q J 5 2 ♥ A J ♦ 9 6 ♣ K J 10 2

Hands [a to d] would accept the game try immediately:

a. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ Q 9 7 2 ♦ J 10 8 2 ♣ A 6

b. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ K 9 7 2 ♦ J 10 8 2 ♣ Q 6

c. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ Q 9 7 2 ♦ K 10 8 2 ♣ Q 6

d. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ 10 9 7 2 ♦ A 10 8 5 2 ♣ 6

With hand [d], the mismatch of values is disappointing. Game is not horrible, but the singleton club is not as good as ♣ Q-6 would be. No system does it all. If the ♣ K-J were the ♣ A-3, we would be all set.

e. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ Q 10 2 ♦ 10 8 5 2 ♣ A 6 4

Responder bids 3♥ holding hand [e], and opener bids 4♠, since either the ♥ K or Q would be useful.

f. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ 10 9 2 ♦ Q 10 5 2 ♣ A 6 4

With hand [f], responder would bid 3♦; opener signs off in 3♠.

g. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ 10 6 2 ♦ 10 8 5 2 ♣ A Q 4

h. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ 10 6 2 ♦ A 10 5 2 ♣ Q 8 4

Responder bids 3♣ holding hand [g] or [h], and opener bids 4♠.

The worst situation is when we have key secondary values in two side suits. Inquiring about one suit passes the decision immediately to opener, based on that one suit and ignoring the other – when we need the values in both suits to be working.

i. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ 7 5 3 ♦ Q 9 5 3 ♣ Q J 3

With hand [i], we assume one side suit is dead. When that's hearts, the minor-suit honors are all working, and we would wish to be in game. However, when either minor suit is dead, we want to stop short. Faced with this decision, definitely stop short at matchpoints, an apparent 2:1 favorite. Only when vulnerable at IMPs does game

have any appeal; we should still stop short, with the chances of a good game around 33%, which may be optimistic. More points or better spots could make bidding on more attractive.

Short-suit game try (SSGT). The most accurate way to try for game after the single raise is the short-suit game try. ⁹ Unfortunately, it may tip a forcing defense. Accordingly,

***Guideline:** Declarer should make a short-suit bid only when the partnership has at least nine trumps, or when trying for slam.*

In the current context, this means a short-suit game try is usually made with six or more trumps. The forcing defense is less of a threat when slamming, since we intend that the opponents will lead at most twice against a slam.

After the single raise, a new suit above the nondescript bid shows a singleton or void in the bid suit. (Over 2♥, 2 NT shows short spades.) Responder's job is easy: bid game when expecting to cover three losers, or sign off otherwise. Count everything, except the K, Q, J, or shortness in the short suit. The ace in the short suit counts, but it should combine better with opener's hand, in some other suit.

An exception would be a hand with 10 total HCP including a soft double stopper such as K-Q-10 or Q-J-9-7 in the short suit. Experience has shown such a hand can often make 3 NT.

7. ♠ A Q J 6 5 2 ♥ A 10 6 ♦ 6 ♣ K 10 9

Opener [7] has a 6-loser hand that is worth a short-suit game try, due to the good texture in the 3-card suits.

i. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ 7 5 3 ♦ Q 9 5 3 ♣ Q J 3 (repeated)

Holding responder hand [i], the ♦ Q is wasted, so we sign off in 3♠.

j. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ 7 5 3 ♦ Q J 3 ♣ Q 9 5 3

Swapping the clubs and diamonds in [i], we get [j]: Now the ♦ Q-J-3 is wasted, so we again sign off.

k. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ Q J 3 ♦ 7 5 3 ♣ Q 9 5 3

Finally, swap the diamonds and hearts in [j] to get [k]. Now we are cooking! All our honors are working, so we bid 4 ♠. We have two top losers, and need only one of two finesses for game.

Opposite a nondescript game try from hand [7], hands [i], [j], and [k] all sign off in 3 ♠. This is the right choice two times out of three, not bad odds. The SSGT gets it right all three times.

2 ♠ game try doubled: redouble shows a first or second round spade control, pass denies a control, and bids are unchanged.

The Re-Raise

○ **Trump-suit game try.** The re-raise asks for help in trumps. Consider trump honors and aces as winners. Secondary honors in side suits are likely to be wasted. Unlike other game tries, this non-standard re-raise shows *five* losers and desperate need of trump help. (We cannot expect responder to provide two aces plus a trump honor; two top trump honors plus an ace would be rare.)

8. ♠ J 10 8 7 5 3 ♥ 2 ♦ K Q J 7 ♣ A K

Hand [8] has five losers: two missing aces and three in trumps. This is a particularly nasty situation where partner's secondary values in both clubs and hearts will be wasted. In this situation, responder may not actually cover two of our losers, so we re-raise to 3 ♠, instead of jumping to game. This situation is rare, so we can probably do without the trump suit game try – just bid the game.

○ **1-2-3-stop.** Many expert pairs play that the re-raise is preemptive, not forward-going. Some play this only in hearts, where opponents bidding spades is a concern.

○ **Combination re-raise:** preemptive with A-K-Q-x-x-x, or a topless game try. Responder bids game with the ace, king, or queen of trump, plus either a second top trump or an ace.

Slam Tries

When opener has only four losers, responder's raise makes a slam possible. Our nondescript or short suit game try can be used as a slam try – bid on, if responder accepts or makes a useful counter-try.

□ **Natural jump shift (two suit) slam try.** A strong major one-suiter with four losers would be opened 2 ♣. A two-suiter with four losers is too weak to open 2 ♣, because each new suit by opener is forcing. Such a hand is opened at the one level.

When opener has no secondary side losers, a short-suit slam try does not work properly. Responder would count the ♣ Q on:

9. ♠ A Q J 9 7 3 ♥ 2 ♦ K J 10 7 ♣ A K

After responder raises to 2 ♠, opener jumps to 4 ♦ on hand [9]. This non-standard jump shift shows a one-and-a-half- or two-suiter with four total losers, and no secondary losers outside of the bid suits.

Responder counts only aces, plus secondary honors in trumps and the bid suit. With two or fewer winners, responder signs off. With three winners, responder should move toward slam.

With hand [9], we have a slam opposite any three of ♠ K, ♥ A, ♦ A, and ♦ Q. Responder may have ♠ K and an ace for two sure winners; 4 ♦ is hoping for the ♦ Q as well. Yes, this is trying for perfect cards, but if we don't find them, we just play in 4 ♠.

10. ♠ A Q J 9 7 3 ♥ 2 ♦ K Q J 9 ♣ A J

On slightly different hand [10], the king or queen of clubs would be useful, so a 4 ♦ slam try would be the wrong bid. Responder would need both black kings and an ace (likely a limit raise) to lay down a slam. The ♣ Q would help, so a 3 ♥ short-suit slam try is acceptable.

○ **Void jump-shift (splinter) slam try.** Eddie Kantar did not play short-suit game/slam tries. He recommended that opener's jump shift over a raise should be a slam try with a void in the bid suit. In my decades of playing that way, it probably came up once. Since we play short-suit game/slam tries at the three level, it's redundant to play the jump shift as also showing shortness. Our admittedly rare natural jump-shift slam try addresses a problem with no other solution.

Magic Slams. If responder has a strong side suit, we might have a magic slam, for example, responder hand [1]:

1. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ 10 8 2 ♦ K Q 10 8 2 ♣ 6 4

If opener bids 2 NT over our minimum 2 ♠ raise, we want to be in game when partner likes diamonds; so, we bid 3 ♦. If opener moves toward slam, our repeat of diamonds shows this hand.

If opener instead makes a short-suit game/slam try in clubs or hearts, we bid 4 ♦ to show this hand. In either case, a super-fit may even produce a grand slam.

The Nondescript Game Try in Action

Dummy [A]

♠ Q 6 2
 ♥ 9 5 2
 ♦ K 10 6 2
 ♣ Q 10 7

Declarer [1]

♠ K J 10 7 5
 ♥ A Q 8
 ♦ 4
 ♣ A J 4 3

Declarer [2]

♠ K J 10 7 5
 ♥ 4
 ♦ A Q 8
 ♣ A J 4 3

Declarer [3]

♠ K J 10 7 5
 ♥ A J 4 3
 ♦ A Q 8
 ♣ 4

All three declarers hold the same cards, in different suits. Each has 15 HCP and a singleton; a game try is appropriate with six losers.

Holding only five spades, declarer chooses the nondescript game try of 2 NT. For all three declarers, minimum dummy [A] will sign off. Declarer [2] will miss a desirable game – a short-suit game try (3 ♥ in this case) really can reach better contracts – but the 3 ♠ contract will be reasonable in all cases. Because we chose the nondescript game try, the opponents will be given no tip on the defense.

If we replace a low heart with the missing queen or king of hearts, dummy [B] will accept the nondescript game try:

Dummy [B]

♠ Q 6 2
 ♥ (QK) 9 2
 ♦ K 10 6 2
 ♣ Q 10 7

The 4 ♠ contract will be fine in all three cases. The heart honor is mostly wasted for declarer [2], who does not care; the heart honor is

working for declarers [1] & [3]. In all these cases, we reach our obvious games, and stay out of bad ones.

Game Tries – Summary

O2	R2	O2	R2	Game Tries after { 1 M – 2 M }	
1 st step	[2 ♠ or 2 NT] Asks responder to place the contract when holding scattered values; otherwise:				
1 st –3 rd step	Responder has a secondary value in the bid suit (2 NT = ♠), typically at least three cards including ♠ a king or queen, or ♠ a queen.				
	3 M	To play.			
	3 NT	Choice of games.			
	4 M	To play.			
	Other	Control cue-bid (slam try).			
		Value suit	Rebid secondary value suit = source of tricks.		
	3 M	<i>Minimum</i> , scattered values.			
	3 NT	Flat hand with nine or 10 distributed HCP.			
4 M	<i>Maximum</i> , scattered values.				
2 nd –4 th step	Short-suit game try: singleton or void in the suit bid (2 NT = ♠). Use with 6+ trumps or for slam.				
	3 M	To play: wasted or insufficient values.			
	3 NT	Maximum, soft double stopper in short suit.			
	4 M	To play.			
	3 NT	Non-forcing, about 10 HCP, soft double stopper.			
	Other	Source of tricks.			
3 M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1–2–3–stop: preemptive: ♠ but only in hearts. ○ Trump-suit game try: asks for two top trumps or aces. ○ Combination: (a) A-K-Q-x-x-x preempt, or (b) topless game try, asks for a top trump plus a top trump or ace. 				
3 NT	18–19 balanced, non-forcing.				
JS	<input type="checkbox"/> Jump shift with <i>four losers</i> , asking for three winners in aces and bid suits. ♠ Void slam try. ♠ Skip this.				

Game Tries in Other Situations

After Drury. A modern Drury bid promises a fit, and is therefore a raise at the two level. In this situation, our game tries are available to both partners – see “Passed Hand Raises” on page 84.

11. “The Bidding Box” (2), August 2022 *Bulletin*:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ 10 6	♠ K Q J 4
♥ K Q 10 6 3	♥ J 9 8 7 2
♦ K Q 7	♦ 6 5
♣ A J 4	♣ 8 7
1 ♥	2 ♥ [constructive]
2 ♠ [nondescript GT, 6 LTC]	2 NT [secondary spade value]
3 ♥ [sorry I asked]	Pass

As responder, we cannot evaluate our hand well, but if the spades are wasted, we have five trumps and two doubletons. We raise immediately; over the marginal game try, we get to ask if our secondary spade cards are useful. (Game fails if a club is led in time.)

Competition

The principles of jumping to game with five losers and accepting an invitation with three winners remain in effect, but we need to be flexible. “Support with support” applies!

Over a raise with any kind of interference:

- Our game tries are on when all bids are available.
- Our game tries are on only when the raise is doubled.

When our game tries are off, natural game tries apply.

Key Features

- A single raise of opener’s major suit should provide 2 to 3 winners (sure cover cards).
- If opener has the strength to consider bidding over the raise, they pass with 7 losers, try for game with 6, jump to game with 5, or try for slam with 4.

- The usual game try is the next available bid, a nondescript game try. Usually, responder decides the issue immediately, either bidding game with 3 winners (or 9+ scattered HCP), or signing off with 2 winners. With questionable secondary values in *one* suit of at least 3 cards, responder bids that suit (2 NT for spades). (With two such suits, sign off.) Decision: is such a secondary value always a queen (all kings are winners), or either a king or queen?
- Decision: the re-raise is a game try with bad trumps, asking for *two* winners in aces or trumps; preemptive (1-2-3 stop); or a combination, where the preempt has A-K-Q-x-x-x.
- Other non-jump bids are short-suit game tries, which we tend to avoid unless we have nine total trumps or are slamming. Responder accepts with three winners (ignoring the K-Q-J of the short suit), or bids 3 NT with 10 HCP and a soft double stopper in the short suit.
- Decision: Is a jump shift a natural slam try, asking for three winners in aces and bid suits, or a void slam try?

Backstory

The reader may recognize the basis of the game-try scheme as Kokish or Nagy game tries. Their asking bid is replaced with the superior nondescript game try, and we avoid the short-suit game try with a 5-3 trump fit. (In another context, a 4-4 fit may not be so bad – we might take ruffs in our own hand, and reverse the dummy.)

My idea of structuring raises with the primary goal of shrinking the range of the single raise developed over time, with lots of study. In essence, the point is for *responder* to enable the game try, as often as possible. Responder will be dummy. One of the last coins to drop was the understanding that there was no need for opener to inquire anything of responder who has answered the nondescript game try with a secondary value – in the context of the 2- to 3-winner raise. We started playing this scheme in November 2018.

Readers of Jeff Rubens will recognize his *in-and-out valuation* at work. For example, when partner opens 1 ♠, secondary honors in spades with aces outside are better than the ♠ A with secondary honors outside.

♦ Alternative Methods

⁷⁻⁵⁹ **Losing trick count.** Losing trick count does not appeal to me as a primary method, because it counts all three top honors in a long suit as having the same valuation. Both these hands have five losers, one in each major, plus three in the minors:

12. ♠ K Q 8 6 2 ♥ K Q 7 5 3 ♦ 9 ♣ 10 3

13. ♠ A K 8 6 2 ♥ A K 7 5 3 ♦ 9 ♣ 10 3

After a raise to 2 ♠, hand [12] has a decent chance of making game only opposite the two major-suit aces, or a better hand. Hand [13] only requires two queens, or an ace and a queen, or

The best approach is to first use points and visualization to see if we are within range of game, and only then apply the losing trick count.

Various modifications attempt to improve LTC. For example, New Losing Trick Count (NLTC) tallies a missing ace as 1½ losers and a missing queen as ½ loser. Counting these new losers takes effort, is error-prone, and we don't really need it. Most LTC systems require us to count our losers, estimate partner's losers, add them up, and subtract from 24 (or 25 for NLTC). We seldom need that either, with our methods: declarer (or the strong hand) counts losers, and dummy (or the weak hand) counts winners (cards that cover partner's losers).

⁸⁻⁶² **Nondescript game try.** Eric Schwartz was a proponent of the non-descriptive game try, which I shortened to nondescript. GLM Richard Pavlicek calls this a *relay game try*. The only time opener reveals his holding would be by implication: opener's reaction to responder's secondary-value bid.

With one exception (purposely omitted here), Pavlicek recommends playing all other bids as natural slam tries, instead of our short-suit game/slam tries. His system applies in all potential situations, not just { 1 M – 2 M }.

We modified Pavlicek's methods for use with the 2- to 3-winner single raise; he has more situations to cover. We'll learn about fragment spiral, which we play when minor-suit opener raises a major suit to the two level.

"Containing a king or queen" is Pavlicek's method.

Andrew Hanes likes the winners plan for responding to a game try. He has been playing and teaching "containing a queen," which he calls half a winner. It has been working well for him; he particularly likes that it is unambiguous. He brought this back to me, and we have agreed to play it. Other honors could accompany the queen, as with ♠ K Q J 4 in the example on page 69.

⁹⁻⁶⁴ **Old game tries.** In the old days, the game try was usually the re-raise (3 ♠). Responder would bid 4 ♠ with a maximum raise, and pass with a minimum. If both hands are relatively balanced, this method is reasonable. High card points work best for bidding balanced hands. However, if a wide-ranged responder has a middling hand, after the re-raise, they have no way to kick the problem back to opener.

Our partnership intends to play this hand in spades. Pairs started using other bids as game tries, to help responder resolve a close decision. The *trial bid* in a new suit, with variants called a *long-suit* or *help-suit game try*, was born. It's still standard, as described by William Root in 1986:

- Bid three of the raised suit with good trumps. For example, after { 1 ♠ – 2 ♠ }, bid 3 ♠ on:

♠ A K 9 8 3 2 ♡ 7 6 ◇ A 10 ♣ K 4 2,

asking responder to bid game with a maximum hand.

- Bid a new suit; for example, after { 1 ♡ – 2 ♡ }, bid 3 ♣ on:

♠ A K Q ♡ J 10 8 7 5 ◇ 4 ♣ A J 4 3

Responder must not pass; to refuse the invitation, he bids 3 ♡. Responder is asked to take his club holding into consideration.

The trial bid tells responder to especially value cards in the bid suit, as well as in trumps. However, the trial bid says nothing about the other two suits; and the fit in the side suits may be crucial, especially if opener is short in one of those suits. Repeating the example, here is why this method is poor:

Dummy [A]

♠ Q 6 2
 ♡ 9 5 2
 ◇ K 10 6 2
 ♣ Q 10 7

Declarer [1]

♠ K J 10 7 5
 ♡ A Q 8
 ◇ 4
 ♣ A J 4 3

Declarer [2]

♠ K J 10 7 5
 ♡ 4
 ◇ A Q 8
 ♣ A J 4 3

Declarer [3]

♠ K J 10 7 5
 ♡ A J 4 3
 ◇ A Q 8
 ♣ 4

With either hand [1] or [2], declarer is supposed to make a trial bid of 3 ♣. With sure values in both trumps and the trial suit, plus a king on the side, dummy should accept the game try. Opposite declarer hand [1], 4 ♠ is ugly. If we can establish the ◇ K, we may not have an entry to cash it. If we don't have that entry, we cannot take the club finesse. Only if the club finesse fails

(or we yield a club), might we have a chance to take the heart finesse. Good luck avoiding a club ruff. The \diamond K will be useful under half the time.

Opposite declarer hand [2], 4 \spadesuit is likely to make, losing a trump, a heart and perhaps a club. There is no trouble reaching dummy. In addition to being a sure entry, the \diamond K is worth $1\frac{1}{2}$ tricks, increasing the combined diamond holdings to three tricks, and the fourth diamond may prove useful, too. The most important card in dummy's hand may be the \diamond K, and how it fits into declarer's hand, which the 3 \clubsuit trial bid does not address.

If we say declarer should have bid their \diamond A-Q-8 on hand [2] or [3], then, similarly, dummy cannot tell the value of the \clubsuit Q-10-7. All three declarer hands have the same cards, just in different locations.

Stronger example: With most such methods, lacking help in the trial suit, responder is not allowed to make a counter-try. Dummy [C], with one red king, is required to sign off, with no help at all in clubs, the trial bid suit for declarer [1] or [2]. Yet if the side king fits, we want to be in game. Our nondescript game try easily handles dummy [C]:

Dummy [C]

\spadesuit A Q 2

\heartsuit ? 5 2

\diamond ? T 6 2

\clubsuit 7 5 2

Max Hardy's help-suit game try is significantly different from what is described above. His game try promises "some honor holding" in the bid suit, and denies interest in values in the suits that could have been shown more cheaply. That is, declarer and dummy bid features up the line, until either decides to bid game or to sign off. My investigations indicate this approach to be inferior to the standard trial bid! Also, a doubleton honor is a problem; skipping over one appears slightly superior.

Raising Opener's Suit

In the previous topic, we saw that when responder raises opener's major suit, opener will count on responder to provide two to three winners, no more and no less. We need a new concept to make this a reality.

Sure Cover Cards = Winners

A *sure cover card* or *winner* will cover a loser in declarer's hand, even if declarer has a singleton in the worst possible location:

- The king or queen of trump, or any ace, is a sure cover card.
- Assume declarer has a singleton in the side suit containing the most HCP in kings, queens, and jacks. Each king or queen in either of the other two side suits is a winner. Conservatively count our own shortness in those side suits as well.

For example, if partner opens 1 ♠, hand [a] contains two sure cover cards (the trump king and the ace), plus a doubleton:

$$\text{a. } \spadesuit K 7 6 \quad \heartsuit A 8 3 \quad \diamondsuit 9 7 6 3 2 \quad \clubsuit 5 4 \quad 1+1+0+0 = 2$$

However, if the opening bid is 1 ♥, assume opener has a singleton spade, the worst possible location. Then hand [a] has only one sure cover card, ♥ A. Raising 1 ♥ to 2 ♥ would be a bet that either the ♠ K or the doubleton will actually cover a loser for opener. We'd raise on this hand; but move a small diamond into the club suit, erasing the doubleton, and we would not. Remember that opener will jump to game over our single raise on a five-loser hand, counting on us for two actual winners.

For a given number of cover cards or sure cover cards, a hand may be good or bad. Uncounted values make the hand a little better. Each counted queen, especially if unsupported, is a little worse.

Remember that *losers and cover cards apply only to a suit contract, and only when a fit of eight or more cards has been found*. HCP are the best way of evaluating balanced hands, especially for notrump. LTC is more relevant when either partner has a distributional hand.

Here are the sure cover cards for some sample responding hands, after a 1 ♠ opening:

b.	♠ Q 7 6	♥ K 8 5 3 2	♦ Q 7 6	♣ 5 4	1+0+1+0 = 2
c.	♠ A 7 6 3	♥ K 8 3 2	♦ 7 6 3	♣ 5 4	1+0+0+1(4♠) = 2
d.	♠ Q 7 6	♥ A Q 8 3	♦ 7 6 3 2	♣ 5 4	1+1+0+0 = 2
e.	♠ Q 7 6	♥ K Q 8 3	♦ 7 6 3 2	♣ 5 4	1+0+0+0 = 1
f.	♠ Q 7 6	♥ K Q 3	♦ 7 6 3 2	♣ 9 5 4	1+0+0+0 = 1
g.	♠ 7 6 3	♥ K Q 8 3	♦ K Q 7 6	♣ 5 4	0+0+2+0 = 2

Example hands [b, c & d] are all single raises. Hand [e] is borderline with all those extras (I'd raise), [f] is too weak, and [g] is almost too strong.

Look back at “The Nondescript Game Try in Action” (page 67), where dummy [A] is a minimum raise to two spades:

A. ♠ Q 6 2 ♥ 9 5 2 ♦ K 10 6 2 ♣ Q 10 7

It has two sure cover cards, both queens (assuming the ♦ K is wasted). Add the ♥ K, and hand [h] has three sure cover cards with boring 4-3-3-3 shape, a maximum single raise:

h. ♠ Q 6 2 ♥ K 9 2 ♦ K 10 6 2 ♣ Q 10 7

Single Raises

Single raise. The direct single raise is expected to provide two to three winners, no more and no less. It is *constructive*, either:

- The *3-card constructive raise* provides 6–10 HCP, 3-card support, and either two sure cover cards, or 9–10 support points.
- The *4-card single raise* provides about 5–7 HCP, 4-card support, and either a doubleton with one sure cover card, or a flat hand with up to two cover cards. The extra trump should give this hand the playing strength of the minimum 3-card constructive raise.

i. ♠ A 7 6 3 ♥ Q 8 3 2 ♦ 7 6 3 ♣ 5 4 1+0+0+1(4♠) = 2

j. ♠ Q 7 6 3 ♥ A 8 3 ♦ 7 6 3 ♣ 9 5 4 1+1+0+0 = 2

Hands [i] and [j] are 4-card single raises of a 1 ♠ opening.

Slow-down raise. A foundation of the “forcing notrump” approach is that a 5-2 major-suit fit is generally a safe haven. The methods recommended here frequently require responding 1 NT when holding *three* cards in opener’s major.

One of my favorite tools I call the *slow-down raise*. Consider this:

1 ♠	(Pass)	1 NT [forcing]	(Pass)
2 ♦	(Pass)	2 ♠	?

Responder’s 2 ♠ bid is often a suit preference, with a doubleton. As a result, opener is less likely to be interested in game, and more likely to pass. On the flip side, since we have not announced an 8-card fit, the Law of Total Tricks says the opponents should be cautious about competing to the three level. Everybody tends to slow down.

The slow-down (bad) raise hides within this preference mechanism. We respond 1 NT and then try to play two of partner’s major – with any supporting hand that is not good enough for a single raise.

Important: when opener rebids 2 NT over our 1 NT response, showing a balanced hand of about 18 HCP, our return to opener’s major shows a slow-down raise, and is non-forcing. (Our bid of a lower-ranking suit is also non-forcing.) *Everyone who plays the 1 NT response as forcing should employ the slow-down raise.*

The slow-down raise is usually made with exactly 3-card support. Hand [f], repeated here, would be a maximum slow-down raise:

f. ♠ Q 7 6 ♥ K Q 3 ♦ 7 6 3 2 ♣ 9 5 4

A slow-down raise can be used on a really bad hand with 4-card support (at most one sure cover card and usually less than seven HCP). Remember, we want something like two sure cover cards for a single raise. Hand [k] would be a maximum for a 4-card slow-down raise of a 1 ♠ opening:

k. ♠ A 7 6 3 ♥ Q 8 3 ♦ 7 6 3 ♣ 9 5 4

We will still get to game, if opener makes a jump shift.

With extra trumps or shape, an aggressive slow-down raise can produce a good result with few high cards.

So far, we have assured that the single raise is strong enough. We use other raises to assure that the single raise is not too strong.

Single raise in competition. When the next opponent overcalls our major-suit opening – or when we overcall their opening – there is no slow-down raise. We raise on both types of hand, with about six or more points.

In competition, there is more guesswork. With good shape, opener should still bid game on a 5-loser hand, applying maximum pressure. When bidding more on high cards, a game try is advisable. Responder should bid game with three winners and sign off with fewer than two. With two winners, if possible, make a counter-try of the most descriptive intervening bid, or bid game with extras.

The Mixed Raise

Our jump raise is a *mixed raise*, a 4-card constructive raise. It typically provides two sure cover cards and a doubleton, such these jump raises to 3 ♠:

l. ♠ Q 10 7 6 ♥ 8 3 2 ♦ 7 6 ♣ A 9 5 4 [minimum]

m. ♠ Q 7 6 3 ♥ K 3 2 ♦ 7 6 ♣ K 9 5 4 [common]

We also bid this mini-splinter as a mixed raise, possibly providing two ruffs in addition to the two honor winners:

n. ♠ Q 7 6 3 ♥ 8 5 3 2 ♦ 7 ♣ A 9 5 4

Hand [n] may be heavy, if it provides two useful ruffs, but we have no better way to bid it. Note that hands [l & n] only have one defensive trick for diamonds, not what some partners may expect.

The jump mixed raise is particularly difficult to defend against. Opener should be able to bid game when it is there. The opponents may have a makeable contract, but any action they take could be perilous.

Limit Raises

4-Card limit raise. The Swedish variation of our Jacoby 2 NT response includes the 4-card limit raise. When not playing that, we use an artificial 4-card limit raise at 3 ♦. ♠¹²

3-Card limit raise. The 3-card limit raise is also called a $2\frac{1}{2}$ raise: bid 1 NT (forcing), planning to raise to three of the major. This promises 11–12 support points: a hand too strong for a single raise, but not a game force. Also do this with four small trumps, 4-3-3-3.

When opener rebids 2 NT over our 1 NT response, showing a balanced hand of about 18 HCP, we usually bid game in the major, or perhaps 3 NT, with the 3-card limit raise. (Three of the major is non-forcing, a slow-down raise.) Slam is unlikely to be solid on balanced hands with at most 31 combined HCP.

Hand Strength Definitions & Game Splinter

Now that we are coming to stronger responding hands, we need to review the definitions for the strength of hands that would open the bidding, whether held by opener or responder:

- small* a hand of about 13 points and about 7 losers: one that that would open one of a suit, but would not invite a game after a single raise. It might accept a game invitation – in other words, a normal opening bid.
- medium* a hand of about 16 points and 5 or 6 losers: worthy of a stronger auction than a small hand.
- large* a hand of about 19 points and 4 or 5 losers.

The Game-Splinter

The *game-splinter* is a double jump shift showing four or more trumps, a singleton or void in the bid suit, and a small hand: about 11 to 14 HCP, usually located in all three long suits. Over 1♥, that would be 3♠, 4♣, or 4♦; for example, bid 4♦ on hand [o]:

o. ♠ Q 10 6 3 ♥ A Q 3 2 ♦ 7 ♣ A 9 5 4

Jacoby 2 NT – Enhanced

Most tournament bridge players use the Jacoby 2 NT response to a major-suit opening bid to show a forcing raise with at least four trumps. In the common plan charted on page 12, opener's bid of a new suit shows *shortness* (a singleton or void) in that suit, and a new suit at the four level shows a good 5-card suit. Lacking shortness,

opener might choose 3 M (large), 3 NT (medium), or 4 M (small – fast arrival). This plan has these problems:

- Fast arrival has killed many a large-small slam.
- Opener’s rebids leak information to the opponents that responder may not need.
- When opener shows either shortness or a long suit, responder has no clue as to opener’s strength.
- Opener’s bid of the short suit allows the opponents to employ a double for nefarious purposes.
- Responder has no way to show a slam splinter, that is, shortness in a hand too strong for a game splinter.

Our responses solve all these problems, while retaining the capabilities of the basic responses. Our most important response is 3 ♣, which shows any small hand. Over that, responder will often jump to game, revealing little to the opponents.

Beyond that, the plan consists of applications of NLMH5 bids, which should soon become intuitive:

Step	NLMH5 bids:
1	No shortness; or asks (usually without shortness) NLMH5.
2	Low (club) shortness.
3	Middle (diamond) shortness.
4	High (other major) shortness.
4 Suit	5-card suit with 2 of top 3 honors.

In the charts that follow, we employ four sets of such bids:

- Two for opener: over 2 NT (bypassing 3 ♣), and (after having rebid 3 ♣) over 3 ♦;
- Two for responder: over 3 ♣, and over 3 ♦.

Over the 2 NT response itself or over opener’s 3 ♣ small-hand rebid, the first step (3 ♦ in both cases) is a NLMH5 ask, usually without shortness. Over such a 3 ♦ ask, the first step (3 ♥) simply denies shortness; it does not ask for shortness, because the 3 ♦ bidder already declined to do that.

Over opener’s small-hand 3 ♣, responder only bids NLMH5 with a large hand, so a shortness bid shows a *slam splinter*. However, over

opener's ask at 3 \diamond , responder might also show shortness with a limit raise or other hand unsuitable for a game splinter. Serious 3 NT (page 97) applies when opener shows a medium or large hand, or when responder bids NLMH5 over 3 \clubsuit .

We offer two plans for Jacoby 2 NT, standard and Swedish: \diamond^{13}

□ Plan A – Standard Jacoby 2 NT (Enhanced Rebids)

□ 3 \diamond is the 4-card limit raise over the opening bid.

Our jump raise is mixed, and the 3 \clubsuit jump response is a natural invitation, so 3 \diamond is the best available bid for the limit raise.

O2	R2	O3	After Standard Jacoby 2 NT (Enhanced)		
3 \clubsuit	Any small hand (~13 HCP); NLMH5 slam tries:				
	3 \diamond	Asks NLMH5 (slam interest):			
		3 \heartsuit	No shortness.		
		3 \spadesuit	Low (club) shortness.		
		3 NT	Middle (diamond) shortness.		
		4 \clubsuit	High (other major) shortness.		
		4 M	Terrible hand, 5-3-3-2.		
		Other	5-card suit with 2 of the top 3 honors.		
	3 \heartsuit	Low (club) shortness.		Slam Splinter	
	3 \spadesuit	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 \diamond	Asks NLMH5 (medium or large hand):			Medium or Large Hand	
		3 \heartsuit	No shortness.		
		3 \spadesuit	Low (club) shortness.		
		3 NT	Middle (diamond) shortness.		
		4 \clubsuit	High (other major) shortness.		
		4 M	Terrible hand, 4-4-3-2 or 4-3-3-3.		
		Other	5-card suit with 2 of the top 3 honors.		
	3 \heartsuit	Low (club) shortness.			
	3 \spadesuit	Middle (diamond) shortness.			
	3 NT	High (other major) shortness.			
	Other	5-card suit, 2 of the top 3 honors.			

In the chart above, a long club suit can be shown immediately by opener, or by responder over 3 ♣. When the asking bid is 3 ♦, 4 ♣ is used up to show shortness, so long clubs cannot be shown. Long suit bids are rare, so this is not much of a defect. If this appears likely to be an issue, consider responding 2 ♣.

○ Plan B – Swedish Jacoby 2 NT

- A game-forcing 2 NT response announces open season on wacky bids; Swedish Jacoby includes the limit raise.

O2	R2	O3	After Swedish Jacoby 2 NT	
3 ♣	Small hand (~13 HCP); NLMH5, skip 3 M = limit raise:			
	3 ♦	Asks NLMH5 (slam interest):		
		3 ♥	No shortness.	
		3 ♠	Low (club) shortness.	
		3 NT	Middle (diamond) shortness.	
		4 ♣	High (other major) shortness.	
		4 M	Terrible hand, 5-3-3-2.	
		Other	5-card suit with 2 of the top 3 honors.	
	3 M	Limit raise (opener passes or accepts).		
	3 oM	Low (club) shortness.		Slam Splinter
	3 NT	Middle (diamond) shortness.		
	4 ♣	High (other major) shortness.		
	4 M	Game values with no slam interest.		
	Other	5-card suit, 2 of the top 3 honors, slam interest.		
3 ♦	Asks NLMH5 (medium or large hand):			Medium or Large Hand
		3 ♥	No shortness.	
		3 ♠	Low (club) shortness.	
		3 NT	Middle (diamond) shortness.	
		4 ♣	High (other major) shortness.	
		4 M	Terrible hand, 4-4-3-2 or 4-3-3-3.	
		Other	5-card suit with 2 of the top 3 honors.	
	3 ♥	Low (club) shortness.		
	3 ♠	Middle (diamond) shortness.		
	3 NT	High (other major) shortness.		
	Other	5-card suit, 2 of the top 3 honors.		

Swedish Jacoby includes the 4-card limit raise in the 2 NT response. This provides cover for our slam auctions, since opponents don't want to go for a number against a possible partscore.

The rebids for Swedish Jacoby are more complicated: responder's 3 M bid over opener's 3 ♣ shows a limit raise (it may be passed or raised). That bumps the higher NLMH5 bids up a step, so responder can never show long clubs.

They Act over Standard or Swedish Jacoby 2 NT

RKB is always active. The *enemy suit* is a single known suit, or the highest of two or three suits.

For *opener*, immediately over any interference:

- Dble Penalty. At the three level, responder must pull the double with a singleton or void in the enemy suit. (Double of an artificial bid suggests penalties.)
- Pass Forcing, denies a control in the enemy suit.

They Double 2 NT – Systems on with...

Rdbl Balanced, about 18 HCP, ace or king in the enemy suit.

They Overcall Below 3 M

- 3 M Some control in the enemy suit, but weak.
- 3 NT An honor control in the enemy suit; forward-going.
- 4 M Preemptive.
- Other All other bids by opener promise *shortness* in the enemy suit with a control in the bid suit. A cue-bid shows a large hand.

Responder's bid at three of our major is weakest. If opener's pass comes around, responder must act:

- Dble Responder doubles on any hand with 3+ cards in the enemy suit, and opener passes with 3+ cards.
- 3 M At most a doubleton in the enemy suit, weak.
- 3 NT The ace or K-Q of the enemy suit, forward-going.
- 4 M Play here (likely two losers in the enemy suit).
- Other All other bids by responder promise *shortness* in the enemy suit. A cue-bid shows a large hand.

They Overcall at 3 M or Above

With some control in the enemy suit:

4 M Play here.

Other As natural as feasible, forward-going. The cue-bid of the enemy suit shows shortness in a large hand.

Preemptive Game Raises – 4 M & 3 NT

The immediate raise to game in opener's major suit promises five or more trumps, a singleton or void, and no side ace or protected king. The jump response of 3 NT shows the same hand, but with a side ace or king. This use of 3 NT is *off in competition*; 4 M does double duty.

The Game Force with 3-Card Support

With 3-card support and game values, we usually bid a lower-ranking suit at the two level, and then raise opener's major.

- Unless planning a picture bid (page 95), responder has little need to do this with 4-card support and a good, long side suit, as our Jacoby 2 NT can usually handle this hand.
- In “Spades after a Heart Opening” on page 90, we'll see that, with game values, the 1 ♠ response requires a 5-card suit. 1 ♠ is a cumbersome start, if our plan is to force to game in hearts.

○ Plan A – 2/1 with 3-Card Support = Any Game Force

With this standard plan, a Jacoby 2 NT response promises 4-card support, and a 3 NT response shows a preemptive game raise with side ace or king – as described above.

Playing this way, the 2/1 responder's raise of opener's suit, a common occurrence at the three level, would be made with a hand of any strength. If either partner has medium strength, we have a medium-medium problem.

□ Plan B – 2/1 with 3-Card Support = Medium+ Hand

With this plan, if a 2/1 responder raises opener at the second bid, that shows a medium or large hand, a boon for slam bidding. Pick a method for “small” responder to force to game with 3-card support:

- Bid Jacoby 2 NT with only 3-card support in a small hand.
- A 3 NT response shows a small hand with 3-card support.
- A 3 NT response shows a small hand with 3-card support, or a preempt to 4 M with a side ace or king. (Good luck with this!)

Passed Hand Raises

Except for 2 \diamond and 2 NT, our passed hand raises are the same.

□ **Diamond Drury.** Because the passed-hand 1 NT response is only “intended as forcing,” it is inappropriate for a 3-card limit raise. A bid of 2 \diamond shows a game invitation, with 3-card support (occasionally with four small trumps, usually 4-3-3-3).

Our 2 \diamond opening bid is weak; because a passed responder chose not to do that, a natural 2 \diamond response is less likely – a largely idle bid for a significant need!

R1	O2	R2	Passed Hand – Diamond Drury
1 NT	[intended as forcing] May be a slow-down raise.		
2 \clubsuit , 2 \heartsuit	[new suit] Natural invitation, denies 3-card support.		
2 \diamond	Diamond Drury: 3- or bad 4-card limit raise.		
	2 \heartsuit	Natural and encouraging, but non-forcing.	
	2 M	No interest in game.	
	Higher	Game try.	
2 M	Constructive raise; game tries apply.		
2 NT	4-Card limit raise; NLMH5 slam tries, skipping 3 M:		
	3 M / 4 M	To play.	
	3 \clubsuit	Asks NLMH5.	Slam Interest
	3 \diamond	Low (club) shortness.	
	3 oM	Middle (diamond) shortness.	
	3 NT	High (other major) shortness.	
	Other	5-card suit, 2 of top 3 honors.	
JS	Fit-showing (LR strength).		
3 M	Mixed raise.		

○ **Two-way Drury.** Both minor suits are game tries.

○ Traditional: 2 \clubsuit = 3-card support, 2 \diamond = 4-card support.

□ Superior: 2 \clubsuit = 4-card support, 2 \diamond = 3-card support.

In the superior method, over 2 ♣, opener may either make a game try in a known 9-card fit, or bid 2 ♦ with a normal but minimum opening bid, allowing responder to take control.

Game tries. Our game tries are easily employed over any Drury that promises a fit. With sufficient values, opener jumps to game (or sometimes makes a slam try). With no interest in game (possibly a light opening bid), opener rebids two trumps (or possibly 2 ♥ with spades and hearts). Since Drury is a raise, our game/slam tries are on for opener, starting at the first step over two trumps. Responder might also make a game try, using the same system.

Raises of a Major-Suit Opening – Summary

R1	O2	R2	O3	Raises of Major-Suit Opening
1 NT	[forcing] May contain slow-down raise (suit preference next), or 3-card limit raise (raise to three level next).			
2/1	GF, follow with raise: 3+ trumps, small+ or medium+.			
2 M	3+ trumps; 2 to 3 winners (no more, no less): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-Card support; 5-7 HCP, 1 winner and a doubleton, or two winners with 4-3-3-3, or • 3-Card support; 2 to 3 winners or 9-10 HCP. With points to consider game, opener counts losers: 7 = pass, ~6 = game try, ~5 = bid game, 4 = slam try.			
2 NT	Jacoby – Swedish (4-card LR+), or enhanced standard.			
JS	3 ♣ = Good club suit of at least six cards, invitational. 3 ♦ = Limit raise, fit-showing (default), or other. 3 ♥ = Fit-showing (default), or other.			
3 M	Mixed raise: 4+ trumps; two sure honor winners and a doubleton, or 10 support points. Could be a minimum mini-splinter. Opener bids game with 6 or fewer losers.			
3 NT	Preempt to 4 M with a side ace or king, off in competition; small-hand 3-card raise; or both.			
DJS	Game splinter (double-jump shift): small hand with 4+ trumps; about 11-14 HCP; singleton or void in bid suit.			
4 M	Preemptive raise: both 5+ trumps and a singleton or void – denies a side A or K, except in competition.			

Competition. Our raise structure is *off* whenever the opponents act over our opening bid. Select either, neither, or both of these options:

- Diamond Drury is still on when an opponent overcalls below 2 \diamond .
- Diamond Drury is still on when an opponent doubles.

Key Features

- A winner (sure cover card) in responder's hand is expected to remove an actual loser from opener's hand.
- The single raise is constructive, with 2 to 3 winners.
- We use a slow-down raise, with strength to respond (or less!), but fewer than two winners: respond 1 NT before preferring opener's major.
- Other raises include the jump mixed raise, 3- and 4-card limit raises, the 3+ card game force (via 2/1 or possibly 3 NT), the game-splinter, enhanced Jacoby 2 NT, preemptive game raises (4 M or possibly 3 NT), and perhaps fit-showing jumps.
- Decision: regular or Swedish Jacoby 2 NT.
- When they interfere over Jacoby 2 NT, double is penalty. Opener's pass denies a control in the enemy suit; responder doubles with 3+ cards, and opener passes with 3+ cards. Bidding our suit is weak, 3 NT shows an honor control, and other bids show shortness in the enemy suit.
- The special raise structure, including constructive raises, is *off* when an opponent acts over our opening bid. Support with support!

Backstory

Slow-down raise is my term, expressing my long-term understanding of how it works. The 2- to 3-winner single raise and our game try system grew from seven versions of my article on game tries.

Jacoby 2 NT was invented by Oswald Jacoby over fifty years ago. Swedish Jacoby is called Stenberg in Sweden, and by other names in other countries.

Splinters. My session note, "Good Raise" shows responding 2 NT to 1 \spadesuit on

\spadesuit A 8 6 4 \heartsuit 10 \diamondsuit K 10 4 \clubsuit K 7 5 4 3

Opener showed a small hand with 3 \clubsuit , and we stuck it in 4 \spadesuit . The opponents were given no clue for the opening lead.

Vic Quiros recommends playing a 3 NT response as showing a hand such as ours (4+ card support, a singleton somewhere, and 9 to 11 good HCP). If opener needs to know where the singleton is, they bid 4 ♣ (the next step), and responder shows the shortness with LMH steps (or another method). However, modern responses to Jacoby 2 NT handle this hand just fine, and we have better uses for the 3 NT response.

Interference. Aggressive opponents have learned to interfere over a Jacoby 2 NT response. Our system is based on the following sound advice:

John Adams: Players are so busy thinking that double shows a singleton, that they can never punish you. Add to that the knowledge that a 9 card fit means the opponents have 22 cards in the other 3 suits and are guaranteed an 8 card fit no matter how the other suits are divided... Intervention is almost free.

So much so that some will bid 4 card suits to get the lead. Hence I play penalty doubles.

Barry Rigal: I think the most important hands to worry about are

- 1) Those with shortage in THEIR suit.
- 2) Penalty doubles of their frivolous intervention.
- 3) Hands that can no longer make game your way.

You need to be able to show these three hand types; fit the rest in around them.

The main published plan for dealing with interference over our Jacoby 2NT is by Larry Cohen (2002), supported by Billy Miller (2011): double shows shortness in their suit. This is obsolete, and people playing a basic default of penalty doubles are probably better off. Other than my article on the topic, and the section in this book, the only ready-to-play plan that I can recommend is by Robert Todd. In the references are discussions on Bridge Winners started by Jack Feagin, Prahalad Rajkumar, and Adam Gann. That's it; people don't often write about this topic.

Rigal prefers "double is discouraging (weak length [3+ cards]), and pass is penalty X (partner reopens with X unless he would pull the double) or a slam try with 1/2nd round control." Despite initial impressions, this seems no better at meeting the requirements; it is also less intuitive and creates other difficulties. Maybe this just organizes the hands differently, putting all the ready-to-go slam tries into the one bucket – if opener does not pass, then they either lack the strength or a control to drive toward slam.

Drury. We play diamond Drury. Twice we played in the last makeable contract, after this auction: { Pass – 1 M; 2 ♣ – Pass }. Another time I argued for

diamond Drury with an occasional partner, who rejected it for two-way Drury. The above auction was best for the first deal!

◆ Alternative Methods

¹²⁻⁷⁷ Other Raise Structures and Variations

One-under raises. See my article “One-Under Raises of a Major Suit” for an untested plan using two of the suit below trump as our strong or limit raise.

Bergen raises. Marty Bergen’s 4-card major-suit raises have been around for four decades, are in common use, and have inspired countless variants:

- 2 NT Game forcing (Jacoby 2 NT).
- 3 ♣ Constructive (mixed) raise.
- 3 ♦ Invitational (limit) raise.
- 3 M Weak jump raise (0–6 HCP).

Folks who swap the 3 ♣ and 3 ♦ bids may gain a tad of preemption, but it comes at the cost of having no game try over 3 ♦, when hearts are trump. Bergen raises are compatible with the 2- to 3-winner single raise, but they conflict with, and are inferior to, mixed jump raises. Experts have largely given up weak jump raises, which can make life too easy for strong opponents.

Eichenbaum 4-card major-suit raises and cover cards. In his book, Ken Eichenbaum presents his major-suit raises in detail. From his inspiring work, I took the mixed jump raise of the opening bid or overcall. Eichenbaum’s framework is highly compatible with the 2- to 3-winner single raise.

Many years ago, George Rosenkranz defined cover cards. Eichenbaum offers modifications to cover card values. For more information, see their books or my article on major-suit raises.

Mini-splinter. We played the mini-splinter jump shift response for a couple of years, but it did not come up often; we went back to fit-showing. We now bid a mini-splinter hand with the most suitable other response.

When responder’s jump shift was a *mini-splinter*, it promised

- At least 4-card trump support,
- A singleton or void in the bid suit,
- At least two sure honor cover cards, and
- Either weaker or stronger than a game-splinter.

Attack the medium-medium problem. As we have mentioned, exploring for slam with a medium hand can be tricky. We don’t have enough strength to drive toward slam, yet if partner is also medium, we could well have one. It’s

much better, if one partner can either show or deny medium strength. We offer two ways to get the small 3-card raise out of the 2/1.

3 NT response as a small raise. GLM Steve Gladyszak plays this way, attacking the medium-medium problem head on, for opener's suit. This appears better than the following approach:

2 NT includes the small 3-card raise. The Jacoby 2 NT response has traditionally promised at least 4-card trump support. Now that we have opener's small-hand 3 ♣ response, Serious 3 NT has basically licked the medium-medium problem for those auctions. We could respond 2 NT over 1 ♠ with all of these hands:

♠ A Q 7 ♥ 7 5 3 2 ♦ K 6 ♣ K J 9 2

♠ Q 7 3 ♥ K Q 3 2 ♦ 6 ♣ K Q 9 6 2

♠ A Q 7 ♥ Q J 3 2 ♦ K 6 ♣ 10 9 6 2

Most of the time, partner bids 3 ♣, and we stick it in 4 ♠. No harm, no foul – that's where we thought we were going. If opener goes slamming over 2 NT, they will know that we might have such a hand, perhaps barely better than a 4-card limit raise.

2 ♠ as Jacoby. When the opening bid is 1 ♥, bidding space can be used more efficiently by swapping the meanings of the 2 ♠ and 2 NT responses – if the autopilot does not bid Jacoby 2 NT, and if 2 ♠ is not doubled. There are better uses for 2 ♠, including fit-showing and invitational.

¹³⁻⁸⁰ **Rebids after Jacoby 2 NT**

The most important part of our Jacoby 2 NT methods is opener's 3 ♣ rebid. Limiting opener's hand immediately solves the medium-medium problem for these deals. We play serious 3 NT, so when opener shows a medium or large hand, responder goes serious with a medium or large hand, solving the problem for most of these deals – including the slam-splinter.

Mixing in the limit raise can give pause to a feisty opponent, who won't want to go for a number against a partscore. A fine alternative is to swipe the Bergen limit raise of 3 ♦, which will be familiar to most advancing players. (As we saw on page 39, a *natural* invitation at 3 ♦ is as likely to cause a problem as to solve one.)

Spades after a Heart Opening

{ 1 ♡ – 1 ♠ } sequences can be tricky. The final strain is wide open, as is the strength of each hand. The issues include: ◆¹⁴

- A. Should opener raise to 2 ♠ on a small hand with only 3-card support?
- B. What does opener do with a medium or large hand containing three spades and six hearts? [major nightmare hand]
- C. How does responder sort out a sensible contract when holding minimal, invitational, or game values?

In addition, after a 1 NT response:

- D. Opener has a small hand with precisely 4=5=2=2 distribution.

Forcing to Game when Holding Spades

Rule: *With a game-forcing hand, only respond 1 ♠ to 1 ♡ with five or more spades.*

What do we do with only four?

Rule: *With a game-forcing hand containing four spades, make a two-over-one in a minor suit, over partner's 1 ♡ opening bid.*

Once the game force has been established, bidding will be much easier. However, we need this additional rule:

Rule: *The 1 ♡ opener must rebid 2 ♠ when holding four spades, after a two-over-one in a minor suit.*

Opener's shape-showing reverse does not show extra values and promises four or more spades; it won't interfere with anything responder had planned to do over a 2 ♡ rebid. This is the last chance to guarantee finding a spade fit.

The Routine 1 ♠ Response

Rule: *Over 1 ♡, the 1 ♠ response promises Q-10-x-x or better, or any five or more spades.*

This lets opener better judge when to raise (or jump raise) on 3-card support. Yup, it's possible to miss a 4-4 spade fit on a partscore hand. My analysis indicates the value outweighs the risk.

With three or more hearts, responder usually raises hearts or starts a slow-down raise with 1 NT. Responder only bids spades with invitational values (but not an FSJ) or better, for the lead with a slow-down raise, or without heart support.

Opener's 1 NT rebid. Opener's 1 NT denies a singleton (often 2=5=3=3) and is non-forcing.

R2	Opener Rebids 1 NT { 1♥ - 1♠; 1 NT - ? }
2♣	New minor forcing (NMF, next chapter; 5 spades if GF).
2♦	To play – but see two-way NMF in the next chapter.
2♥	To play.
2♠	To play.
2 NT	Natural invitation, 4 spades and 1-2 hearts.
3♣	To play.
3♦	If 2♦ forcing, to play; otherwise, undefined.
3♥	Natural invitation, 4+ spades and 3 hearts.
3♠	Natural invitation, 6+ cards.
3 NT	Choice of games with 5 spades (per rule, since GF).

Opener's minor-suit rebid. Opener should have four or more cards in the suit, for a minor-suit rebid. (Occasionally, opener has only three cards, hoping to show extra values on the next bid.)

R2	Opener Rebids 2♣ { 1♥ - 1♠; 2♣ - ? }
2♦	Fourth suit forcing (next chapter; five spades if GF).
2♥	To play.
2♠	To play, 6+ cards, likely 0-1 hearts.
2 NT	Natural invitation, 4-5 spades and 1-2 hearts.
3♣	Natural invitation.
3♦	To play!
3♥	Natural invitation, 4+ spades and 3 hearts.
3♠	Natural invitation, 6+ cards.
3 NT	Choice of games with 5 spades (per rule, since GF).

Only minor-suit bids (grayed) are different, when opener rebids 2♦:

R2	Opener Rebids 2 ♠ { 1 ♥ - 1 ♠; 2 ♠ - ? }	
2 ♥	To play.	Desperation, if weak with clubs. If can only play in clubs, respond 1 NT to 1 ♥.
2 ♠	To play, 6+ cards, likely 0-1 hearts.	
2 NT	Natural invitation, 4-5 spades and 1-2 hearts.	
3 ♣	Fourth suit forcing (next chapter; five spades since GF) - responder cannot play 3 ♣, which 1 NT response permits.	
3 ♠	Natural invitation.	
3 ♥	Natural invitation, 4+ spades and 3 hearts.	
3 ♠	Natural invitation, 6+ cards.	
3 NT	Choice of games, 5 spades (per rule, since GF).	

Key Features

- With only four spades in a game-forcing hand, respond two of a minor to a 1 ♥ opening. Opener must rebid 2 ♠ whenever holding four spades. (With game values, a 1 ♠ response promises at least five spades.)
- Responding in spades with three or more hearts usually requires invitational values or better.
- Over 1 ♥, the 1 ♠ response promises Q-10-x-x or better, or any five or more spades.

Backstory

Early in our partnership, Gary Schwartz said to have ♠ Q-10-x-x, any five, or better, for the 1 ♠ response to 1 ♥. The requirement to have five spades, to respond 1 ♠ on a game-going hand, came to me from multiple world champion Lynn Deas, via Richard Lee.

4=5=2=2. With nobody vulnerable, I picked up this hand:

♠ K Q 5 2 ♥ A 9 6 3 2 ♦ K 6 ♣ 6 4

After RHO passed, I felt obligated to open 1 ♥. LHO rescued me with a takeout double, the opponents played 2 ♣, and we got 57% on the board by holding them to two.

Rescued, you ask? Indeed: suppose LHO had passed, and partner had bid 1 NT forcing. My hand was way too weak for a reverse to 2 ♠, and the hearts were far too anemic to rebid. The approved choice is 2 ♣ on ♣ 6-4. Passing 1 NT is the alternative, but that would disappoint if responder has a heart raise. (Since we routinely rebid in a 3-card minor, it is only the 4=5=2=2 shape that causes such a problem.)

Open 1 ♠. In *Five Weeks to Winning Bridge*, where a major-suit opening would frequently be four cards, Alfred Sheinwold said to open 1 ♠ on:

♠ A K 6 3 ♡ K Q 5 3 2 ◇ 5 2 ♣ 8 4

but open 1 ♡ and rebid 2 ♡ on:

♠ K J 6 3 ♡ A K J 6 3 ◇ 5 2 ♣ 8 4

Playing 5-card majors, the author had *unacceptable results with this plan*. The 1962 K-S book says on page 24: “The opening bid of one spade or one heart promises five (or more) cards in the suit opened. This requirement is basic and invariable....” However, on *The Bridge World* site, Edgar Kaplan’s final *Kaplan-Sheinwold Updated* lists three cases for opening a 4-card major.

◆ Alternative Methods

¹⁴⁻⁹⁰ Evaluation of Prominent Alternatives

Playing Q-10-x-x or better, with the other features as described above, is sensible, easy to learn, and significantly improves the less-structured methods typically played. This is the way to go, for many partnerships. It helps with issues [A to C] above.

Flannery is the use of a 2 ◇ opening to show a small hand with four spades and five hearts, sometimes extended to 4=6 or even 5=6 shape. My analysis indicates Flannery provides about twice the benefits of the recommended method, *when learned thoroughly*. However, we start out at the two level, so any exploration takes us to the three level; everything tends to be a little high to work well. Flannery adherents tend to tout this preemption, not as a weakness, but as a strength, which I have not assessed. In its way, it addresses all four problems [A to D] above. Flannery is work; and it gives up the much-maligned weak 2 ◇ bid, which we like very much.

Tucker uses 1♡-opener’s 1 NT rebid as forcing with 3-card spade support; for this to work, a 2 ♠ response must be played as game-forcing with five or more spades. My analysis indicates Tucker provides about twice the benefits of Flannery, for no more work. It addresses issues [A to C] above very well. The idea has not sold well, so my article “Tucker over One Heart” was removed from the Appendix of this book. This and other alternatives are also described in my article “Flannery and Major Nightmare Solutions.”

Edgar Kaplan’s Interchange or inversion of the 1 ♠ and 1NT-forcing responses to 1 ♡ is poised near the sweet spot, providing useful value for less complexity than Flannery and Tucker. It addresses all the problems above, except 4–3 fits for [A & B]. This has not sold well, so it has been removed from the Appendix to this book. If I get it right, look for an article.

Major Suit Slams

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.

Opener

♠ A 4 2

♥ A J 9 3 2

♦ J 6

♣ A 9 4

1 ♥

2 NT

Pass

Responder

♠ J 8 5

♥ K Q 7

♦ A K Q 3 2

♣ 8 5

2 ♦ [natural game force]

4 ♥ [picture bid]

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 ♦ response and 2 NT rebid, responder's best shot is to bid

3 ♥, and then control-bid in diamonds – hopefully, twice, showing

♦ A-K-Q. Here's another way:

1 ♥ 3 ♦ [FSJ, inv or slam]

4 ♥ [accepts game try] 5 ♦ [no black suit control]

6 ♥ [getting the picture]

5. A grand picture.

Opener

♠ Q 10 7 6 5 4

♥ A J 4

♦ A 4

♣ A 3

Responder

♠ A K 9 3

♥ K Q 8 7 2

♦ 6 2

♣ 5 4

1 ♠

3 ♥ [forcing]

7 NT [count 13 tricks]

2 ♥ [5+ cards]

4 ♠ [picture bid]

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

1 ♥ – 2 ♣

2 ♠ – 4 ♠ [no keycards]

We have a slam if partner has two aces. Because partner showed none, we get to make four spades, instead of being one down at five.

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. \diamond^{15} It applies when a fit in a major suit of at least eight cards is confirmed \diamond^{16} in a non-competitive, game-forcing auction, *below 3 NT*. \diamond^{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*. \diamond^{18} Before asking for keycards, we want the partnership to have:

2. serious intent to bid a slam, and
3. 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 \diamond^{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. \diamond^{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 \spadesuit is required. It neither shows nor denies serious slam interest. \diamond^{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 game 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 to diagnose 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 ♣ control] |
| 4 ♥ [♣ control, no ♥ control] | | |

[4 ♥ instead of 4 ♦ shows ♥ control but neither 2/3 top ♦ nor ♣.]

11. 4 ♦ is last train:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----|---------------------------|
| 1 ♥ | 2 ♦ | [includes ♦ control] |
| 2 ♥ | 3 ♥ | |
| 3 NT [serious, no ♠ control] | 4 ♦ | [♠ control, no ♣ control] |

12. 4♥ is last train:

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 ♠ | 2♥ [includes ♥ control] |
| 2 ♠ | 3 ♠ |
| 3 NT [serious] | 4 ♣ [♣, no ♦ (would RKB)] |
| 4♥ [♦, values problem] | |

13. 4♥ is last train with serious slam interest:

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 ♠ | 2♥ [includes ♥ control] |
| 2 ♠ | 3 ♠ |
| 4 ♣ [courtesy, ♣ control] | 4♥ [serious, no ♦ control] |

14. 4♥ is last train:

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 ♠ | 2♥ [includes ♥ control] |
| 2 ♠ | 3 ♠ |
| 4♦ [courtesy, ♦, no ♣] | 4♥ [serious, ♣, no ♥] |

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

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1♥ | 2♦ [includes ♦ control] |
| 2♥ | 3♥ |
| 4♦ [courtesy ♦, no ♠ or ♣] | |

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 83.

Heart keycard issue. When hearts are trump and 4 NT is the keycard ask, a 4♦ last train could mean, we have all the controls, but I only have one keycard (4 NT causes a disaster on a 5♠ 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 ♠ – (2 ♦) – 2 ♠ – (3 ♦); ?

3 ♠ is competitive; 3 ♥ is the only game try.

17. Lots of good stuff here:

Opener

♠ A K Q J 9 2

♥ A 8

♦ 9 4

♣ Q 7 2

1 ♠

3 ♠ [spades trump, slam try]

4 ♥ [last train, ♥, no ♦]

5 ♦ [0 or 3 keycards (1430)]

6 ♣ [yes, and ♣ queen!]

Responder

♠ 10 9 3

♥ 9 2

♦ A 10

♣ A K 10 9 5 4

2 ♣ [♣ A or K]

4 ♣ [courtesy, 2 of top 3 clubs]

4 NT [♦ control, RKB ♠]

5 ♥ [queen ask]

7 NT [count = 13 tricks]

Responder has shown two of the top three clubs, so opener gets to show the ♣ 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

♠ Q 9

♥ A K Q J 2

♦ K 9 2

♣ K J 3

1 ♥

2 ♥ [catch-all (no ♠ stop)]

3 NT [serious, no ♠ control]

Pass

Responder

♠ 10 8 4

♥ 10 6 4

♦ A Q

♣ A Q 9 8 7

2 ♣ [with hearts, ♣ A or K]

3 ♥ [hearts are trump]

4 ♥ [no ♠ control, either]

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

1♥

2♠ [required with 4♠]

4♣ [courtesy, ♣ control]

4NT [RKB (all suits controlled)]

Responder

♠ A Q 10 8

♥ Q 7

♦ A Q 7 2

♣ A 5 3

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 3NT applies when an 8-card major-suit fit is confirmed below 3NT in a non-competitive game-forcing auction. Bidding 3NT shows serious slam interest (extra values); a control-bid bypassing 3NT is only a courtesy (expected values).
- The control-bid below 4M 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 3NT is off, but our control-bidding methods still apply.

Backstory

Serious 3NT 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.

Limited fast arrival was inspired by Rodwell; example [6] is his.

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.*

¹⁵⁻⁹⁷ **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.

¹⁶⁻⁹⁷ **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.

¹⁷⁻⁹⁷ **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 ♦ 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.

¹⁸⁻⁹⁷ **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.

¹⁹⁻⁹⁷ **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.

²⁰⁻⁹⁷ **Partner's suit**. Shortness in partner's A-x-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.

²¹⁻⁹⁷ **Spade interchange**. Some pairs flip the meaning of 3 ♠ and 3 NT when hearts are trump: 3 ♠ 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.

²²⁻⁹⁹ **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.

3. Minor-Suit Openings

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Finding Major-Suit Fits: NMF, XYZ & 4SF

Let's start with some core features of our minor-suit system.

Walsh Responses to a 1 ♣ opening require game-forcing values to respond 1 ♦ to a 1 ♣ opening, when holding a four-card major. ^{◆1} Opener only bids a major over the 1 ♦ response with an unbalanced hand or concentrated values, otherwise preferring to rebid 1 NT. The 1 ♦ responder carries responsibility for finding an undisclosed major-suit fit, usually by reversing into the major. This plan works well.

We respond 1 ♠ to 1 ♣ with either of these:

♠ K 8 7 3 ♡ 7 ♦ Q 9 7 5 3 2 ♣ 8 2

♠ K Q 7 3 ♡ 7 ♦ K Q 9 7 2 ♣ 8 3 2

but bid 1 ♦ with a full opening bid:

♠ K Q 7 3 ♡ 7 ♦ A K 9 7 2 ♣ 8 3 2

□ **Opener's 1 NT rebid denies a singleton.** We rely heavily on this rule, which provides major advantages to partnerships who play “better minor” openings, as we do:

***Rule:** Opener's 1 NT rebid absolutely, unconditionally guarantees at least two cards in responder's suit.*

Responder will routinely rebid 2 ♠ over opener's 1 NT rebid with:

♠ 8 6 5 4 3 ♡ A 8 3 ♦ K 9 5 ♣ 6 4

We are not going to enjoy it if opener produces:

♠ K ♡ K Q 6 4 ♦ A 8 2 ♣ Q J 9 5 2

Yes, this is a revolting 2 ♣ rebid. We only open because of the ♠ K. See “Don't Buy a Problem” on page 20 for related examples.

○ **Opener may rebid 1 NT over 1 ♠ with a singleton.** ^{◆2} To many, this is a worthy option; but the ramifications are huge. When I played in the individual regional [winning twice], I proposed to every partner that a 1 NT rebid promises at least two cards. Having an agreement on this issue is that important!

The rest of this book assumes opener's 1 NT denies a singleton.

Responding in a major suit. Responder always bids the longer of two major suits of at least four cards. With equal length in the majors, the response is 1 ♥ with 4-4 (prepared to ignore spades unless opener bids them) or 1 ♠ with 5-5 or 6-6 (prepared to bid hearts next).

Bypass spades. Over a 1 ♥ response, opener's 1 NT rebid denies interest in a 4-4 spade fit. We may agree (or independently choose) to rebid 1 NT over 1 ♥ with 4=3=3=3 shape, because notrump may play better than spades. Reportedly, some pairs bypass 1 ♠ to bid 1 NT on many other hands, but we don't do that.

The other major after opener rebids 1 NT. When the response was 1 ♠, we may well have a 4-4 heart fit. Exploring for that is a priority when responder is 5=4 or 6=4. When weak, responder can simply bid 2 ♥, which opener should pass or correct to 2 ♠. (Responder may choose 2 ♠ instead, when unwilling to be passed in a 4-3 heart fit.)

When opener rebids 1 NT over a 1 ♥ response after a 1 NT rebid, there is little chance of a spade fit. Responder signs off in 2 ♥ with a weak hand. Responder's mention of spades is forcing, with interest in game or slam, and might be agreed to be artificial.

New Minor Forcing (NMF)

New minor forcing, now a generic term, has been a mainstay of tournament players in North America, when opener rebids 1 NT. It has two main approaches, with multiple variations. [♦³](#) (See also "Spades after a Heart Opening" on page 90.) Before we get into those approaches, we need to decide an issue.

4-4 majors vs. 4=5 or longer, after opener rebids 1 NT over 1 ♥.

With a forward-going hand, responder may wish to show a spade suit. We have two approaches to employ: reverse to 2 ♠ and NMF.

☐ 2 ♠ shows longer hearts. A 2 ♠ bid after NMF shows 4-4.

○ 2 ♠ shows 4-4. A 2 ♠ bid after NMF shows longer hearts.

○ Optionally, an "impossible" 2 ♠ bid by opener after NMF asks for a spade stopper, so that 2 NT can promise one.

○ Plan A – Two-Way NMF with 2 ♣ Puppet

Responder's bid of 2 ♣ is a puppet to 2 ♦; it includes weak hands with diamonds and either [a] most, or [b] almost all, invitational hands. Responder's 2 ♦ is an artificial game force. Plans like this are also called modified two-way Stayman or xyNT, etc.

R2	O3	R3	Two-Way NMF: 1 x – 1 y; 1 NT – ?		
2 ♣	Puppet to 2 ♦.				
	2 ♦	Required relay.			
		Pass	To play.		
		Suit	Natural invitation (2 ♠ choice above).		
		2 NT	Natural invitation:	[a] with 4-card support for opener's minor.	[b] 2- to 4-card support.
		3 NT	Choice of games, with a 5-card major.		
		Higher	Splinter for <i>responder's</i> suit.		
2 ♦	Artificial game force.				
2 ♥	Natural, to play.				
2 ♠	Natural; to play. (If a reverse, see choice above.)				
2 NT	[a] Natural invitation, denies 4-card support.				
2 NT	[b] Puppet to 3 ♣: to play, or GF with opener's minor.				
	3 ♣	Required relay – pass, to play there.			
		3 ♦	5 M, 4 m, low shortness.		Singleton or Void.
		3 ♥	5 M, 4 m, high shortness.		
		3 ♠	4 M, 5 m, low shortness.		
		3 NT	4 M, 5 m, high shortness.		
3 ♣	[a] Natural, to play.		[b] Natural slam try.		
3 ♦ 3 ♥ 3 ♠	Natural slam try, 5+ cards. If 3 M, 6+ cards & sets trump. 3 ♠ is a splinter for opener's suit, over hearts.				
3 NT	To play, usually without a 5-card major.				
Higher	Splinter for <i>opener's</i> suit.				

Responder's 2 NT over opener's 1 NT is:

[a] a natural invitation (default); or

[b] artificial, puppet to 3 ♣ – expert, but can we remember? \diamond^4

Two-way NMF applies whenever opener's second bid is 1 NT.

Variation [a] updates a response structure that I played for quite a while in the past. Some play the jumps as good-suit invitations, instead of slam tries. Splinters are optional. { 1 m - 1 ♡; 1 NT - 2 ♠ } shows the less usual 4-4, invitational; with 4=5, go through 2 ♣.

○ Plan B – Standard One-Way NMF

Responder's bid of two of the new (unbid) minor is artificial, promises at least invitational strength, and asks opener for clarification. Responder's subsequent bid at the three level is forcing to game, often a slam try, except three of opener's minor with [b]. This method could be called standard, original, or one-way NMF. It applies when the response to a suit opening is a major suit, and opener rebids 1 NT, including { 1 ♡ - 1 ♠; 1 NT - 2 ♣ }.

R2	O3	R3	One-Way NMF: 1 m - 1M; 1NT - ?	
2 m	Natural, to play in opener's suit.			
2 om	Artificial game try, often with 5 cards in M.			
	2 ♢	[over 2 ♣] No major, min, 5 ♢.		Non-forcing; 2 ♡ is priority.
	2 ♡	Suit or support, minimum.		
	2 ♠	Support, min (choices above).		
	2 NT	No major, minimum.		3 m over any:
		3 m	[a] GF (default).	[b] Invitational.
	3 om	☐ <i>Artificial game force: 3-card M and 4-card oM.</i>		
	3 M, 3 oM, 3 NT	Natural, maximum values.		
2 ♡	Natural, to play (or correct to spades).			
2 ♠	Natural, to play. (If a reverse, see 2 ♠ choice above.)			
2 NT	Natural invitation, usually without a 5-card major.			
3 om	Natural, to play, 6+ cards (only way to play in om).			
3 m	Natural:	[a] invitational (default).	[b] GF.	
3 M	Natural, invitational, 6+ cards.			
3 oM	Natural, invitational. (Splinter if 2 ♠ is a reverse.)			
3 NT	To play, usually without a 5-card major.			
DJS	Splinter for <i>opener's</i> suit.			

Responder's two ways to 3 m:

- ☐ [a] after NMF = GF, direct = invitational (default); or
- ☐ [b] after NMF = inv, direct = GF (expert, less intuitive).

One-Way vs. Two-Way NMF

The main advantage of one-way over two-way NMF is to be able to bid a natural preference at two of opener's club suit. Proponents of two-way counter, the opponents won't let us play there, anyhow. I have found that assertion to be partially true, but sometimes 2 ♣ is the last – or only – safe haven. If the opponents let us play there, our score may still be negative. We'll also see examples where responder's 2 ♣ bid can turn into an otherwise unlikely game. One-way NMF is attractive at matchpoints – the author's game – where all boards count the same.

Two-way NMF provides many advantages – a popular plan for good reason. It should be better for slam bidding and therefore makes sense for pairs that often play in events with IMP scoring.

Recommendation: Don't be in a hurry to change a comfortable NMF system. Both work. Within each system, gray methods [b] in the charts (pages 109–110), don't come up that often.

Examples – after { 1 ♣ – 1 ♠; 1 NT }:

Both the up- and down-sides of the one-way NMF preference to clubs occur here: opener has no negative bid below 2 NT after 2 ♦ NMF.

1. ♠ K 8 7 3 ♥ 7 ♦ Q 9 7 5 3 2 ♣ 8 2

One-way auction:

We leap to 3 ♦; opener passes.

Two-way auction:

We bid 2 ♣, and pass 2 ♦.

2. ♠ K 10 8 7 3 ♥ 7 ♦ A J 9 7 3 ♣ Q 2

One-way auction:

We bid 2 ♦. Over 2 ♥, we bid 2 ♠, invitational. Over opener's 2 ♠, we pass (3 ♠ would be forcing) or bid 4 ♠. Over opener's 2 NT, we pass if we agreed 3 ♦ is forcing, or bid 3 ♦ if non-forcing.

Two-way auction:

We bid 2 ♣. Over the 2 ♦ relay, we bid 2 ♠, invitational, denying four hearts and concealing opener's heart holding. If opener raises, we bid 4 ♠. Over opener's 2 NT, we bid 3 ♦.

3. ♠ K Q 10 7 3 ♥ 7 ♦ A Q 9 7 3 ♣ Q 2

One-way auction:

We bid 2 ♦. Over 2 ♥, we bid 3 NT, implying five spades. Over opener's 2 ♠, we bid 4 ♠. Over opener's 2 NT, we can try 3 ♦, if forcing – partner has at most three hearts – or just bid 3 NT.

Two-way auction:

We can bid 2 ♦ (GF) and easily reach game in spades, notrump, or perhaps diamonds.

4. ♠ K 10 8 7 3 ♥ A J 7 5 ♦ 9 3 ♣ Q 2

One-way auction:

We bid 2 ♦. Over opener's minimum 2 ♥, we pass. Over opener's 2 ♠ or 2 NT, we pass.

Two-way auction:

We bid 2 ♣. Over opener's 2 ♦ relay, we bid 2 ♥, invitational, 5=4. A weak opener will pass or bid 2 ♠ – we pass.

5. ♠ K 10 8 7 3 ♥ A J 7 ♦ 9 3 ♣ Q 8 2

One-way auction:

We bid 2 ♦. Over opener's 2 ♥, we bid 2 ♠, invitational. Over opener's 2 ♠ or 2 NT, we pass.

Two-way auction:

We bid 2 ♣. Over opener's 2 ♦ relay, we bid 2 ♠, invitational. We play game, if opener bids it.

See “Five Deals” on page 117 for examples from actual play.

XYZ

The XYZ system is a customary extension of the methods of two-way NMF to auctions where opener rebids a *suit* at the one level. It's called X-Y-Z or XYZ for the three bids at the one level. Pairs who play XYZ usually play the same structure whether opener rebids 1 NT or one of a suit, calling the whole package XYZ.

Two-way NMF works smoothly because opener has a limited hand with balanced distribution. XYZ has additional complexities, because opener may have an unbalanced hand and/or extra values, and may need to break the relay. Marshall Miles recommended our:

Rule: *Opener breaks the 2 ♣ puppet to 2 ♦, when they would not have passed a natural 2 ♦ signoff.*

With XYZ, fourth suit forcing is no longer used when opener rebids 1♥ or 1♠, but 4SF is still needed when opener makes a normal rebid in a suit at a higher level.

Fourth Suit Forcing (4SF)

The fourth suit by responder is artificial and forcing, in these cases:

- a. Fourth suit at the one level:

1♣ - 1♦; 1♥ - 1♠

- b. Third suit at the one level, fourth at the two level:

1♣ - 1♦; 1♠ - 2♥

1♣ - 1♥; 1♠ - 2♦

1♦ - 1♥; 1♠ - 2♣

- c. Third suit at the two level, fourth at the two level:

1♦ - 1♥; 2♣ - 2♠

1♦ - 1♠; 2♣ - 2♥

1♥ - 1♠; 2♣ - 2♦

- d. Third suit at the two level, fourth at the three level:

1♥ - 1♠; 2♦ - 3♣

Playing XYZ, only cases [c] and [d] are fourth-suit forcing auctions. Not playing XYZ, all four cases are 4SF auctions.

One round or to game. The ACBL convention card has boxes to indicate whether 4SF is forcing for one round or to game. The latter is absolute, and most play it that way. However, some hands cannot be bid correctly if the fourth suit is unconditionally forcing to game.

1♦ - 1♠; 2♣ or 1♣ - 1♥; 1♠

For example, playing one-way NMF, after either of the above auctions, what is responder supposed to bid with a relatively balanced invitational hand and no stopper in the fourth suit?

□ Plan A – Fourth Suit Forcing to Game

Responder's bid of the fourth suit is an artificial game force. As XYZ makes 4SF less frequent, this plan is a good fit for XYZ.

□ Plan B – Fourth Suit Forcing One Round

Kantar's rule: After responder's one-round force in the fourth suit, responder's bid at the three level is forcing to game.

Responder's two-level bids after this 4SF are non-forcing. As bidding 2 NT promises a stopper in the fourth suit, opener may be stuck for a bid in some circumstances, having to bid two of responder's major with only a doubleton. Opener must jump with 3-card support and game values, since responder may have little to do but pass the minimum preference. Plan B is highly recommended with one-way NMF, which operates similarly and needs 4SF more.

6. ♠ K 10 7 ♥ A J 9 7 3 ♦ 9 3 ♣ Q 8 2
1 ♣ – 1 ♥; 1 ♠ – ?

Playing XYZ, bid 2 ♣, on hand [6]. Over opener's expected 2 ♦, invite game with 2 ♥. Without XYZ, when the fourth suit is forcing one round, we bid 2 ♦ (4SF) and pass opener's two-level bid. Without XYZ, with 2 ♦ forcing to game, we are hurting: try 2 ♠.

7. ♠ K 10 7 4 2 ♥ 9 7 3 ♦ K 3 ♣ K Q 8
1 ♦ – 1 ♠; 2 ♣ – ?

On hand [7], XYZ does not apply. We bid 2 ♥, if forcing one round. Otherwise, we are stuck; best is to bid 2 NT smoothly; if we have dithered, either 2 ♠ or 2 ♥ may work out best. This is not a common case: with another club or diamond – likely if we have only four spades – we could raise a minor suit.

Despite the occasional problem, Plan A is a simpler, common choice.

Fourth Suit at the One Level { 1 ♣ – 1 ♦; 1 ♥ – 1 ♠ }

Responder will have game-forcing values, if holding four spades, having bid a Walsh 1 ♦. 1 ♠ is natural, playing XYZ. Without XYZ, the 1 ♠ bid is forcing, but ambiguous about spades. Responder's jump to 2 ♠ is natural, with five spades and six diamonds. ♦⁵

Opener Rebids Two of the Minor

1 \diamond - 1 \spadesuit ; 2 \clubsuit

On the above auction, responder's hand is unlimited. Fortunately, we have 4SF when responder has a good hand. Consider these auctions:

1 \clubsuit - 1 \heartsuit ; 2 \clubsuit

1 \clubsuit - 1 \spadesuit ; 2 \clubsuit

Only two suits have been bid. We treat 2 \diamond as if it were 4SF (some call this *third suit forcing*). This is comfortable.

1 \diamond - 1 \heartsuit ; 2 \diamond

1 \diamond - 1 \spadesuit ; 2 \diamond

Here, we use the other major as if it were 4SF. Not so comfortable, but we need all the bidding space we can get.

Why? Opener's rebid of the minor is not frivolous. It promises a 6-card suit, or a chunky 5-carder under duress. When opener rebids that minor, and game is not possible, we usually pass. A new suit is forcing. As responder, repeating our major suit promises a good 6-bagger and close to invitational values.

Suppose we hold:

8. \spadesuit K Q 8 7 3 \heartsuit Q 5 3 2 \diamond 9 \clubsuit 8 5 2

Partner opens 1 \diamond , and we bid 1 \spadesuit . If partner bids 1 NT, our weak bid of 2 \heartsuit is automatic. Opener has promised two spades, so we have a playable spade fit, and may have a 4-4 heart fit.

After 1 \diamond - 1 \spadesuit ; 2 \diamond , a bid of 2 \heartsuit would be suicidal, even if we played it as weak: opener may have one spade and two hearts.

Free Bid at One of a Major

9. 1 m - (1 \heartsuit) - 1 \spadesuit

10. 1 \clubsuit - (1 \diamond) - 1 M

On auction [9], most correctly play that 1 \spadesuit promises at least a 5-card suit. We agree with Mel Colchamiro that the free bid of either major on auction [10] should promise five as well. He refutes the risks of a doomsday scenario, when we double with one 4-card major.

Key Features

- Holding a 4-card major after a 1 ♣ opening, responder bypasses 1 ♦ with less than opening strength. The 1 ♦ responder assumes responsibility for major-suit fits; opener only bids a major with an unbalanced hand or concentrated values.
- Opener's 1 NT rebid guarantees two or three cards in responder's major suit.
- Decision: one-way NMF vs. two-way NMF with 2 ♣ puppet.

One-way NMF:

- Responder's bid of the unbid minor is an artificial one-round force. Opener's artificial "raise" of the new minor shows a maximum with three cards in responder's major, and four in the other major.
- Responder's jump into the new minor is weak.
- Decision:
 - Slow: { 1 m – 1 M; 1 NT – 2 om [NMF]; something – 3 m }
 - Fast: { 1 m – 1 M; 1 NT – 3 m }
 - Standard: slow auction is forcing, fast is invitational, or
 - Expert: slow auction is invitational, fast is forcing.* pick same?
- Decision: { 1 ♣ – 1 ♦; 1 NT – ? }, is 3 ♣ forcing?* pick same?

Two-way NMF with 2 ♣ puppet:

- 2 ♣ is a puppet to 2 ♦. Responder passes to play, invites game, or bids 3 NT to offer a choice between 3 NT and 4 M.
- 2 ♦ is an artificial game force.
- A non-reverse bid of two of either major suit is to play.
- Decision: is 2 NT a puppet to 3 ♣, or is 2 NT natural and 3 ♣ to play? – big ripples here.
- A higher suit is slamming.

Fourth suit forcing:

- Decision: is responder's bid of the fourth suit forcing to game, or one round? (With one round, responder's subsequent three-level bid would be game-forcing.) One round is similar to, and fits well with, one-way NMF. To game is simpler and fits well with XYZ, where 4SF comes up less often.
- After opener rebids their minor over responder's suit bid, the cheaper unbid suit is treated as 4SF.

Five Deals

Board 2. Tim Hill and I played this deal. Over the 1 NT rebid, I chose to remove to Tim's club suit. Double dummy defense can hold this to two, but Tim made an extra.

West was shut out by our bidding his two better suits. East had the shape to enter with an unusual 2 NT bid, but chose not to, at unfavorable vulnerability with ratty suits.

Board 2	♠ J 10 5 4			
South Deals	♥ 8			
E-W Vul	♦ A 9 6 5			
	♣ QJ 6 3			
♠ A Q 9 6	N	♠ 3 2		
♥ J 6 5 2	W E	♥ K 9 7 4 3		
♦ 10	S	♦ K J 8 7 2		
♣ A 10 7 5		♣ 4		
	♠ K 8 7			
	♥ A Q 10			
	♦ Q 4 3			
	♣ K 9 8 2			

E 4♥; S 2N; W 2♥; NS 2♣; NS 1♠; Par -300: S 4N×-2

West	North	East	South
	<i>Pete</i>		<i>Tim</i>
			1 ♣
Pass	1 ♠	Pass	1 NT
Pass	2 ♣	All Pass	

2 ♣ by South; Made 3 — NS +110

Even though, this time, opener has hearts well-stopped, it can indeed be useful to offer to play in 2 ♣, even if the opponents bid over it. Often, North would have a weaker hand for the 2 ♣ bid.

Board 4. My partner and I are silent. Join my opponent for this deal, in a matchpoint pairs game. It's your system and your call with the hand below:

♠ 7 2	♥ K Q J 7	♦ 5 4 3	♣ 9 6 5 2
1 ♣	1 ♥		
1 ♠	?		

Make your choice before reading on.

Board 4									
West Deals		♠ A 9 5 3							
Both Vul		♥ 10 5							
		♦ A K							
		♣ A K 8 4 3							
♠ Q 6 4		<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> </table>		N		W	S	E	♠ K J 10 8
	N								
W	S	E							
♥ A 9 3 2			♥ 8 6 4						
♦ Q 9 7 2			♦ J 10 8 6						
♣ J 7			♣ Q 10						
		♠ 7 2							
		♥ K Q J 7							
		♦ 5 4 3							
		♣ 9 6 5 2							

West	North	East	South
Pass	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♥
Pass	1 ♠	Pass	2 ♣
Pass	3 NT	All pass	

3 NT by North

Lead: ♥ 8

Made 5 – NS +660

Playing XYZ, South's only reasonable action over partner's 1 ♠ rebid is to bid 1 NT. South must not pass partner in a 4–2 spade fit, and 2 ♣ would be inviting game (or escaping into diamonds). Over 1 NT, North can visualize the possibility of taking as few as the five top tricks in a notrump contract. A gentle 2 NT seems plenty. With only six points, and not knowing about partner's clubs, South passes.

However, our opponent was playing standard NMF. 2 ♣ appealed to responder more than 1 NT. North visualized clubs running, for eight tricks – surely South will provide another. Suddenly optimistic, North leaped to game. To add insult to injury, even though I took the second heart trick, declarer had entries in clubs to enjoy two more hearts – making five for an 85% board. This was a system win for traditional methods.

Would you have led a spade (the fourth-best ♠ 8 is likely best, in a bid suit) and held them to three? Maybe at IMPs, but not at matchpoints. No other lead makes a difference.

Board 8, none vul. After { 1 ♣ – 1 ♦; 1 NT }, this is a problem deal for one-way NMF. Notice that responder's diamond suit quality is not sufficient for an auto-splinter.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ K J 9	♠ 3
♥ A Q 7	♥ K 10
♦ Q 6	♦ K 10 9 8 7 2
♣ Q 9 7 5 3	♣ A K 4 2

Recommended – 3 ♣ forcing:

1 ♣	1 ♦
1 NT	3 ♣ [forcing]
3 NT [all suits stopped]	Pass

At the table, the cards lay so that 3 NT always made five. However, on some other layout, leaking information could have hurt. With 6–3–2–2 shape, a jump to 3 NT by responder can make sense, perhaps holding this hand:

♠ Q 3 ♥ K 10 5 ♦ A J 9 8 7 2 ♣ A 2

Board 17. This matchpoint-pairs deal raises issues with both NMF systems.

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ A 8	♠ Q J 10 9 4
♥ A 5 4 3	♥ J 7 2
♦ K 8 6 2	♦ Q 10 9 5
♣ Q 5 3	♣ A

Auction 1 – One-way NMF:

1 ♦	1 ♠
1 NT [small & balanced]	2 ♣ [NMF]
2 ♥ [may also have spades]	3 ♦ [natural & it depends]
3 NT	Pass

Auction [1] was what happened at the table. Playing method [a], NMF is our only possible way to force in diamonds below the four level (perhaps with four spades and five diamonds), so an aggressive 3 NT was reached. (On the lead of the ♥ K, declarer played RHO for the ♦ J, and came in with two tricks in each suit, plus a third diamond – lucky indeed.)

Responder's non-forcing third bids are 2 ♠ and 2 NT, both implying five spades. Playing method [a], there is no way that responder can further the invitation in diamonds, or play there. A jump rebid of 3 ♦ (not NMF) is how we invite in diamonds, but that does not explore for spades.

Responder had assumed method [b] NMF, with the direct 3 \diamond forcing (and 3 \diamond after 2 om invitational). This case, which I had not recognized in many decades of playing NMF, is the reason for method [b].

Auction 2 – Fit-showing jump:

1 \diamond		2 \spadesuit	[5+ \spadesuit , 4+ \diamond , inv]
3 \diamond	[Pass if 2 \spadesuit NF]	Pass	

On this specific deal, our auction [2] is perfect: responder has five spades containing only secondary honors (plus the 9), \diamond Q-10-9-5, and mostly an ace outside. However, this is not a general solution; the values are too scattered for an FSJ on this hand:

\spadesuit Q 9 6 5 4 \heartsuit Q 7 2 \diamond Q 10 9 5 \clubsuit A

Auction 3 – Two-way NMF:

1 \diamond		1 \spadesuit	
1 NT	[small & balanced]	2 \clubsuit	[Weak with \diamond or any invite]
2 \diamond	[required relay]	2 \spadesuit	[5+ \spadesuit , inv, NF]
Pass			

Two-way auction [3] is clear sailing to the expected top contract of 2 \spadesuit . However, on the alternative hand, we still sail into 2 \spadesuit , the only way to try for game in spades. Responder never gets to mention diamonds. Two-way NMF method [b] applies only to game-forcing hands.

Board 5. “The Bidding Box” (2), March 2024 *Bulletin*:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
\spadesuit K J 9 2	\spadesuit 8
\heartsuit A J	\heartsuit K 10 6 3 2
\diamond 10	\diamond J 7 3
\clubsuit K Q 9 6 5 2	\clubsuit A 10 7 4

Auction 1 – Standard:

1 \clubsuit	1 \heartsuit	
1 \spadesuit	2 \clubsuit	[natural, usually 4+ cards]
3 \clubsuit	3 \diamond	
3 \heartsuit	4 \heartsuit	
Pass		

Opener’s 3 \clubsuit showed diamonds was a problem for notrump. Responder’s 3 \diamond , showing and asking for half a stopper, was correct. Lacking that, with only two hearts, opener should have bid more clubs, the probable 10-card fit. The bad 3 \heartsuit bid snatched defeat from the jaws of a system win.

The moderator's suggested auction has responder bidding 5 ♣ instead of 3 ♦. I disagree, even though it worked this time.

Playing in clubs gets an above-average score (5 ♣ is a top); 4 ♥ is easily defeated and gets a zero.

Auction 2 – XYZ:

1 ♣	1 ♥
1 ♠	1 NT [2 ♣ not natural]
2 ♣	Pass

Opener's 2 ♣ might be only five clubs, with concerns about diamonds for 1 NT, perhaps 4=2=2=5. Possibly discouraged by opener's 1 ♠ rebid, responder chose to pass. This pair made no move toward game.

Backstory

The “unbid minor forcing” that we adopted from K-S and played through 1976 had become NMF when I returned to bridge in the 90s. The two-way NMF chart, with option [a], is largely as proposed by Brian Duran when we played this way. The expert 2 NT gizmo [b] is Gavin Wolpert's from 2007, which he reposted (plus a paragraph) on Bridge Winners in 2010.

Eddie Kantar recommended the “forcing one round” 4SF methods. Marshall Miles described similar methods in *Modern Constructive Bidding*.

In his MIT days, Jon Weinstein played the cheaper unbid suit as an artificial force over opener's rebid of their minor. I have recharacterized it as a variation of 4SF.

My survey and comparison of 11 methods is “Bridge Bidding Systems for Finding Major Suit Fits.”

Polls on Bridge Winners (2023)

1. New Minor Forcing (NMF) + 3 m: Invitational or Forcing?

1 ♦	1 ♠
1 NT	2 ♣ [NMF]
2 ♥	3 ♦

Is 3 ♦ invitational or forcing?

In *Standard Bridge Bidding for the 21st Century*, it is fundamental to Max Hardy's NMF that 3 ♦ is forcing. However, in his first book of *Bidding Topics*, Eric Rodwell flags this as a matter for partnership agreement. He continues to say that his preference is for it to be invitational, playing that 3 ♦ would be forcing on the auction { 1 ♦ – 1 ♠; 1 NT – 3 ♦ }.

When I play one-way NMF, on the NMF auction at the top of this poll:

11	17%	3 \diamond is always invitational (or assumed inv)
1	2%	I play both ways, prefer invitational
1	2%	I play both ways, no preference
1	2%	I play both ways, prefer forcing
51	78%	3 \diamond is always forcing (or assumed forcing)
20		Abstentions

Poll conclusions. The comments on Bridge Winners are generally advanced or expert, yet a large majority never plays the expert modification. Those who find this problem frequent enough to be worth a change probably tend to switch to two-way NMF. Boston-area expert Joe Cappannelli prefers two-way, but also plays the modification to one-way.

2. After Opener's 1 NT Rebid (New Minor Forcing, Checkback, etc.)

After an opening bid at one of a minor suit, and a major-suit response, opener rebids 1 NT. What are your preferred methods over this?

4	3%	Two-way NMF with 2 \clubsuit checkback
91	75%	Two-way NMF with 2 \clubsuit puppet to 2 \diamond
6	5%	2 \clubsuit checkback Stayman
13	11%	NMF (one-way)
1	1%	Natural bids
7	6%	Other methods
3		Abstentions

Poll conclusions. A large majority plays two-way NMF with a 2 \clubsuit puppet to 2 \diamond . Second choice is the long-time standard of one-way NMF – in widespread use by pairs who have played it for years and no longer study the game. Whether or not other methods have a meaningful technical advantage, it does not make much sense to put effort into any but these two plans.

◆ Alternative Methods

¹⁻¹⁰⁷ **Diamonds with major, invitational.** BWS includes a compromise between responding up-the-line and Walsh, where a 1 \diamond response requires only invitational values when holding a 4-card major.

²⁻¹⁰⁷ **Singleton spade permitted.** BWS includes:

A one-notrump rebid may include a singleton in responder's [spade] suit.

Many statements like this often have not been thought out as well as they might be. With a singleton heart, opener will have four spades or nine cards

in the minors and thus, with proper planning, should have a better rebid than 1 NT. Therefore, 1 NT over a 1♥ response can and should provide two hearts – I inserted [spade] above. Playing this way, responder should have six spades, or a chunky five, to rebid them over 1 NT.

In an e-mail exchange in May 2024, Marty Bergen confirmed that he routinely rebids 1 NT with a singleton in opener's suit. I followed up in Jan 2025:

Are there any situations where you would, as opener, rebid 1 NT with a singleton in responder's heart suit?

Yes, but fewer than after a 1♠ response.

What rules do you play for responder's rebid of their major over 1 NT?

No rules. Just strive for good judgment.

Any differences between hearts and spades?

2♠ rarer on 5 than 2♥.

Examples in multiple sections of this book show difficulties with assuring the significant advantages of opener providing at least a doubleton in responder's spade suit.

Marshall Miles discussed this issue on pages 11-13 of *Modern Constructive Bidding*, preferring a 1 NT rebid with a singleton spade and suitable strength.

³⁻¹⁰⁸ **Further NMF alternatives.**

Novice and intermediate players may play natural continuations, but any of the systems with artificial bids work better than that. Some strong players of yesteryear preferred to play a single artificial continuation of 2♣: checkback Stayman. Two-way is also played with 2♣ checkback. Sometimes transfers are in the mix. Two-way NMF does have obvious advantages.

Because I want to be able to simply bid two of opener's club suit, I prefer standard NMF – at the cost of some complexity – but see Boards 2, 4, and 5 above.

Transfer responses to 1♣ change the picture substantially. People play multiple variations. The 1♦ opening shows an unbalanced hand with at least four diamonds; 5–3–3–2 hands with five diamonds are either included or opened 1♣.

Over the 1♣ opening (which includes all balanced opening bids weaker than 1 NT), 1♦ and 1♥ are each a transfer to the major suit above. In Ron Beall's Toucan Club system, opener completes the transfer with exactly 3-card support; otherwise, 1 NT is available with a balanced hand.

In a superior plan, opener completes the transfer with a balanced minimum, showing 2- or 3-card support. Opener's break to 1 NT shows 17 to 19 HCP, avoiding a jump to 2 NT. Opener may have bid a 2-card club suit; this plan lets responder rescue opener with a 5-card major in a bad hand.

9. ♠ 6 5 4 ♥ Q J 8 7 2 ♦ 9 5 ♣ 8 7 6

With hand [9], we can safely respond 1 ♦. If opener rebids 1 ♥, showing normal values and two or three hearts, we have an easy pass. We also pass 1 ♠, in the 4-3 fit; and over opener's strong 1 NT, we play 2 ♥.

The 1 ♠ response shows a balanced hand, or unbalanced with either minor suit or both, usually with less than invitational values. These methods provide substantial value, and we are still below 1 NT.

A quick grab for more value is to play that a 1 NT response shows an invitational balanced hand, about 11 to 12 HCP. Then 2 NT can be forcing with 13 to 15 or 19+ (planning 4 NT next), and a 3 NT response can be 16 to 18. With this, 2 ♣ and 2 ♦ are natural, forcing responses showing at least invitational values.

A more complex approach uses 1 NT through 2 ♥ as transfers to the suit above, and 2 ♠ as a mixed club raise with 6-card support. In either plan, a jump response of 3 ♣ is weak with 6-card support. Stewart Rubenstein and I have played this plan with opener's break to 1 NT as 17 to 19. He got it from GLMs Adam and Zach Grossack.

⁴⁻¹⁰⁹ **Shortness.** I asked on Bridge Winners, and the reply was that "shortness" does mean singleton or void, as is customary. K. Gopalakrishnan replied (in detail) that 5-4-2-2 hands are bid with the other mechanisms, not Wolpert's 2 NT gizmo.

⁵⁻¹¹⁴ **4SF in spades.** A common agreement is that, after { 1 ♣ – 1 ♦; 1 ♥ – ? }, 1 ♠ is natural, and 2 ♠ is 4SF. This does not make much sense when playing Walsh, but might when bidding suits up the line.

Fragment Spiral

- a. ♠ K J 3 ♥ 9 4 ♦ A 10 9 7 5 ♣ K Q 4
b. ♠ K J 3 ♥ 9 ♦ A 10 9 7 5 4 ♣ K Q 4
c. ♠ K J 3 ♥ 9 ♦ A 10 9 7 5 ♣ K Q 8 4
d. ♠ K J 3 ♥ 9 4 ♦ A K 10 9 7 5 ♣ J 4
1 ♦ – 1 ♠; ?

On all these hands, we open the bidding with 1 ♦. We are ready for a 1 ♥ response with [a] 1 NT, [b] 2 ♦, [c] 2 ♣, and [d] 2 ♦; but partner surprises us with 1 ♠. If we insist that a raise to 2 ♠ promises 4-card support, we can be in a bad place, especially on hand [a].

Many advanced partnerships would raise to 2 ♠ on the first three of these hands. Playing in spades, partner can ruff a heart in the short-trump hand (ours), controlling the play and likely producing an extra trick.

On hand [a], a 1 NT rebid and contract will probably catch a heart lead through partner's meager holding there. A rebid of 2 ♦ should provide a six-card suit; sometimes a chunky five has to suffice, but this suit does not cut it.

On hands [b & c], the natural 2 ♦ or 2 ♣ rebid may well end the auction with a 5-3 spade fit available. Opener's natural rebid in a minor is often made with fewer than two spades, so responder would need at least a six-card suit to repeat spades, and a decent hand, too.

On hand [d], rebid 2 ♦ not 2 ♠. This will assure that we get to enjoy the length of this fine suit. We'll see that a raise could be a problem.

Basic spiral raises. When opener raises responder's major, in many partnerships, responder bids 2 NT to inquire, 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 useful scheme has defects that we'll explore later.

Fragment Spiral Overview

Fragment spiral applies when minor-suit opener may have raised responder's major suit with only 3-card support:

1 m – 1 M; 2 M – ?

When holding a hand worth moving forward, responder needs tools to sort out the eventual level and strain.

Opener should have a weak shortness to make a 3-card raise: a singleton, void, or weak doubleton. The best permissible holding in the short suit should be J-x. \diamond^6 Q-x or three small is deemed suitable for a rebid of 1 NT.

When holding *exactly four cards* in the major, and a desire to explore, responder uses one of these three bids:

- 2 M+1 The *fragment spiral* inquiry is the next bid, made with a hand not suitable for either 2 NT (over 2 ♥) or 3 NT. Unless a 4-4 fit is disclosed, 4 NT next is quantitative.
- 2 NT [hearts raised] A one-round force, responder shows four spades and four hearts. (Only when slamming, should responder have more hearts.)
- 3 NT Responder has game values with both unbid suits securely stopped. Opener converts to four of the major when appropriate. We'll see it can be crucial to *not* use the fragment spiral inquiry on this hand.

Other bids. All other bids by responder promise *five cards in the major*, which becomes trump. All except three of the major suit are forcing. Continuations after these are standard.

Fragment Spiral Inquiry

The next step is the spiral inquiry (2 ♠ over hearts, 2 NT over spades), and the next *five* bids are the primary responses.

Starting at the top, 3 M+1 (or higher) shows a 4-max, clearly forcing to game. 3 M shows a 4-min, and 3 m shows a 3-min, either of which may be passed. The other two bids show a 3-max, again non-forcing,

with a *fragment* in the bid suit (2 NT = spades): A-x, K-x, or any three or more cards in this suit.

O3	R3	Spiral Inquiry: 1 m – 1 M; 2 M – 2 M+1; ?
3 m	[3-min] Responder's choices:	
	Pass	With 4-card support, likely best to play here.
	3 ♦	Over 3 ♣, an offer to play with 5+ cards. Opener passes or bids 3 M.
	3 M	To play.
	3 oM	The other major is stopped. Asks for 3 NT with the other minor stopped. [With two suits in doubt, bid what we have.]
	3 NT	The other minor is stopped, but not oM. Disaster looms if we forgot to jump to 3 NT, instead of bidding 2 M+1.
3 M	[4-min] Bidding the major is non-forcing. Otherwise, both partners continue as after 3 M+1.	
3 M+1	[4-max] The next step after three of the major (3 ♠ or 3 NT) forces to game. Both partners continue:	
	4 M	No slam interest.
	3 NT	Control-bid, first- or second-round control in the other major, usually spades.
	Other	The cheapest first- or second-round control.
3 om	[3-max] The other minor shows a fragment in the bid suit (weak shortness in the other major). Over 3 ♦, 4 ♣ is to play!	
2 NT or 3 ♥	[3-max] The other bid below 3 M shows a fragment in the other major: when hearts were raised, 2 NT shows a fragment in spades [3 m is then to play]. When spades were raised, 3 ♥ shows a fragment in hearts.	
Higher	[4-max] singleton/void (splinter 3 NT = ♠) or 5-4-2-2.	

6-3-2-2 (no fragment). With 6-3-2-2 and no ace or king in a side suit, opener should rebid the minor, not raise. It is unlikely that responder can draw trump in a 4-3 fit, and then enjoy the long minor. If opener forgets with a maximum, the best chance is to bid 3 m, showing a 3-min instead. If responder bids over that, we must

not play in notrump, because one suit is unstopped (responder did not jump to 3 NT).

Competition. Fragment spiral does not apply in competition. If an opponent intervenes after opener's raise, responder's double or redouble shows interest in game with a 4-card major. A new suit is a forcing game try, somewhat natural if possible, showing at least five cards in the major. Three of opener's minor or the major is competitive, with 4- or 5-card support, respectively.

If they bid over our spiral inquiry, opener may double with three of our major, to suggest defending.

2 NT Shows Spades over 2 ♥

Consider this auction:

1 m - 1 ♥; 1 ♠ - 1 NT; 2 ♥

Clearly, opener has four spades, three hearts, at least four in the minor, and at most two cards in the other minor. We play that this sequence by opener shows extra strength. \diamond^7 With a modest opening hand, we skip spades and make the 3-card raise to 2 ♥ immediately. Accordingly, on this auction:

1 m - 1 ♥; 2 ♥

responder needs to check for spades, when trying for game. Since 2 ♠ is the spiral inquiry, we use 2 NT as a one-round force showing four spades. Responder may have more hearts when trying for slam, but otherwise should be exactly 4-4. With five hearts, we either have nine, or eight with a ruffing value in the short hand - let's not tell the opponents about our spades!

After responder's spade-showing 2 NT, we bid as naturally as possible. With 4-card support for either major, opener bids it at the three or four level. Opener's only forcing bid is three of the other minor, which may ask for a stopper in this, the only suit at issue.

Examples – for { 1 ♣ – 1 ♥; 2 ♥ – ? }:

1. ♠ A 8 ♥ K J 9 6 4 ♦ 10 5 ♣ Q 8 4

Bid 3 ♣, forcing, promising both clubs and five hearts.

2. ♠ A 9 8 ♥ K J 9 4 ♦ Q 10 5 ♣ Q J 4

Bid 3 NT – both side suits are stopped!

3. ♠ A J 8 3 ♥ K J 9 4 ♦ 10 5 ♣ Q 8 4

Bid 2 NT, showing four spades!

4. ♠ A J ♥ K J 9 4 ♦ 10 5 3 ♣ Q 8 4 2

At last, a spiral inquiry – bid 2 ♠.

a. Opener's 2 NT shows a 3-max with a spade fragment. Bid 3 ♥ at matchpoints; diamonds are wide open, but we can ruff one in the short hand. At IMPs, go for the safer 3 ♣ when nonvulnerable; vulnerable, go for the brass ring at 4 ♥, perhaps a 40% game.

b. Opener's 3 ♣ shows a 3-min. We pass, or perhaps try 3 ♥ at matchpoints.

c. Opener's 3 ♦ shows a 3-max with a diamond fragment. (The opponents have at least nine spades.) Bid 3 ♥ and hope for the best.

d. We pass opener's 3 ♥ [4-min] and bid 4 ♥ over 3 ♠ [4-max].

5. ♠ Q 8 ♥ K J 9 4 ♦ K Q 10 5 3 ♣ 8 4

Bid 2 ♠.

a. Opener's 2 NT shows a 3-max with a spade fragment, so we do not have a diamond fit. Bid 3 NT, vulnerable at IMPs, or sign off in 3 ♥ at matchpoints – likely a good board, no need to bid game.

b. Opener's 3 ♣ shows a 3-min. Offer to play 3 ♦. Opener may convert to 3 ♥.

c. Opener's 3 ♦ shows a 3-max with a diamond fragment. Spades are wide open – pass!

6. ♠ K 8 ♥ A Q 10 4 ♦ K 8 4 ♣ A K 10 3

Bid 2 ♠.

- a. Opener's 2 NT shows a 3-max with a spade fragment. Our 19 HCP plus opener's 14 or so is enough for slam on power. Partner could have a singleton ♦ Q, but otherwise 6 NT by partner is at best 50%. Stick it in 6 ♥, so we declare!
- b. Opener's 3 ♣ shows a 3-min. Bid 3 NT, which says diamonds, but not spades, are stopped. If opener's short suit is spades, opener will pull and we'll play 4 ♥, which should be fine. Exploring for a thin club slam looks risky.
- c. Opener's 3 ♦ shows a 3-max with a diamond fragment. Bid 6 NT on this deal, protecting the ♠ K. Maybe they will lead a club, and we might run the table without a spade trick; or the ace may be onside.
- d. Opener's 3 ♥ shows a 4-min. Bid 3 ♠ to show a spade control with interest in slam. If opener encourages, slam is possible.
- e. Opener's 3 ♠ shows a 4-max. Ask for keycards, and bid the slam. If we have them all, ask for kings, since opener may have a concealed source of tricks and bid a grand slam. Otherwise, at matchpoints, choose 6 ♥ because an overtrick is possible; with a keycard missing, choose 6 NT.

Key Features

After opener raises responder's major suit to the two level, when opener has an invitational hand or better with *four* cards in the major:

- With a 4-card major, game values, and stoppers in both unbid suits, responder *must* jump to 3 NT. Responder's 3 NT after getting a 3-min response denies a stopper in the other major.
- 2 NT over 2 ♥ shows spades, and must be bid with a forward-going hand containing 4-4 majors.

- The next step (2 ♠ or 2 NT) is the spiral inquiry: 3 M+1 and 3 M show 4-max and 4-min, respectively; 3 m shows a 3-min; the other two bids show a fragment in a 3-max.

All other bids below 3 NT are natural, forcing to 3 M, and promise five cards in the major.

Backstory

For lots of details and a comparison of many methods, see my article “Fragment Spiral.” It charts the meanings of the bids in the methods below and more. Jan Jansma published Dutch spiral as I was researching and publishing fragment methods. Gavin Wolpert describes his method in his “Spiral Raises” article; Kitty Munson Cooper’s method is the first comment.

Capabilities of Spiral Methods (●=full, ○=partial, ◌)=modified version)	Basic	Wolpert	Dutch	Cooper	Fragment
Inquiry is 2 ♠ over hearts		●	●		●
Stop at 3 m on a 3-min	●	●	●	●	●
Stop at 3 M on 3-min	●	●	○	●	●
Stop at 3 ♦ on a 3-min in clubs					●
Stop at 3 M on 3-max	●		○		●
Always resolve 3 NT			●	●	●
Resolve 3 NT by 3 M on 3-min			◌		○
Resolve 3 NT by 3 M on 3-max			◌	○	●
Learn balanced/unbalanced		●			
Both vote on playing 3 NT in 4-4 fit		●			
Opener bids 2 NT only with 4-4 fit	N/A		●	N/A	
Space below 3 M on 4-max		○	○		
Space for control-bidding on 4-4		○	●		●
Easy to learn and remember	●		○	●	○

Basic Spiral. The main problems with basic spiral are:

- Partners usually begin and end the discussion with “3–3–4–4,” which is insufficient.
- There are seldom enough bids to sort out a 3-max by 3 NT, let alone by 3 M.

Look at auctions for this responding hand, where we want to play in hearts only when they are 4-4:

♠ 6 5 ♡ 8 7 6 2 ◇ K 4 ♣ A Q J 7 5

<p>Basic Spiral</p> <p>1 ♣ – 1 ♡</p> <p>2 ♡ – 2 NT</p> <p>3 ♣ [3-min] – ?</p> <p>An easy, fortunate pass.</p> <p>1 ♣ – 1 ♡</p> <p>2 ♡ – 2 NT</p> <p>3 ◇ [3-max] – ?</p> <p>OOPS! Hope opener lets us play 4 ♣; guess 3 NT (are spades stopped?); play three yucky hearts; or don't try for game in the first place.</p>	<p>Fragment Spiral</p> <p>1 ♣ – 1 ♡</p> <p>2 ♡ – 2 ♠ [inquiry]</p> <p>3 ♣ [3-min] – ?</p> <p>Pass, to play.</p> <p>1 ♣ – 1 ♡</p> <p>2 ♡ – 2 ♠</p> <p>3 ◇ [3-max, ◇ fragment] – ?</p> <p>Bid 4 ♣, to play, with at least a 5–4 fit and spades wide open.</p> <p>1 ♣ – 1 ♡</p> <p>2 ♡ – 2 ♠</p> <p>2 NT [3-max, ♠ fragment] – ?</p> <p>We bid 3 ♣, to play! (3 NT is likely wrong-sided and touchy.)</p>
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Wolpert spiral appears powerful, but it's quite a bit to learn. Understanding all the details *and their ramifications* is left to the interested reader.

Dutch spiral appears to be an example of a reasonable-looking system that has not been properly thought out. After any bid by opener over the inquiry, responder's bid of the next step is a further inquiry.

If our suits are diamonds and hearts, opener shows a 3-min by bidding 3 ◇ over the inquiry. While opener, having shortness, should have at least four diamonds for this bid, responder may have only three. 3 ♡ may be the top matchpoint contract, but 3 ♡ is the further inquiry, so we cannot play there. This is unacceptable, and there are more issues of this nature.

Cooper is a worthy contender: it's easy to learn, and it always resolves 3 NT.

Fragment spiral, unlike the Wolpert, Dutch, and Cooper methods, always lets us stop short of 3 NT on a 3-max, often in opener's minor as well as the major. Responder can bid 3 NT with opener's known short suit bottled up, although opener's fragment may not be a stopper.

Responder is on firm footing over a 3-min, assuming they are not looking at a hand that should have made a 3 NT jump over 2 M. Responder can sign off at 3 m, suggest playing 3 \diamond over clubs, or bid 3 M. With game values, responder has to judge whether it is safe to proceed. We can still stop in 3 \spadesuit when responder shows a stopper in hearts, but any other stopper that responder shows will commit us to either 3 NT or the four level.

◆ Alternative Methods

⁶⁻¹²⁶ **Small doubleton.** World Grand Master Steve Weinstein writes that a weak doubleton should be no better than 9-x, that the 10 is a useful card. Go with the pro, but we won't get as many chances to test fragment spiral!

No doubleton. Al Muggia reports that Jeff Meckstroth, multiple world champion and ACBL Life Master of the Universe, only makes a 3-card raise with a singleton or void. While Meckstroth is a threat to win any event he enters, he is known for winning major team championships, especially while playing Precision.

If we decide to make the 3-card raise only with a singleton or void, we remove a large majority of the 3-card raises. For the relatively few singleton deals, basic spiral seems just fine. Meckstroth plays that way, and his 3-max is forcing to game. However, opener often has to rebid 1 NT with a weak doubleton. As always, most important is to have an agreement.

Of course, we make the 3-card raise with a singleton (or void) as well as with a weak doubleton, but the singleton does not happen that often. Fragment spiral lets us stop short on a 3-max. I believe this and the weak doubleton style to be a significant advantage at matchpoints, and I'm quite proud of it. Gary named it, and I play it with others.

⁷⁻¹²⁸ **Always show spades.** Considering this auction again:

1 m – 1 \heartsuit ; 1 \spadesuit – 1 NT; 2 \heartsuit

When responder holds four spades and three hearts, some partnerships always bid spades, and the delayed 2 \heartsuit just gets responder out of 1 NT, instead of showing extra values. That may be better when it comes up, but the big hand gets hard to bid. BWS bids this way with 4=3=(1-5) shape; no extra values are promised.

Inverted Minor Raises

The opening bid in a minor suit would routinely be made on three cards: in either minor with 4-4 majors, or with 4-3-3-3 at 1 ♣.

We play inverted minor raises, which conserve bidding space when needed to explore for the correct contract and destroy bidding space for the opponents on weaker hands. All these responses deny holding a 4-card major suit:

Mixed raise. The jump raise of a minor suit promises at least 5-card support and constructive values: a mixed raise. \diamond^8

Preemptive raise. The double-jump raise, to four of a minor, shows more shape and length, but insufficient values for a contract of 3 NT.

Slam splinter. A double jump shift response (3 \diamond , 3 \heartsuit , 3 \spadesuit , or 4 \clubsuit) is a splinter: a singleton or void in the bid suit, 5+ card support, and 15+ HCP – slam values, when finding small cards opposite.

Holding a singleton or void in a small hand, either partner should try to bid the other three suits, implying shortness in the fourth.

EKB. A jump into a suit above four of the minor suit is exclusion keycard Blackwood (EKB), which we'll learn about later.

The Forcing Single Raise

The single raise of a minor-suit opening bid by an unpassed hand is forcing and – as described here – denies a 4-card major. \diamond^{8a} It shows values to at least invite game, described as limit raise or better (LR+). The 2 \clubsuit raise usually provides at least 5-card support, because we can respond 1 \diamond , with only four clubs. The raise to 2 \diamond is often made on four cards, but opener is quite likely to also have four as well. \diamond^{8b}

Opener's splinters. Over a forcing raise, opener's jump shift is also a slam splinter. With three unbid suits, a splinter pinpoints the main issue for notrump or slam immediately.

{ 1 \diamond – 2 \diamond ; ? } : ○ 3 \clubsuit is a splinter, or ○ 3 \clubsuit is natural.

The non-jump 3 \clubsuit splinter might be messed up at the table. \diamond^9 Also, with a hand containing no major-suit stopper, opener's 3 \diamond rebid on this auction must then be a non-forcing catch-all, even with hand [1]:

1. ♠ 9 3 ♥ 9 6 5 ♦ A K 4 2 ♣ A K 7 2

○ Plan A – Single Raise Forcing to 3 of the Minor

The objectives of Plan A are to stop at three of the minor when both partners are minimum; declare 3 NT from the right side; avoid 3 NT when the opponents have five fast tricks; and get to good slams – all aided by showing shortness. This plan is shown with the non-jump 3 ♣ splinter over 2 ♦.

O2	Plan A: Single Raise Forcing to 3 of the Minor
2 ♦, 2 ♥, 2 ♠	Natural, often the cheapest stopper. Over this, responder's new suit also shows a stopper.
2 NT	Natural, non-minimum, at most one partial stopper. With a balanced hand, responder will usually raise to 3 NT or try to sign off at three of the minor suit.
3 ♣	[over 2 ♦] Splinter (0-1 clubs), 15+ HCP.
3 m	Weakest, balanced 3+ m or unbalanced, non-forcing.
3 ♦	[over 2 ♣] Splinter (0-1 diamonds), 15+ HCP.
3 ♥, 3 ♠	[JS] Splinter (0-1 cards in bid suit), 15+ HCP.
3 NT	Balanced, 18-19 HCP, only three cards in the minor.
4 om	Crosswood, asking for keycards in the minor.
4 ♦	[over 2 ♦] EKB, ♣ void [we have a splinter at 3 ♣].*
4 ♣	[over 2 ♣] EKB, ♦ void [we have a splinter at 3 ♦].*
4 ♥, 4 ♠	EKB, void in bid suit.*

* See "Exclusion Keycard Blackwood (EKB)" on page 241.

Rule (both plans): Opener's jump rebid of 3 NT shows 18 or 19 HCP, but three cards in the minor suit or a poor hand for slam.

□ Plan B – Single Raise Forcing to 2 NT or 3 of the Minor

With Plan B, an opener with game-forcing values does not bid either 2 NT or three of the minor suit, which may be passed.

Rule: With game-forcing values, even with both majors stopped, opener usually bids a stopper over the single raise.

Plan B is shown with 3 ♣ natural over 2 ♦, the rebid on hand [1].

O2	Plan B: Single Raise Forcing to 2 NT or 3 m
2 ♠, 2 ♥, 2 ♣	Cheapest stopper. Could be a hand otherwise suitable for 2 NT, but with game values.
2 NT	Minimum balanced hand, both majors stopped, NF.
3 ♣	[over 2 ♠] Natural, forcing, usually no major stopper.
3 m	No major-suit stopper, non-forcing.
3 ♠	[over 2 ♣] Splinter (0-1 diamonds), 15+ HCP.
3 ♥, 3 ♣	[JS] Splinter (0-1 cards in bid suit), 15+ HCP.
3 NT	Balanced, 18-19 HCP, only three cards in the minor.
4 om	Crosswood, asking for keycards in the minor.
4 ♠	[over 2 ♠] Splinter in <i>clubs</i> , with 15+ HCP.
4 ♣	[over 2 ♣] EKB, ♠ void [we have a splinter at 3 ♠].*
4 ♥, 4 ♣	EKB, void in bid suit.*

* See "Exclusion Keycard Blackwood (EKB)" on page 241.

2. Routine example:

Opener

♠ Q 10 7
♥ A Q 4 2
♦ A 9 8 7
♣ Q 5

Responder

♠ K J 6
♥ 8 3
♦ Q J 6 4
♣ A J 7 2

Plan A - forced to 3 m:

1 ♠	2 ♠	[limit raise or better]
2 NT [natural, non-minimum]	3 ♠	[only LR]
3 NT [accepts invitation]	Pass	

Responder prefers to have a fifth diamond for the LR+ raise; but 1 NT denies this strength, 2 ♣ requires more strength, and 2 NT is unacceptable without a heart stopper. For 3 ♠, responder could be balanced or unbalanced. (Swap the minor-suit holdings within each hand, and the response to 1 ♣ would be 1 ♠, not 2 ♣ on four cards.)

Plan B - forced to 2 NT or 3 m:

1 ♠	2 ♠	[limit raise or better]
2 ♥ [♥ stop, ♠ unspecified]	2 NT	[♠ stop, non-forcing]
3 NT [accepts invitation]	Pass	

Opener is not strong enough for a jump to 3 NT but has game values. Therefore, opener must not bid a non-forcing 2 NT. Opener marks time at 2 ♡, which shows a stopper there. Only when holding game values may opener also hold a spade stopper.

Responder's 2 NT shows a minimum (LR) balanced hand with black stoppers. Having catered to the possibility of responder's hand being unbalanced (possibly with slam interest), opener sticks it in 3 NT.

Weaken opener's hand by removing the ♡ Q or ♣ Q, and opener would rebid 2 NT (non-forcing) instead of 2 ♡. Because responder has denied a major suit, and is likely to have club length, stopping both majors is more important for opener to describe than the presence or lack of a club stopper.

Strengthen responder's hand by turning the ♡ 8 into the ♡ K, and the initial response would be 3 NT, avoiding the 4-card raise with stoppers all around. In modern standard bidding, this is an obnoxious but common bid with a balanced, game-only hand, all suits stopped, and lacking a major suit.

Similarly, immediately respond 2 NT (invitational) to 1 ♦ on any of these hands:

3. ♠ K 9 3 ♡ K 3 ♦ Q J 6 4 ♣ Q J 10 2
4. ♠ K 9 3 ♡ K 3 ♦ Q 10 6 4 2 ♣ Q J 10
5. ♠ K 9 3 ♡ K 3 ♦ Q J 6 ♣ Q 10 6 4 2

Note: Responding hands [2 to 5] are appropriate for heavy invites, playing a 1 NT opening range of 14+ to 17 HCP.

Interference

If an opponent acts over the minor-suit opening bid, systems are off. We cue-bid the overcall suit to show a limit raise or better hand; we use the standard Jordan 2 NT (or equivalent) over a takeout double to show a LR+ hand.

If they double the LR+ single raise, redouble shows extras and suggests defending; otherwise, the systems are on. Pass with a balanced hand that might want to be dummy.

If they overcall our LR+, doubles are penalty; otherwise, we play natural bids, splinter jumps, etc. Opener's cue-bid shows shortness, but bidding may still stop at four of the minor suit.

Backstory

This topic is a revision of my article "Inverted Minor Raises." Plan A has been produced from the "Inverted Minors" article on Bridge Winners by Steve Weinstein and Adam Parrish; the article has additional key details. Eric Rodwell lays out a similar plan in his *Bidding Topics*; he says it's easier to play, if 2 NT is forcing, and responder's major suit over 2 NT should show shortness. Plan B is based on the writing of Max Hardy, originating in 1989 or earlier. It works well, but does require bidding a stopper with both majors stopped and intent to force to game.

Poll Results

Plan A – Forcing to three of the minor. In a poll posted by Henry Bethe on Bridge Winners in 2014, 32% preferred this option. Overall bidding accuracy may be improved by having 2 NT be forcing. This method is claimed to be better at IMP scoring, where having to play three of the minor instead of 2 NT may cost little or nothing. This plan is in BWS.

Plan B – Forcing to 2 NT or three of the minor. 48% responded that they prefer this option, which has a long history. This option may be better at matchpoints, where 2 NT will often score higher.

6% preferred plan A at IMPs and plan B at matchpoints; others prefer something else. [◆¹⁰](#)

◆ Alternative Methods

⁸⁻¹³⁴ **Jump raise weak.** The jump raise has been "weak" for decades for most inverted minors partnerships.

6. ♠ K Q 3 ♥ 9 5 ♦ 7 5 4 ♣ Q J 10 4 2

Hand [6] is not good enough for an immediate invitation, yet not right for a 1 NT response; it's a weak jump raise. If we are going to do that, then opener has to bid 3 NT over the weak bid with 18-19 HCP balanced. Partner will be disappointed if we proceed to lay down hand [7] or worse:

7. ♠ Q 4 3 ♥ 9 5 ♦ 7 5 4 ♣ Q J 5 4 2

Unless we agree on another way to bid one of these hands, the sensible approach is to make the jump raise on [6] and pass with [7]. Thus, the ranges for the new (mixed) and the old (weak) raises should overlap or be identical.

However, for some pairs, it's "damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead" – they make the jump raise with either hand and perhaps stronger or weaker.

^{8a-134} **4-Card major.** Some pairs permit responder to have a 4-card major for the single raise. This plan is beyond the scope of this book, but here are some tips.

Plans A and B don't leave much room for sorting out a major-suit fit; surely plan A would be more flexible, if you want to try. It seems best if responder only does this with game values, preferably with slam potential. Pairs who permit a 4-card major may bid the limit raise in some other way, so that the single raise forces to game.

In their system notes, Eric Kokish and Beverley Kraft had 11 full pages on inverted raises, employing artificial step rebids for opener. Before tackling that, you might prefer to start with Bob Crosby or silvr bull in the References.

People are interested in allowing a major in the single raise, because responding one of the major on such a hand may not be a walk in the park.

^{8b-134} **4-card forcing raise.** In the past few decades of playing inverted minors, I don't recall ever having raised clubs on four cards. There should always be something else that's reasonable. My feeling is that half my diamond raises are on four cards. We can squeeze that some, but it's often an issue of making the least-worst bid.

2. ♠ K J 6 ♥ 8 3 ♦ Q J 6 4 ♣ A J 7 2 [repeated]

Some pairs and systems are "stopper-neutral" and would rebid 2 NT on hand [2]. Push it around, and more would bid 2 NT, but many still would not like it:

♠ K 8 6 ♥ J 3 ♦ Q J 6 4 ♣ A J 7 2

⁹⁻¹³⁴ **3 ♣ splinter over 2 ♦.** Hardy wrote to play 3 ♣ as a splinter, as Weinstein/Parrish do, but we find it quite handy and intuitive as a natural bid.

¹⁰⁻¹³⁸ Options

Single raise forcing to game. Some play the jump shift in the other minor as a limit raise, known as criss-cross raises. This plan conflicts with playing { 1 ♦ – 3 ♣ } as invitational in clubs, which is more important.

Rodwell suggests playing responder's jump shift to 2 ♥ as the limit raise. This makes sense, if we don't want the bid for something else. Rodwell also suggests that responder's jump 2 ♠ response can be played as a mixed raise: not strong enough for a single raise, but enough values to support opener's 3 NT bid on 18–19 balanced. When playing this way, the jump raise to three of the minor does not promise much of anything, and opener seldom moves

toward game over that raise. Mel's minors (below) expand these ideas. These plans are easy to describe, but the continuations may not be automatic. Discussion and practice bidding are recommended.

Mel's minors. This plan, by GLM Mel Marcus, uses a standard single raise and the next four bids as raises, in steps, skipping over a natural 2 NT: (1) forcing, (2) invitational, (3) mixed, (4) weak. This prevents { 1 \diamond – 3 \clubsuit } invitational.

Passed hand. Without discussion, inverted minors apply in all seats. However, Marshall Miles recommended that they not apply to a passed hand. He wrote that some hands are hard to bid when playing inverted minors; and many of the advantages of inverted raises disappear, but the problems remain, for a passed hand. From a poll on Bridge Winners, 80% of respondents play inverted minors as a passed hand, as do my other sources.

Jump to 3 NT. Some folks who play (or refute) plan B reportedly require opener to jump to 3 NT with a 14-point balanced hand; with 18–19, opener bids 4 NT. Both bids waste an essential level of bidding, when responder has an unbalanced hand with or slam interest. Experts don't play this way.

8. \spadesuit 3 \heartsuit K Q 9 \diamond A Q 9 7 6 5 \clubsuit Q 7 2

1 \diamond		2 \diamond
3 NT	[14+ HCP]	?

On hand [8], responder basically has to pass. A 14-HCP opener might hold:

\spadesuit A 8 7 4	\heartsuit A 4 2	\diamond K 10 4 3	\clubsuit K 6	[laydown slam]
\spadesuit K Q 7 4	\heartsuit A J 2	\diamond K 10 4 3	\clubsuit J 6	[3 NT is best]
\spadesuit Q 7 4	\heartsuit A J 2	\diamond K 10 4 3	\clubsuit K J 6	[3 NT likely to fail]

However, responder should not hold hand [9], a 3 \spadesuit splinter response:

9. \spadesuit 3 \heartsuit K Q 9 \diamond A Q 9 7 6 5 \clubsuit A 7 2

Occasional problems with the 14+ HCP 3NT might be acceptable to some.

Rodwell recommends that opener's jump to 3 NT be made with 18–19 balanced, but only with three cards in the raised minor, or a poor hand for slam. Weinstein further restricts 3 NT to 18 HCP and three cards.

Long, weak clubs. Perhaps half a dozen times, I responded in a 3-card major over partner's 1 \diamond opening, when 1 NT did not appeal, for example:

\spadesuit K 9 3 \heartsuit 9 \diamond 6 4 3 \clubsuit Q J 8 6 4 2

This was just bridge, not an agreement. I generally reached 3 \clubsuit or played in the major as raised (even to game), with acceptable results. YMMV.

Response in the Other Minor

1 ♣ – 1 ♦; 1 NT – ?

Playing one-way NMF, a strong responder can be in trouble on this auction. With our Walsh style, responder's bid of a major suit is natural and forcing to game. This part works fine. What if responder has an unbalanced, game-going hand, without a 4-card major suit? Both minor suits have been bid, and we play all jumps into bid suits are invitational. There is no *standard* solution to this issue ^{4a} – given the ascendance of two-way NMF, there may never be:

- ❑ Exception: responder's jump to 3 ♣ is forcing (Max Hardy, *Advanced Bidding*). This is consistent with plan [b] for NMF, where the jump to three of opener's minor is forcing.
- No exception, just jump to 3 NT or higher when it comes up.

Opener would have rebid a 4-card major suit over 1 ♦ with an unbalanced hand or concentrated values; still, opener is least likely to have values in diamonds. Accordingly, when responder has values and long diamonds, notrump should usually be the target.

1. ♠ 8 ♥ A J 7 ♦ A Q J 9 5 3 ♣ Q 8 2

Responder's jump to three of a major over 1 NT is an *auto-splinter*: a singleton or void in the bid suit, with at least six good diamonds in a game- or slam-going hand. With a solid partner, we bid 3 ♠ on hand [1]. For example, slam looks good opposite ♠ A, ♥ K, and ♣ A-K.

2. ♠ 8 ♥ J 7 ♦ A Q J 9 5 3 ♣ A K 8 2

It's on real deal [2] where we truly need responder's 3 ♣ to be forcing.

After 1 ♦ – 2 ♣

Our 3 ♣ response to a 1 ♦ opening bid is, of course, invitational with a good suit, denying a 4-card major.

Our 2 ♣ response to a 1 ♦ opening bid is forcing to game. This 2 ♣ response promises only a 4-card suit, possibly a 3=3=3=4 lacking a stopper in a major suit. Holding a 4-card major, it's usually better to

create a game force by bidding a club suit, especially if it contains the ♣ A or ♣ K (in case somebody goes slamming).

Suppose partner opens 1 ♦, and we hold one of these hands:

- a. ♠ K 9 6 4 ♥ 10 6 ♦ Q 3 ♣ Q 10 8 4 2 [weak]
- b. ♠ K 7 ♥ 10 6 ♦ Q 7 3 ♣ Q 10 8 4 3 2 [weak]
- c. ♠ A 9 6 4 ♥ 10 6 ♦ Q 3 ♣ K Q 10 4 2 [invitational]
- d. ♠ A 7 ♥ 10 6 ♦ Q 7 3 ♣ K Q 10 8 4 2 [invitational]
- e. ♠ A 9 4 ♥ 10 6 ♦ Q 10 3 ♣ K Q 10 4 2 [invitational]
- f. ♠ A Q 9 4 ♥ 10 6 5 ♦ Q 3 ♣ K Q 10 4 [game-forcing]
- g. ♠ A Q 9 4 ♥ 10 6 ♦ Q 3 ♣ K Q 10 4 2 [game-forcing]
- h. ♠ A Q ♥ 10 6 ♦ Q 7 3 ♣ K Q 10 8 4 2 [game-forcing]

We respond 1 ♠ and 1 NT, respectively, with hand [a or b]. We also respond 1 ♠ with hand [c], planning to invite game later. With hand [d], we jump to 3 ♣, invitational.

This topic is about what happens on game-forcing hands, such as [f, g, & h], after the 2 ♣ response – and problem hands like [e].

Over the 2 ♣ response, opener's rebid of a major suit denies holding five or more diamonds and shows a 4-card major. It does not show extra values (it's not a strong reverse).

In priority order, opener bids, shows, or plans to show:

- 1) a 5-card major (with 6+ diamonds),
- 2) notrump, 3=3=4=3 or possibly 3=3=5=2 (one major may be unstopped),
- 3) diamonds with five or more,
- 4) a 4-card major,
- 5) 3 ♣ or a splinter (3 ♥ or 3 ♠ singleton or void) with 4+ clubs.

This plan should cover all shapes for opener. Because the opening bid was not 1 NT, opener should not have a medium-strength balanced hand. Responder could have such a hand, of course.

O2	R2	Next	After { 1 \diamond - 2 \clubsuit } game-forcing
2 \diamond			5+ diamonds, may have a 4-card major.
	2 \heartsuit		4+ hearts & 5+ clubs.
	2 \spadesuit		4+ spades & 5+ clubs.
	2 NT		Natural, may be 3=3 majors with 4, 5, or 6 clubs.
2 \heartsuit			4+ hearts (3 or 4 \diamond), may have 4 spades.
2 \spadesuit			4+ spades (3 or 4 \diamond), but not 4 hearts.
2 NT			12 to 14 HCP, 3=3=4=3 shape. \square 3=3=5=2 permitted.
3 \clubsuit			4+ \clubsuit , no 4-card major, no singleton or void in a major.
3 \diamond			6+ diamonds, medium+ strength, no 4-card major.
3 \heartsuit			Splinter: 4+ clubs, any strength, 0 or 1 heart.
3 \spadesuit			Splinter: 4+ clubs, any strength, 0 or 1 spade.
3 NT			18 to 19 HCP, 3=3=4=3 shape. \circ 3=3=5=2 permitted.

Problem Hands

e. \spadesuit A 9 4 \heartsuit 10 6 \diamond Q 10 3 \clubsuit K Q 10 4 2 [invitational]

The following quintecta of conditions produces problem hands such as responder [e]:

- Invitational values,
- No 4-card major suit,
- Diamonds unsuitable for a single, invitational raise,
- 2 NT unsuitable, *and*
- Club suit insufficient for a jump to 3 \clubsuit .

Our 2 NT response is invitational, but promises stoppers. Our plan for this problem is to respond 2 NT with a suggestion of a stopper in one major, accompanied by a solid stopper in the other. Otherwise, we either go low at 1 NT or force to game with 2 \clubsuit .

Hand [e] responds 1 NT; with another point, hand [e] should force to game with 2 \clubsuit .

Examples

f. ♠ A Q 9 4 ♥ 10 6 5 ♦ Q 3 ♣ K Q 10 4 [game-forcing]

g. ♠ A Q 9 4 ♥ 10 6 ♦ Q 3 ♣ K Q 10 4 2 [game-forcing]

h. ♠ A Q ♥ 10 6 ♦ Q 7 3 ♣ K Q 10 8 4 2 [game-forcing]

We open 1 ♦, partner bids 2 ♣, and we hold:

3. ♠ K 10 7 2 ♥ A J 7 ♦ K 9 8 2 ♣ J 3

On hand [3], we rebid 2 ♠, with fewer than five diamonds.

Responder [f or g] bids 3 ♠, since slam is possible opposite a large opening hand; hand [3] signs off in 4 ♠. Responder [h] rebids 3 ♣, and we bid 3 NT.

4. ♠ K 10 7 2 ♥ J 9 7 ♦ A K 8 2 ♣ J 3

On hand [4], we rebid 2 ♠, reaching 4 ♠ with responder [f or g].

Responder [h] rebids 3 ♣ over 2 ♠, denying a heart stopper; we bid 3 ♥, showing and asking for half a stopper (Q-x or J-x-x). Responder retreats to 4 ♣, where we play.

Move the ♣ 4 into the spade suit, and responder [h] would instead bid 3 ♠ over 3 ♥. Taking a position, opener might pass, especially at matchpoints – people without our methods can land in real trouble.

5. ♠ K J 2 ♥ 9 7 2 ♦ A K 10 8 ♣ J 7 3

On hand [5], we rebid 2 NT, showing 3=3=4=3 and at least one major stopped. Responder [f] bids 3 NT, with at least 3-3 in each major – three small opposite three small plays 3 NT. Unfortunately, the opponents have the ♣ A in addition to the whole heart suit, so there is no game on our 25 HCP. However, a 1 ♠ response would be unlikely to do better.

Over our 2 NT, hand [g or h] bids a spade stopper. We bid 4 ♣, and responder should pass.

6. ♠ K 10 2 ♥ A J 7 ♦ A K 8 2 ♣ A 7 3

On hand [6], we had planned a jump rebid of 2 NT. With the expected 3=3=4=3 shape, 3 NT is a good bid. Over a natural 4 ♠ by responder [g] we jump to 6 NT and play there.

3 NT has implicitly raised the clubs of responder [h], so 4 ♦ by either partner asks for keycards in clubs; but no matter who asks, discovering that the grand slam is nearly cold will be difficult.

- f. ♠ A Q 9 4 ♥ 10 6 5 ♦ Q 3 ♣ K Q 10 4 [game-forcing]
 g. ♠ A Q 9 4 ♥ 10 6 ♦ Q 3 ♣ K Q 10 4 2 [game-forcing]
 h. ♠ A Q ♥ 10 6 ♦ Q 7 3 ♣ K Q 10 8 4 2 [game-forcing]
-
7. ♠ K J 2 ♥ A 7 ♦ A K 10 9 8 2 ♣ J 3

On hand [7], we jump to 3♦. Responder [g or h] bids 3♠, as an advance control-bid, confirmed by bidding 4♦ over our 3NT. We bid 4♥ (RKB♦), and land in 6♦. (Lacking a heart stopper, we would have played in a minor suit – in slam if we held a singleton.)

8. ♠ 2 ♥ A J 7 ♦ A K 10 8 2 ♣ J 9 5 3

On hand [8], we rebid 3♠, a splinter showing at most one heart and at least four clubs; this bid does not promise extra strength (only 3♦ and 3NT do that). Responder [f or g] bids 3NT and plays there. On hand [h], 5♣ may be safer, but 3NT appeals at matchpoints.

9. ♠ J 9 8 2 ♥ A J 7 3 ♦ A K 8 2 ♣ 3

On hand [9], we rebid 2♥, showing four hearts but no more than four diamonds. Responder [f or g] bids 2♠, and we settle into 4♠. Responder [h] bids 2NT and we play 3NT.

Backstory

1♣ – 1♦; 1NT – Now What? In Dec 2023, I posted this question as a poll on Bridge Winners. It was poorly constructed, but the comments were varied and insightful. For more on this topic, start there.

1♦ – 2♣. Marty Bergen's articles in the Oct and Nov 2025 *Bridge Bulletin* nail this topic, especially the five examples in Nov. In Oct, he wrote:

FYI: The only rebids that promise extra values are 3♦ and 3NT. The only rebid that denies extra values is 2NT.

My article "After One Diamond – Two Clubs," describes four additional plans as well as what BWS says on the matter. The topic in this book has been revised from the article to correspond to Bergen's methods:

- to permit and encourage a 2♣ response with only four clubs, and
- for opener's splinter to not show extra values (game over slam).

See also the Eaves and Kearney threads on Bridge Winners.

Opener's Strong Reverse

Opener's strong reverse is a non-jump rebid at the two level in a suit higher than the original, over a one-level response. Opener needs extra strength for a strong reverse, because the three-level is where responder picks opener's first suit. (After a 2/1 response, opener's reverse may not provide extra values, as seen on pages 90 and 144.)

Reverse over 1 NT. When the response was 1 NT, responder's hand is limited. There are six such reverse sequences:

1 ♣ – 1 NT; 2 ♦	1 ♦ – 1 NT; 2 ♥	1 ♥ – 1 NT; 2 ♠
1 ♣ – 1 NT; 2 ♥	1 ♦ – 1 NT; 2 ♠	
1 ♣ – 1 NT; 2 ♠		

We have no exceptions – continuations after all six reverses over a 1 NT response follow the same rules, which are BWS: ♦¹¹

- Opener's reverse is forcing, and
- Responder's 2 NT, three of opener's first suit, or a bid in between, is non-forcing. Other bids force to game.

Reverse over one of a suit. When the response was one of a suit, responder's hand is unlimited but could be very weak. Without good agreements, these situations may work out poorly. The rest of this topic discusses these four sequences, by their two groups:

<i>into diamonds</i>	<i>into hearts</i>
1 ♣ – 1 ♥; 2 ♦	1 ♣ – 1 ♠; 2 ♥
1 ♣ – 1 ♠; 2 ♦	1 ♦ – 1 ♠; 2 ♥

Minimum reverse strength. Monroe Ingberman required at least 18 points and 3½ quick tricks to reverse, giving these examples:

1 ♦ – 1 ♠; 2 ♥

♠ 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

With at most 5 losers, these hands should provide safety at the three-level. Reverses this strong support the popular expert approach that opener's reverse is forcing and promises a rebid.

In a lesser category are these medium hands with 5 or 6 losers that may not be suitable to open 1 NT – we’ll meet them again later:

♠ Q 5 ♥ A K 6 3 ♦ A Q J 9 8 ♣ 10 5 [page 150]

♠ Q 5 ♥ A 10 6 3 ♦ A Q J 9 8 ♣ K 5 [page 158]

♠ K J ♥ 6 5 ♦ K J 4 3 ♣ A K Q 9 4 [page 153]

♠ A 8 3 ♥ K 8 5 2 ♦ A ♣ K Q 6 3 2 [page 158]

Hands like these are weaker and more common than Ingberman’s examples. If we would reverse on most of these hands (or weaker), then it makes sense for responder to have a non-forcing rebid.

Two-Way Stop-Major Slow-Down

Opener’s strong reverse sets the stage for our partscore, game, or slam contract. We could play in any strain, and there we are at the middle of the two level. We need tools, and we have choices.

Slow-down bid. The modern style is to play that the cheaper of the fourth suit and 2 NT is responder’s slow-down bid, an artificial application of the brakes. ♦^{11a} Indeed, responder may be hoping to stop as low as possible.

After a slow-down bid, responder’s jump to game...

- ... denies slam interest. Responder’s direct raise is the strongest possible bid. A direct jump to 3 NT shows some slam interest. Let’s call this *two-way slow-down*. ♦^{11b}
- ... is undefined. Responder’s direct raise forces to game, with or without slam interest. Unfortunately, this may be standard.

Does opener promise a rebid?

- Plan A** – Opener’s reverse promises a rebid below game.
- Responder’s rebid of their suit forces to game.
- Responder’s rebid of their suit shows 5+ cards, but not necessarily extra strength. [better and five times as popular]

- ❑ **Plan B** – Opener may pass only two of responder’s major.
Let’s call this plan *stop-major*. It is a distant second in popularity, but it wins on frequency, making it superior for matchpoints and perhaps for IMPs as well.

After a slow-down bid, responder may be planning 3 M next, to show a good hand with a modest 5+ card major.

- **Plan C** – Opener may pass only responder’s 2 NT bid.
Plan C puts the kibosh on two-way slow-down over opener’s 2 ♡.

The rest of this topic discusses two-way stop-major slow-down.

However, if you will eschew stop-major and play Plan A, the adjustments are minimal. One more choice for any plan:

Responder’s jump rebid of their major suit forces to game with...

- ... **at most one loser opposite a void, setting trump for RKB.**
This is too restrictive.

- ❑ ... **at most two losers opposite a singleton.**
This provisionally sets trump; if necessary, bid the suit again to play opposite a void.

- ... **a good 6-card suit.**
This may be standard, but it is too loose.

Reverse into Hearts – 2 NT Slow-Down

1 m	1 ♠
2 ♡	?

Here, opener’s 2 ♡ is a reverse, showing at least five cards in the minor, fewer but at least four hearts, \diamond^{11c} and usually 16 or more HCP. Our reverse is 99% forcing. Responder passes only with an ill-fitting, aceless minimum – possibly our last chance for a positive score.

R2	O3	R3	After a reverse: 1 m - 1 ♠; 2 ♥ - ?
Pass	A terrible hand.*		
2 ♠	Up to a bad 8 HCP, 5+ spades (non-forcing).*		
2 NT	Slow-down bid: forcing, requests 3 ♣.		
	3 ♣	Catch-all (after 1 ♦, at least two clubs).	
		Pass	To play.
		3 ♦, 3 ♥	To play.
		3 ♠	natural game force, 5+ spades.
		Game	To play, no slam interest .
	3 ♦	[♦ opened] Short clubs & six diamonds - to play 3 ♦, if responder intended to pass 3 ♣.	
	3 ♥	Five hearts and six of the minor, non-forcing.	
	3 ♠	3-card support, extra values.	
3 om	The 4 th suit is natural, constructive, and game-forcing.		
3 m, 3 ♥	Natural, responder's strongest possible bids.		Slam interest!
3 NT	Natural, both om and spades well stopped.		
3 ♠	Natural GF, good suit.**		
4 om	Splinter: singleton or void in the bid suit, with 4-card heart support (and therefore, 5+ spades).		

* Non-standard Pass and 2 ♠ \diamond^{12} over a reverse into hearts.

** Per our choice, "Responder's jump rebid" on page 148.

o. "The Bidding Box" (2), May 2023 *Bulletin*:

♠ J 9 4 3 ♥ 10 5 2 ♦ 10 9 7 3 ♣ A 5

1 ♣ 1 ♠

2 ♥ ?

Bid 2 NT, slow-down, planning to pass partner's 3 ♣. That contract should be playable. Passing the reverse is an emergency action, when this might be the last available positive score. Save that for an ace-less 6-count with ♥ x-x-x ♣ x, similar to hand [a] below. In the competition, responder passed; 4 ♥ would have been a fine contract:

♠ 8 ♥ A K J 9 6 ♦ 4 ♣ K J 8 7 4 3

Examples 1-5 – We continue with this specific auction:

1 \diamond – 1 \spadesuit ; 2 \heartsuit – ?

- | | | | | | |
|----|------------------------|----------------------|------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. | \spadesuit K 9 8 7 | \heartsuit 7 5 2 | \diamond 3 | \clubsuit Q J 7 3 2 | [Pass, plus score?] |
| b. | \spadesuit K 9 8 7 2 | \heartsuit 7 5 2 | \diamond 3 | \clubsuit Q J 3 2 | [2 \spadesuit , non-forcing] |
| c. | \spadesuit K 9 8 7 | \heartsuit 7 5 2 | \diamond 3 2 | \clubsuit Q J 7 3 | [2 NT, intend 3 \diamond] |
| d. | \spadesuit K 9 8 7 | \heartsuit 7 5 2 | \diamond K 3 2 | \clubsuit Q J 3 | [2 NT, intend 3 NT] |
| e. | \spadesuit K 9 8 7 | \heartsuit Q 5 2 | \diamond K 3 | \clubsuit A Q 3 2 | [3 NT, slam try] |
| f. | \spadesuit K 9 8 7 | \heartsuit Q J 5 2 | \diamond K 3 | \clubsuit A 9 2 | [3 \heartsuit , slam try] |
-

Now consider these hands for opener, opposite the hands above:

1. \spadesuit Q 5 \heartsuit A K 6 3 \diamond A Q J 9 8 \clubsuit 10 5

Opener's hand [1] is too strong to open 1 \diamond and rebid 2 \diamond , and too shapely to open 1 NT. \diamond^{13} When responder [a] passes the reverse, we are plenty high – what a terrible fit. We pass 2 \spadesuit by responder [b].

When responder bids 2 NT, we have nothing to add and thus bid 3 \clubsuit . Responder [c] bids 3 \diamond , to play, having kept the auction alive for a round. Responder [d] bids 3 NT, perhaps a difficult contract, since opener [1] has a minimum reverse.

We pass the 3 NT of responder [e]. Over the 3 \heartsuit of responder [f], we make a courtesy control-bid of 4 \diamond . RKB is sensible by responder here, since the queen or a singleton spade is likely in opener's hand.

2. \spadesuit 5 \heartsuit A K 6 3 \diamond A Q J 9 8 \clubsuit K 5 4

Hand [2] is a garden-variety reverse, with its 5-4-3-1 shape. When responder [a] passes, we are OK. Although a 3 \clubsuit contract would be safer this time, opener has not promised any clubs at all. Over 2 \spadesuit by responder [b], we bid and play 2 NT.

When responder bids 2 NT, we have nothing to add and thus bid 3 \clubsuit . On hand [c], responder bids 3 \diamond , to play. On hand [d], responder bids 3 NT, a reasonable contract.

Over 3 NT by responder [e], we try 4 NT, which partner passes. Over 3 \heartsuit on [f], we bid a serious 3 NT. With all suits controlled, responder asks for keycards and sticks it in 6 \heartsuit .

- | | | |
|----|---|---------------------|
| a. | ♠ K 9 8 7 ♡ 7 5 2 ♦ 3 ♣ Q J 7 3 2 | [Pass, plus score?] |
| b. | ♠ K 9 8 7 2 ♡ 7 5 2 ♦ 3 ♣ Q J 3 2 | [2 ♠, non-forcing] |
| c. | ♠ K 9 8 7 ♡ 7 5 2 ♦ 3 2 ♣ Q J 7 3 | [2 NT, intend 3 ♦] |
| d. | ♠ K 9 8 7 ♡ 7 5 2 ♦ K 3 2 ♣ Q J 3 | [2 NT, intend 3 NT] |
| e. | ♠ K 9 8 7 ♡ Q 5 2 ♦ K 3 ♣ A Q 3 2 | [3 NT, slam try] |
| f. | ♠ K 9 8 7 ♡ Q J 5 2 ♦ K 3 ♣ A 9 2 | [3 ♡, slam try] |
-

3. ♠ Q J 4 ♡ A K 6 3 ♦ A Q J 9 8 ♣ 5

Hand [3] is similar to [2], with the black suits flipped. When responder passes on hand [a], this is the last chance for a decent score, which may not be plus. We cannot get to 2 ♠ because that bid by responder shows five cards. If responder were to try 2 NT on hand [a], we play 3 ♦ in a 5-1 fit, as noted below.

We bump the 2 ♠ of responder [b] to 3 ♠, but responder passes with wasted club values. When responder bids 2 NT, we cannot stand clubs. The least-bad action is to bid 3 ♦ – a 6-card suit is expected for this – with weaker diamonds, we should have made a 3-card spade raise (not a reverse). Opener is not strong enough to bid 3 ♠ – remember, a weak responder bids 2 ♠ with five, and a game-going responder with five spades is about to bid 3 ♠ anyhow.

Responder [c] passes 3 ♦. Warned of club shortness, responder [d] may pass 3 ♦ as well; either 3 NT or 5 ♦ should fail.

Over 3 NT on hand [e], we try a non-forcing 4 ♠, which partner converts to 6 NT with a triple fit and the lead coming into clubs. Over 3 ♡ on [f], we assume partner has a top spade, ask for keycards, and bid the great 6 ♡ slam.

4. ♠ A Q 4 ♡ A K 6 3 ♦ A Q J 9 8 ♣ 5

Hand [4] is the same hand as [3], but 3 HCP better. A 4-3 major-suit fit will be no picnic in game, so we are still OK when responder passes on hand [a]. If we add the ♡ Q (22 HCP), 4 ♡ would be OK.

Over the non-forcing 2 ♠ of responder [b], we jump to 4 ♠, expecting a good play for game, but little chance for slam.

- | | | |
|----|---|---------------------|
| a. | ♠ K 9 8 7 ♡ 7 5 2 ♦ 3 ♣ Q J 7 3 2 | [Pass, plus score?] |
| b. | ♠ K 9 8 7 2 ♡ 7 5 2 ♦ 3 ♣ Q J 3 2 | [2 ♠, non-forcing] |
| c. | ♠ K 9 8 7 ♡ 7 5 2 ♦ 3 2 ♣ Q J 7 3 | [2 NT, intend 3 ♦] |
| d. | ♠ K 9 8 7 ♡ 7 5 2 ♦ K 3 2 ♣ Q J 3 | [2 NT, intend 3 NT] |
| e. | ♠ K 9 8 7 ♡ Q 5 2 ♦ K 3 ♣ A Q 3 2 | [3 NT, slam try] |
| f. | ♠ K 9 8 7 ♡ Q J 5 2 ♦ K 3 ♣ A 9 2 | [3 ♡, slam try] |
-
4. ♠ A Q 4 ♡ A K 6 3 ♦ A Q J 9 8 ♣ 5 [continued]

When responder bids 2 NT, we cannot stand clubs, but are now strong enough to bid 3 ♠. On hand [c], responder should pass 3 ♠ – the clubs are wasted, and going plus should be fine. On hand [d], a single club stop should be enough, so responder bids 3 NT. Turn the ♣ Q into the ♡ Q, and responder instead pushes on to 4 ♠, planning to ruff clubs in the short hand.

Over 3 NT by responder [e], we take our 20 HCP to 6 NT. Over 3 ♡ by responder [f], we ask for keycards and reach 7 ♡.

5. ♠ 4 ♡ A K 7 6 3 ♦ A Q J 9 8 6 ♣ 5

Opener [5] reverses on this ostensibly 4-loser hand, planning to bid hearts again. When responder passes on hand [a], we are still OK: 4 ♡ would be worse than 50%. Change a black card into an ace (3 losers): after opening 2 ♣, bid 3 ♦, and then 4 ♡. Of course, the opponents may preempt us if we open 2 ♣.

When hand [b] rebids spades, we push on with 3 ♡, non-forcing, which partner passes.

Over 2 NT, we again bid 3 ♡, non-forcing. On hand [c], responder passes, but on hand [d] bids 4 ♡ with the superb ♦ K.

We'll see that 3 NT by responder [e] pre-raises diamonds, so that 4 ♣ asks for keycards, which gets us to 6 ♦. If we instead bid 4 ♡, responder should get us to slam – is a keycard ask available? Over responder's 3 ♡ on [f], we have a 9-card fit, serious slam interest, and all suits controlled, so we ask for keycards. The slam proves to be cold when dummy tables the likely, hoped-for ♦ K. Without it, the slam would still be about 50%, a fine auction.

Reverse into Diamonds – 4th Suit Slow-Down

After the reverse to 2 \diamond , the fourth suit is available at the two level. We use this as the slow-down bid. \diamond^{14} 2 NT by either partner is non-forcing, with a stopper in the fourth suit. Consider this auction:

1 \clubsuit	1 M
2 \diamond	?

Opener's 2 \diamond is a reverse, showing at least five clubs, fewer diamonds (could be a chunky fragment), and usually 16 or more HCP.

R2	O3	R3	After the reverse: 1 \clubsuit – 1 M; 2 \diamond - ?
Pass	We don't pass this reverse – it might not be a suit!		
2 M	Up to a bad 8 HCP, 5+ cards (non-forcing).*		
2 oM	Slow-down bid: forcing, requests 3 \clubsuit .		
	2 \spadesuit	[raise] 3-card spades, NF.	
	2 NT	Natural, non-forcing.	
	3 \clubsuit	Catch-all.	
		Pass	To play.
		2 NT	Natural invitation.
		3 \clubsuit , 3 \diamond	To play.
		Game	To play, no slam interest .
	3 \diamond	Five diamonds and six clubs, non-forcing.	
	Other	Natural and forcing to game.	
2 NT	Natural, forcing to game.		
3 \clubsuit 3 \diamond	Natural, responder's strongest possible bid.		Slam interest!
3 NT	Natural, with both majors well-stopped.		
3 M	Natural GF, good suit.**		
4 M	Natural and distributional.		

* Non-standard 2 M over a reverse into diamonds.

** Per our choice, "Responder's jump rebid" on page 148.

6. \spadesuit 9 5 \heartsuit 7 2 \diamond A K 3 \clubsuit A K Q J 7 2

After opening 1 \clubsuit , opener reverses to 2 \diamond , the best route to 3 NT with eight tricks in hand. Responder must not pass this reverse.

7. “The Bidding Box” (1), March 2023 *Bulletin*:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ K J	♠ 9 8 6
♥ 6 5	♥ Q 9 7 4 3
♦ K J 4 3	♦ A Q
♣ A K Q 9 4	♣ 6 3 2
1 ♣	1 ♥
2 ♦ [reverse]	2 ♥ [max for non-forcing]
2 NT [too strong to pass?]	3 NT [glad to accept]

As responder, our eight HCP are borderline game values, and we do not want to declare notrump. If opener chooses to pass 2 ♥ with 16 HCP and a doubleton heart, we’ll be high enough. This works out, because over 2 NT, we are proud to bid 3 NT on our max.

8. “The Bidding Box” (5), January 2020 *Bulletin*:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ A K 5	♠ 10 8 3
♥ Q	♥ K J 10 8 5 2
♦ K Q 6 2	♦ A J 9
♣ A Q J 7 4	♣ 2
1 ♣	1 ♥
2 ♦ [reverse]	3 ♥ [plays opposite singleton]
3 ♠ [1 st or 2 nd round control]	4 ♦ [control, denies ♣ A or K]
4 NT [or 4 ♠, if RKB ♥]	5 ♥ [2 keycards, no ♥ Q]
6 ♥	

Because a 2 ♥ rebid might be passed, responder’s choice is between an immediate 3 ♥ (offering to play opposite a small singleton) and 2 NT followed by 3 ♥ (forcing to game, but a lesser 5- or 6-card suit).

Hearts are trump here unless opener insists on a minor (or 3 NT). Opener’s 3 ♠ cannot be an offer to play spades, so it’s a control-bid in support of hearts. Serious 3 NT applies – a major suit has been agreed below 3 NT in a game-forcing auction. While responder has a nice hand, it’s not worth a serious slam try over a reverse that might be as few as 16 HCP – so 4 ♦ is a courtesy control-bid. Recognizing gold in the ♥ Q, opener drives to slam. There is no way to know about the ♦ J, which makes 6 NT by opener the top spot.

9. “The Bidding Box” (7), March 2024 *Bulletin*:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ –	♠ A K J 9 8 5 4
♥ K J 9 6 4	♥ A
♦ A 4	♦ Q J 9 8
♣ K Q J 5 3 2	♣ 8
1 ♣	1 ♠
2 ♥ [reverse]	3 ♠ [plays opposite singleton]
4 ♥ [5=6]	4 ♠ [or void]

One pair conducted the auction above, reaching the top spot. The other pair played that 3 ♠ set trump; they rode the juggernaut to 6 ♠. We cannot afford for responder’s jump rebid to unconditionally set trump over opener’s strong reverse.

Key Features

- Opener’s reverse over a 1 NT response is forcing. Responder’s bid of 2 NT, three of opener’s first suit, or a bid in between is non-forcing. Anything else is forcing to game.
- Opener’s reverse over one of a suit is into 2 ♥ or 2 ♦.
- Decisions: Does opener’s reverse promise a rebid below game: [A] always; [B] except over responder’s repeat of 2 M; or [C] except over responder’s slow-down 2 NT?
- Does responder’s rebid of their suit at the two level force to game?
- Responder’s cheaper of the 4th suit or 2 NT implies weakness and asks opener to bid 3 ♣, unless they have more to say. After the 4th suit slow-down bid, 2 NT by either partner is natural and non-forcing.
- Do responder’s delayed game bids (via slow-down bid) deny slam interest with Plan A or B?
- Is responder’s raise of either suit the strongest possible bid, showing slam interest – as does responder’s direct 3 NT?
- Does responder’s jump rebid of their major suit show one two losers opposite a singleton?

Backstory

The roots of modern systems over opener's strong reverse are Ingberman, lebensohl, and blackout. People use these names somewhat interchangeably, with cross-pollination and revision of methods. I deliberately omitted these names from the text, simply talking about the slow-down bid. The choices in this book do not cover all the issues. This tangle is complicated! Look for an upcoming article on 3NT.XYZ.

Ingberman. Monroe Ingberman, a mathematician and bridge writer, was the first coach of the Dallas Aces, the team formed by Ira Corn to wrest the world bridge championship back from the Italians. Ingberman's article "Opener's Reverse" was published in 1970 and is available on 3NT.XYZ. Ingberman was the first popular use of an artificial 2 NT rebid over the reverse.

Lebensohl. George Boehm published his "lebensohl" articles in the Nov & Dec 1970 issues of *The Bridge World*. The teaser available online is a quick, great read, but it only talks about interference with a 1 NT opening.

Ron Andersen was a five-time winner of the annual race for masterpoints in North America, extending the record three times. His book on lebensohl was published in 1987. After applying the lebensohl concept to interference over our 1 NT opening and our double of their weak two-bid, Anderson turned to opener's strong reverse. He noted that experts have a dozen or more applications for lebensohl. The *Encyclopedia* does not include an entry for lebensohl over reverses, although lebensohl is a distinct origin.

Blackout originated in Australia. Tim Bourke wrote to me, "Bobby Richman introduced a variation of it to the Melbourne youth group in 1971/2."

Bourke sent me a copy of his 1975 pamphlet, "Blackout," now transcribed and up-formatted on 3NT.XYZ. It has the rebid of responder's suit as non-forcing; but Bourke wrote me that, soon after publication, it became forcing. The *Encyclopedia* has an updated approach, noting blackout is also known as Wolff over reverses.

◆ Alternative Methods

¹¹⁻¹⁴⁶ **Lebensohl after reverse over 1 NT.** Bridge Bulletin standard is defined more primitively BWS: lebensohl is always on over a reverse, such as on this auction from "It's Your Call" (2), January 2024: { 1 ♡ – 1 NT; 2 ♠ - ? }. It's not clear how this works when the reverse is not into spades.

^{11a-147} **Slow-down is always 2 NT.** This is quite playable, and a natural fourth suit could be useful. However, the recommended method should be better over time.

11b-147 **Exploring the level.** Look for an upcoming article on 3NT.XYZ for ideas beyond “two-way.”

11c-148 **Reverse into 3-card hearts.** A reverse into 3-card hearts creates a third opponent. We must be quite ready to recover from whatever happens, such as declaring the hand in 4-3 hearts. Ingberman wrote that on hand [11], over a 1♠ response, a “forcing reverse to 2♥ ... is the least of evils.” Since our partner’s 1♠ response (page 90) provides the ♠A (Q-10-x-x or better) or five cards, we could jump-raise 3♠ instead:

11. ♠KQ4 ♥AK3 ♦AK852 ♣96

A possible plan of play in 4♠ would be to ruff the third club, cash the ♠K-Q, go to hand with the ♦Q, play the ♠A discarding a heart, and play diamonds until the opponent with four trumps ruffs – claim.

12-149 **Reverse and rebids forcing.** Most experts insist that opener’s reverse is forcing. The chance is small that opener has a 20+ HCP moose when we hold xxx-x in opener’s suits. For the past two or more decades, we have not passed often, but when we have, it has been right every time. Consider hand [a] this way: our minimum response got much worse.

Here is a summary of a 2017 poll posted on Bridge Winners by David Parsons. 75% of respondents play that opener’s reverse promises a rebid.

Jan 2017		Plan	1 m – 1♠; 2♥ Opener promises a rebid below game...
150	75%	A	always.
31	16%	B	except after responder’s 2♠.
18	9%	C	except after responder’s 2 NT.
33			Abstentions.

In 2024, I posted a follow-up poll, “Responder rebids after opener’s strong reverse,” with these results:

	{ 1♦ – 1♠; 2♥ – ? } I prefer that any bid by responder over 2♥, ...
8	... except 2 NT, forces to game. (lebensohl, per Ron Andersen)
46	... except 2♠ or 2 NT, forces to game. (blackout, per Encyclopedia)
7	... except [other], forces to game.
10	Abstentions

The poll would have picked up more real replies, if it had said “forces to 3 NT” instead of game. Dave Beer posted a link to a copy of the Ingberman article, which I was pleased to latch onto.

10. Playing matchpoints with three local experts, we are vulnerable:

Opener	Pete
♠ A 8 3	♠ K J 10 2
♥ K 8 5 2	♥ A 4 3
♦ A	♦ K 5 4 2
♣ K Q 6 3 2	♣ 5 4
1 ♣	1 ♠
2 ♥ [reverse]	2 NT
3 ♣ [as requested]	3 NT

All three of the other folks at the table play that my 2 NT bid can be passed! I was told to jump to 3 NT. I added plan C for them, but would not play it.

As we have seen, with Plan B, we need 2 NT to be forcing, with responder's repeat of the major non-forcing. When responder's 2 M is forcing (as assumed at the table), there is some logic to permitting opener to pass 2 NT – but that is definitely not standard.

¹³⁻¹⁵⁰ **Avoid opening 1 NT on 5-4-2-2.** The concentrated values and weak black doubletons make it clear to open 1 ♦ on hand [1], repeated here:

1. ♠ Q 5 ♥ A K 6 3 ♦ A Q J 9 8 ♣ 10 5

We might also open 1 ♦ on this hand:

♠ Q 5 ♥ A 10 6 3 ♦ A Q J 9 8 ♣ K 5

Such marginal reverses are too weak with Plan A, but are supported by Plan B.

¹⁴⁻¹⁵³ **Slow-down is never 2 ♠.** International star Silvana Rojko plays that 2 ♠ is never the slow-down bid after a reverse – I did not ask why, but I puzzled out these possible reasons:

- If 2 ♠ is artificial, it may catch an effective double.
- This could be our last chance at a 4-3 spade fit.

The 3-6 Jump Reverse & 4-6 Raise

The 3-6 Jump Reverse

Suppose we open 1 \diamond , partner responds 1 \spadesuit , and we hold:

1. \spadesuit A Q 3 \heartsuit 7 2 \diamond A K J 9 4 3 \clubsuit K 6

Assuming we have an 8-card fit, this is a 5-loser hand with 17 HCP, surely worth an immediate move toward game. Which move?

- 2 NT Silly with no heart stopper.
- 3 \clubsuit Marginal values for a contrived game force.
- 3 \diamond A fine value bid, but we might play there with 4 \spadesuit cold!
- 3 \spadesuit Responder may have four small spades, with diamond tolerance or support.

Those bids do not appeal. They call a strong “six of mine and three of yours” a nightmare or death hand, for good reason. We show such a hand with a 3-6 *jump reverse*, when available: \diamond^{15}

- 3 \heartsuit An artificial bid promising a strong playing hand, good 3-card spade support, and usually six diamonds.

There is a jump reverse available on any minor-major auction, except $\{1\ \diamond - 1\ \heartsuit\}$. Over $\{1\ \clubsuit - 1\ \spadesuit\}$, there are two: we jump into the stronger red suit holding. Too bad we cannot save one of those bids for $\{1\ \diamond - 1\ \heartsuit\}$!

At matchpoints, some pairs will play in the minor suit. Playing this jump reverse and having to choose between three and four of the major in a 4-3 fit, lean toward three. Simply finding the correct strain should produce a good score.

2. “The Bidding Box” (4), January 2024 *Bulletin*:

Opener

\spadesuit Q 6

\heartsuit A 4

\diamond 7 2

\clubsuit A K J 10 9 5 2

Responder

\spadesuit 10 5 4 3

\heartsuit 10 9 8 3 2

\diamond A 4

\clubsuit Q 6

Our Auction

1 ♣	1 ♥
3 ♣	3 ♦ [stopper]
3 ♠ [half-stopper]	3 NT

Either partner could have bid 3 NT with a full spade stopper. In desperation, opener bids 3 ♠, which shows and asks for half a stopper (Q-x or J-x-x). With the super ♦ A and ♣ Q, responder's ♠ 10-x-x-x are sufficient.

As with Sherlock Holmes, the key to the auction is the dog that did not bark – the 3-6 jump reverse that opener did not make – opener has no interest in this stinking heart suit! Responder bids the ♦ A and both partners know the target is 3 NT (responder rebids a decent 6-card heart suit). Easy-peasy!

In the bidding contest, apparently neither pair played the 3-6 jump reverse. The first three bids were the same. One responder felt the need to bid 3 ♥ and played in 4 ♥. The other responder chose 3 ♦; opener then felt the need to bid 3 ♥, and the same hopeless 4 ♥ contract was reached.

The 4-6 Raise

While we are at it, let's review a similar raise. Suppose we open 1 ♦, partner responds 1 ♠, and we hold:

3. ♠ A Q J 3 ♥ 2 ♦ A K Q 10 5 3 ♣ 9 6

With hand [3], we jump to 4 ♦, traditionally promising four strong spades and a *solid* diamond suit. ^{15a} This is a forcing raise, and spades are trump.

a. ♠ K 10 8 4 2 ♥ A 10 8 6 4 ♦ J 6 2 ♣ 5

On hand [a], we count tricks: six diamonds, five spades, one heart, and at most one loser. We are going to bid a small slam, but in case opener has the extra ♣ A, we ask for keycards in spades with 4 NT.

b. ♠ K 10 8 4 2 ♥ 10 8 6 4 ♦ J 2 ♣ A 5

With hand [b], we count five spades, six diamonds and a club, for 12 tricks. With multiple heart losers, we show our side ace with 5 ♣, putting the focus on hearts.

Rule: *We cannot afford to start Italian control-bids above the keycard ask: we only show a first-round control up there.*

Opener holds a singleton heart in hand [3] and bids the laydown slam over 5 ♣. With two heart losers, opener would sign off in 5 ♠.

c. ♠ K 10 4 2 ♥ A 8 6 4 ♦ J 2 ♣ 10 8 5

On hand [c], we can lay down a slam opposite a singleton club, with a 3-2 spade split, ruffing a heart in hand. We bid 4 ♥, but subside when opener [3] bids 4 ♠.

There are choices for opener's double-jump rebid at four of a minor:

❑ **Traditional:** forcing, strong 4-card support for responder's major and a long suit headed by at least A-K-Q.

○ **BWS:** forcing, strong 4-card support for responder's major and a long, very strong suit.

4. ♠ K Q J 9 ♥ 6 ♦ A K 10 9 7 4 ♣ 5 2

Hand [4] is Marty Bergen's example of the BWS method, in the December 2023 *Bulletin*: "a terrific long minor. [The hand] usually includes fewer high-card points than a splinter raise."

Key Features

- Opener's jump reverse shows strong 3-card support for responder's major and a strong minor (usually six cards).
- Decision: Opener's double-jump rebid shows strong 4-card support for responder's major. Does it also show a solid, or a very strong, minor suit of at least six cards?

Backstory

Eric Schwartz attributed our jump reverse to GLM Lloyd Arvedon. I asked Lloyd, and he said "I figured it out." Bobby Goldman's *Aces Scientific* contains an ancestor of it, on page 58. Gary Schwartz brought this general idea to our partnership decades ago; he thinks he found it in the Master Solvers feature of *The Bridge World*: "As if that's what the stars played."

Names. With this book, I have adopted the descriptive names *3-6 jump reverse* and *4-6 raise*. Philip Alder called the latter the *raise without a name*.

◆ Alternative Methods

¹⁵⁻¹⁵⁹ **Mini-splinter.** Many pairs play the jump reverse as a mini-splinter, showing 4-card support, a singleton in the bid suit, and invitational values. This mini-splinter is great when it comes up. However, such a hand can be bid acceptably with a jump raise, since there is never any doubt as to strain. Also, it only works when the bid is available for the shortness actually held.

Our 3-6 jump reverse works on more deals and is usually the only way to reliably identify the correct strain.

Frequency	3-6	Mini-Splinter
1 ♣ – 1 ♥	100%	50%
1 ♦ – 1 ♥	0%	0%
1 ♦ – 1 ♠	100%	50%
1 ♣ – 1 ♠	100%	100%
Average	75%	50%

BWS lists the jump reverse as a “game-forcing splinter raise” – their double jump shift is a void splinter – seems like a waste, giving up the 3-6 jump reverse for the BWS plan.

^{15a-160} **The 4-6 non-raise.** Some commenters on Bridge Winners play the double-jump rebid as non-forcing with a solid suit and weakish spades.

Frank Stewart’s example for his fictional partner’s hand, in the Nov 2023 *Bulletin*, is equivalent to hand [5]:

5. ♠ Q 7 5 3 ♥ A 10 ♦ A K Q 9 7 5 4 ♣ –

This is either a liberty on the traditional meaning, or 4-6 non-raise.

Opener's Jump Rebid

As we have seen, when our opening major suit is raised, life is good. We plan to play in that suit; the only issue is, how high. Furthermore, our raise promises two or three winners, so we can pass with seven losers, try for game with six, and jump to game with five.

If we open a long, strong suit and get a one-level response, we have no idea whether responder has any trumps or fitting cards for us. The final contract could be in our suit, notrump, or any other suit. If we jump, we know for sure that the auction will reach the three level.

Opener's jump rebid shows a strong suit, five to six losers, and good side honors. In a minor, 3 NT is the main target. This merely good suit is *not strong enough*:

1. ♠ Q 10 4 ♥ A 3 ♦ K 6 ♣ A Q 9 7 3 2

Counted aggressively, hand [1] has only five losers, but with clubs 4-2 and the ♣ K offside, we could start with three trump losers. Over any suit response, we rebid 2 ♣, which usually provides a 6-card suit. This encourages a game try on a hand with a club honor and assorted junk. (An alternative is to open 1 NT – see note 3 on page 177.)

These hands are bare minimum for a jump rebid to three of a minor over 1 ♥, with the ♠ 10 assisting the dubious queen:

2. ♠ Q 10 4 ♥ A 3 ♦ K 6 ♣ A Q J 9 3 2
3. ♠ Q 10 4 ♥ 3 ♦ A K J 9 3 2 ♣ A Q 7

Jump Rebid at 3 ♣

Continuations are straightforward after opener's jump rebid at 3 ♣, so we'll discuss this situation first. Consider this auction:

1 ♣ – 1 M; 3 ♣ – ?

Pass Most hands with a misfit pass. Any bid below game is forcing, and opener promised a strong suit. Compared to the not-quite-good-enough hand [1], opener should be glad to have the extra texture in trump provided by hand [2].

3 M This bid shows six decent cards in the major. Opener did not make a jump reverse, and is therefore not interested in some grungy 5-card suit. However, a 6-2 major-suit fit could be best: the plan would be to draw trump and use dummy's extra strength to establish and enjoy the clubs. The major may be far less useful when clubs are trump.

3 NT Responder shows game values and both side suits stopped, for example, minimal stoppers for a 1♥ response, with the beautiful ♣ K:

a. ♠ K 7 2 ♥ J 9 6 5 2 ♦ Q 10 2 ♣ K 6

3♦ This bid shows game values with a diamond stopper, but no stopper in the other major.

3 oM Bidding the other major shows game values with a stopper in this suit, but no diamond stopper.

Unfortunately, it's not as simple as that. The hope is that, after a stopper bid, opener will have a stopper in the fourth suit, and bid 3 NT. The opening lead will often be through the stopper announced by responder. If opener cannot help, the opponents may run the suit immediately; or third hand may win and lead through opener's stopper in the fourth suit. Here is my advice:

Rule: For 3 NT, responder only needs a stopper in each suit that is likely to hold up to an incoming opening lead.

Rule: To show a single stopper, responder must prevent the opponents from running the suit with a single lead across it.

♠ K-7-2 and ♦ Q-10-2 are both acceptable for 3 NT under this advice, but neither is acceptable as a single stopper. For that, we need at least ♠ K-10-2 or ♦ Q-J-2. Obviously, an ace is a great stopper.

This plan won't work perfectly, but we also shouldn't have the opponents routinely and immediately setting us in the suit of our stopper, unless the opening leader has a side entry.

One diamond response { 1♣ - 1♦; 3♣ }. 3 NT is the first target, so we bid stoppers up the line until either partner bails. As with a major, our 6-card diamond suit may play better than clubs.

One notrump response { 1 ♣ – 1 NT }. Responder should have a balanced hand, a value in each side suit, and a desire to declare notrump. Responder could have marked time with 1 ♦, so that opener would declare. Repeating the hands from above:

2. ♠ Q 10 4 ♥ A 3 ♦ K 6 ♣ A Q J 9 3 2

3. ♠ Q 10 4 ♥ 3 ♦ A K J 9 3 2 ♣ A Q 7

With hand [2], bid 2 NT, not 3 ♣. Reserve the 3 ♣ bid over 1 NT for a club-based hand similar to hand [3] – one with a defect in a major suit for notrump. Responder then takes charge.

Jump Rebid at 3 ♦

1 ♦ – 1 M; 3 ♦ – ?

Responder’s two obvious paths to 3 NT are: bid it, or bid the other major. We have a rule! Two suits are in doubt, so bidding one (3 oM) shows a stopper in that suit. Otherwise, we guess to either pass or bid 3 NT. This is better than no plan at all. [♦¹⁶](#)

□ Ambiguous Major over 3 ♦

Responder’s major is ambiguous, suggesting a single stopper in clubs. Responder’s subsequent removal of 3 NT to either of our suits shows six cards in the major with no side stopper – non-forcing – a specific exception to “Forcing to Game” on page 56.

- **Other major tells** (per rule) – inferior but simple.
- **Other major asks** (partnership assumes clubs are not an issue).

One spade response. Opener had a jump reverse available.

One heart response. This situation is the worst, because opener had no jump reverse. There is nothing to do about it.

4. “It’s Your Call” (2), January 2023 *Bulletin*:

Matchpoints, both vulnerable:

♠ 5 2 ♥ A Q 9 6 ♦ 9 ♣ K 10 9 7 4 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1 ♦	Pass	1 ♥
Pass	3 ♦	Pass	?

Playing ambiguous major, we can bid 3 ♡, suggesting a club stopper. Our singleton diamond may disappoint, but *clubs* may run.

Playing instead by our rule, two (black) suits are in doubt, so our 3 ♠ would be telling. We must guess between passing and bidding 3 NT on this hand. Even if we guess right and the stoppers are there, we may not make 3 NT – two ways to lose – so passing is best.

This was a difficult problem for the panel. Panelists who do not have a rule should pass as well. Pass was as popular as 3 ♠ (asking), with 3 NT right behind. Any agreement is better than none.

One notrump response. Responder may have any hand with no major suit, 5 to 10 HCP, and either balanced or unbalanced.

2. ♠ Q 10 4 ♥ A 3 ♦ K 6 ♣ A Q J 9 3 2

3. ♠ Q 10 4 ♥ 3 ♦ A K J 9 3 2 ♣ A Q 7

The same two hands... With hand [3], bid 3 ♦. With a diamond-based hand similar to hand [2], bid 2 NT. It also makes sense to count on responder for a club stopper, and rebid 2 NT on hand [5]:

5. ♠ K 10 4 ♥ A Q ♦ A K J 9 3 2 ♣ 10 6

Over 3 ♦, responder should assume there is a problem in a major suit – not the case on hand [5].

Key Features

- Opener's jump rebid is a serious game try; over a 1 NT response, usually one major suit will be unstopped.
- Responder's 3 NT shows a stopper in each side suit that should stand up to an incoming lead.
- Opener's stopper-showing bid shows a stopper that should stand up to a single lead across it.
- Decision: Over 3 ♦, do we play our major as ambiguous (either long, or shows a stopper in the other minor)? If not, does the other major tell (by our rule), or ask (ignore clubs)?

Backstory

The pages of this topic could be the largest discussion of opener's jump rebid in any book anywhere. In a survey of my one to two hundred bridge books,

several authors that I thought might mention it, don't. Those who touch on the subject mostly say a bit about one hand:

Author Year (Page)	Hand with a strong 6+ card suit	Requirements	LTC
Culbertson 1949 (195)*	♠ 6 3 ♥ A K Q 8 5 2 ♦ A K 7 ♣ 5 2	–	5
Reese 1952 (32)*	♠ 6 ♥ K 5 ♦ A Q J 9 4 3 2 ♣ A Q 3 ♠ Q 7 3 ♥ A K J 9 6 4 ♦ A 8 5 ♣ 8 ♠ J 4 ♥ 5 ♦ A K J 9 7 4 3 ♣ K J 8	The third hand is seriously deficient in honor strength.	4 6 6
Goren 1958 (84)	♠ x x ♥ A K 10 x x x ♦ A Q x ♣ K x	16 to 19 points	5
Sheinwold 1964 (68)	♠ A 9 ♥ A Q J 7 5 4 ♦ A 3 2 ♣ J 4	17 to 19 points	6
Root 1986 (44)	♠ 7 ♥ A 6 2 ♦ A 8 3 ♣ A K J 9 7 5	17 to 19 points	6
Hardy 2000 (23)	♠ A Q J 9 6 5 ♥ 6 ♦ K J 5 ♣ A J 3	15+ to 18 HCP	6
Manley, et. al. <i>Encyclopedia</i> 2011 (214)	–	Good 6- or 7-card suit, about 15-17 HCP	–

* Counting hands by honor tricks, not points. Culbertson played differently in a minor.

Notice the suit quality in all these examples, even Reese's deficient hand. Suit and honor quality are paramount.

♦ Alternative Methods

¹⁶⁻¹⁶⁵ { 1 ♦ – 1 ♥; 3 ♦ – ? } and example [4]. Panelists used the word “grope.” Some experts essentially define the unbid major as the only suit in doubt; for them, 3 ♠ asks for a stopper, and 3 NT shows one – ignoring clubs. (As a defender, ask about this, and consider leading a club!) This plan works for example [4], because spades happens to be the problem suit. However, responder is less likely to stop clubs after a major-suit response than after a 1 NT response.

Steve Weinstein: “It’s best to specifically define 3 ♠ as either showing or asking for a stopper (I prefer asking) rather than just giving partner a random guess each time. At least if they double 3 ♠, we might be able to untangle things.”

The two-suit rule lets us figure out what 3 ♠ means, with nothing else to remember. My ambiguous major, based on a lost hint on Bridge Winners (sorry), makes it better still.

Opener Rebids Two Notrump: Wolff Sign-Off

After a response in a suit at the one level, opener's rebid of two notrump usually shows a balanced hand of about 18 HCP: a hand between a strong 1 NT and a strong 2 NT opening. In standard methods, anything responder bids over 2 NT is forcing to game. That's not good enough.

Playing Walsh style (page 107), we respond 1 ♠ to 1 ♣ with:

1. ♠ K 8 7 3 ♥ 7 ♦ Q 9 7 5 3 2 ♣ 8 2

If opener rebids 2 NT, we would like to sign off in 3 ♦, likely a much better contract.

2. ♠ K 10 8 7 4 3 ♥ 7 2 ♦ 9 5 3 ♣ 8 2

After opener rebids 2 NT over our 1 ♠ response, we would like to offer 3 ♠ as a better final contract on hand [2]. (Pairs who respond "up the line" to 1 ♣ or who play weak jump shifts won't want to sign off over 2 NT as often.) On the same auction, we would want opener to choose between playing 3 ♥ and 3 ♠:

3. ♠ K 10 8 7 4 ♥ Q 9 7 2 ♦ 5 3 ♣ 8 2

Wolff Sign-Off with 3 ♦ Checkback ¹⁷

This plan applies when opener jumps to 2 NT over a *major suit response* (even if they double 2 NT).

Sign-off or slam try. 3 ♣ over 2 NT is a puppet to 3 ♦, for example:

- 1 ♣ - 1 ♠; 2 NT - 3 ♣; 3 ♦ - ?

Pass On hand [1] - we play 3 ♦.

3 ♠ On hand [2] - opener is asked to pass, but may raise.

3 ♥ On hand [3] - opener is asked to pick, but may bid game.

Checkback. Responder's 3 ♦ checkback promises either five cards in the first major or four cards in the other major. With both 3-card support and four cards in the other major, opener usually tries first for the 4-4 fit, planning to convert responder's 3 NT to the 5-3 fit.

4. ♠ K 10 8 7 4 ♥ Q 9 7 2 ♦ 5 3 ♣ K 2

5. ♠ K 10 8 7 4 ♥ Q 9 2 ♦ 7 5 3 ♣ K 2
 6. ♠ K 10 4 ♥ Q 9 8 7 2 ♦ 8 5 3 ♣ K 2
 7. ♠ K 10 7 4 ♥ Q 9 8 7 2 ♦ 5 3 ♣ K 2
 8. ♠ K 10 7 4 ♥ Q 9 7 2 ♦ 8 5 3 ♣ K 2

We need a checkback – natural bidding cannot sort out responder’s 4=4 and 4=5 forcing major hands [7 & 8]. A 4-4 spade fit or 5-3 heart fit could get lost, or we might unintentionally play in a 4-3 fit. Checkback works on all hands [4 to 8] – check it back!

R2	O3	R3	Wolff Sign-Off with 3 ♦ Checkback	
3 ♣	Puppet to 3 ♦.			
	3 ♦	Required relay.		
		Pass	Sign off in diamonds.	
		3 ♥	Sign off in hearts; opener may correct to original spades.	
		3 ♠	Sign off in spades.	
		3 NT	Mild slam try in opener’s minor suit.	
		Other	Natural slam try; implies broken suit.	
3 ♦	Major-suit checkback, with either 5+ cards in the bid major, or 4 cards in the other major. Opener’s priorities: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The other major, holding four cards there. 2. Responder’s bid major, holding three cards there. 3. 3 NT otherwise. 			
3 ♥, 3 ♠	Natural slam try: a 6-card or longer good suit (two of the top three honors), or at least 5-5 majors.			
3 NT	Natural, to play.			
	○ [a] Gerber/diamonds	◻ [b] slam/RKB opener’s minor.		
4 ♣	Gerber for aces (0 or 4, 1, 2, 3).	4 m	Natural slam try with good 5+ card support.	
4 ♦	Natural slam try, good 6-card suit, or good 5-card support.	4 om	RKB in opener’s minor (crosswood).	
4 ♥, 4 ♠	Natural, to play: a 6-card suit or longer, or at least 5-5 majors; opener may correct to original spades.			
4 NT	Natural, quantitative.			

Slam options. By default, four clubs is Gerber here. When we are not looking at the king and queen of our suit, it's inadequate. Assuming we remember it, option [b] in the chart is a better plan. This gives up the unlikely natural slam try at 4 \diamond , when the opening bid was 1 \clubsuit , and gains the likely natural slam try at 4 \clubsuit . We also get RKB!

1 \clubsuit - 1 \spadesuit ; 2 NT - ?

9. \spadesuit K Q 7 4 \heartsuit A 7 \diamond 8 3 \clubsuit K Q 9 3 2

Playing plan [b], jump to 4 \clubsuit , a good-suit natural slam try. Without that option, bid 3 \clubsuit and then 3 NT over the 3 \diamond relay - the way we would bid with the either queen replaced with a jack or ten.

10. \spadesuit K Q 7 4 \heartsuit A 7 \diamond 8 \clubsuit A Q 10 9 3 2

Playing plan [b], jump to 4 \diamond , asking for keycards. Otherwise, bid 3 \clubsuit and then 4 \clubsuit over the 3 \diamond relay. With plan [b], this shows a bad suit with slam interest; with plan [a], this sequence serves double duty.

After a 1 \diamond or 1 NT Response

Opener jumps to 2 NT over a 1 \diamond response:

- 3 \diamond , 3 \heartsuit , or 3 \spadesuit is natural and forcing; 3 \clubsuit is a puppet to 3 \diamond .
- All responder's suits are forcing (standard).

Opener raises a 1 NT response to 2 NT:

- Three of opener's suit or a lower-ranking suit is to play.
- All responder's suits are forcing (standard).
- Responder's continuation of three of a suit other than opener's is a transfer (BWS).

Slam is off the table here; the main need is to escape 2 NT, when that is likely to be a bad contract. Transfers prevent escaping to 3 \clubsuit .

Key Features

After { 1 m - 1 M; 2 NT }:

- Responder's 3 \clubsuit is a puppet to 3 \diamond for sign-off, a mild slam try in opener's minor, or a bad-suit slam try.
- Responder's 3 \diamond is a major-suit checkback.

- 3 ♡ or 3 ♠ is a natural slam try.
- Decision: Is 4 ♣ always Gerber, or do we play crosswood and a natural slam try in opener's minor?

Decide about { 1 ♣ – 1 ♦; 2 NT } and { 1 x – 1 NT; 2 NT }.

Backstory

My article, “Bridge Bidding Systems after Opener Rebids 2 NT,” compares ten methods of handling opener's 2 NT rebid. The version of Wolff sign-off with 3 ♦ checkback that we play has been distilled from the version in that 2012 article. The systems described by Max Hardy and Marshall Miles differ, and more ideas are online. The original Wolff sign-off appeared on page 75 of *Aces Scientific* by Bobby Goldman (1978). It required opener to break the relay and raise responder's major with 3-card support – we don't do that, so responder can get to 3 ♦ on hand [1]. In other words, playing Walsh responses, don't break the relay.

Robert ‘Bobby’ Wolff was an original member of the Dallas Aces, winner of numerous ACBL and World championships, former president of the ACBL and of the World Bridge Federation. He is a member of the ACBL Hall of Fame.

♦ Alternative Methods

¹⁷⁻¹⁶⁸ Two Playable Contenders

Wolff sign-off with 3 ♦ raise. The powerful version I recommended in 2012 can be described as “3 ♣ is a puppet to 3 ♦ for sign-off, 4–4 forcing, or slam try. 3 ♦ is an artificial raise of opener's minor.” This system was attributed to George Rosenkranz on the web. We played it for a while, but the checkback version has won out. BWS plays 3 ♦ raise, along with breaking the relay.

Transfers are a decent alternative to Wolff. Andy Bowles provided this summary: 3 ♣, 3 ♦, and 3 ♡ “are transfers, showing 4 cards if it's a new suit, 5 cards if it's responder's suit, 3 cards if it's opener's suit. 3 ♠ shows a good hand with clubs.... Transfers to a new, lower suit, to responder's first suit, or to opener's suit might be weak.... Any further move by responder after a transfer is game forcing.” For more detail, see the References.

These transfers can also be played after our natural 2 NT overcall. Andrew Hanes and I have played transfers for years, without discovering any particular problems. However, we have not mapped out the sequences.

4. One Notrump Opening

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Overview of Responses

The initial responses to 1 NT are:

2 ♣	Stayman (promises at least one major suit).
2 ♦	Transfer to a heart suit of at least five cards.
2 ♥	Transfer to a spade suit of at least five cards.
2 ♠	Size ask with no major: a balanced invite, or 6+ clubs.
2 NT	Transfer to 6+ diamonds, any strength.
3 ♣	5-card-major Stayman with zero or one 4-card major.
3 ♦	Game-forcing, with at least 5-5 in the minor suits.
3 ♥	One spade, a 3-card heart fragment, and 5-4 minors.
3 ♠	One heart, a 3-card spade fragment, and 5-4 minors.
3 NT	To play.
4 ♣	Gerber: 0/4, 1, 2, 3 aces.
4 ♦	Transfer to a heart suit of at least six cards.
4 ♥	Transfer to a spade suit of at least six cards.
4 ♠	Slam try, both minors, and no shortness.
4 NT	Slam invitation (quantitative).
5 NT	Forcing, grand slam invitation.

Key Features

- Modern 4-way transfer framework.
- 2 ♠ after Stayman is *the* invitation with 5 or more spades.
- 2 ♠ is a size ask with no major: balanced invite or club suit.
- 3 ♣ is 5-card-major Stayman with zero or one 4-card major.

Backstory

The 2 ♠ response might be clubs, but it manifests as a size or range ask. This is how we bid a balanced invitation without a 4-card major, or a hand of any strength with long clubs. Formerly, we had to bid Stayman with an invitational balanced hand, just to get to bid 2 NT next, needlessly leaking opener's major-suit holdings to the opponents. Now, responder promises a major suit for a 2 ♣ Stayman bid.

See the Appendix for an approach where 2 NT is 5-card-major Stayman, to avoid a lead-directing double.

Point Range and Shape

Our 1 NT opening is *strong*. Since I'll need a range for examples, I'm going to use 15 to 17 HCP, the most commonly listed range in North America. \diamond^1 In practice, a good 14 will also be opened 1 NT. The methods presented can also be applied to a weak notrump opening.

We avoid opening 1 NT with a 5-card major. \diamond^2 Often a hand with a 5-card major and 15–17 HCP can be downgraded or upgraded to a major-suit opening bid. It's a distinctly mid-range hand, a good 15 to a bad 17, that cries out to be opened 1 NT. Even then, and especially at matchpoints, lean toward opening in the major suit with a doubleton in the other major: otherwise, if we open 1 NT, partner may stick us in a 5–2 fit, with a 5–3 fit available in our major.

We never open 1 NT with either 2–2 or a singleton in the major suits; we seldom open 1 NT with two other doubletons. \diamond^3

\diamond Alternative Methods

¹⁻¹⁷⁶ **The 1 NT range.** Gary and I play 15+ to 18-, nominally half a point stronger. He proposed to play this way, because he got sick of having 1 NT raised to 3 NT on 10 HCP, only to have no play for the contract. This range is comfortable to play with medium invites, splitting evenly at 16 to 17. Beyond evaluating a good or bad 15, we can decide that a 15-point hand will bid better when opened in a suit or in notrump, and act accordingly. For example, to get both black suits into play, open 1 \clubsuit on hand [1], a moderate 15-count:

1. \spadesuit A Q 9 4 \heartsuit K 3 \diamondsuit J 6 2 \clubsuit K Q 10 7

but open 1 NT on more notrumpy hands [2 & 3]:

2. \spadesuit A Q 4 \heartsuit K 3 \diamondsuit J 9 6 2 \clubsuit K Q 10 7

3. \spadesuit A Q 4 \heartsuit K 3 \diamondsuit J 6 2 \clubsuit K Q 10 9 7

In this regard, we might try 14+ to 17-, which splits evenly at 15 to 16. However, with heavy invites, 15 to 17 (meaning 14+ to 17) appeals more.

Because a 1NT-opener usually declares the hand, strong declarers often stretch to open 1 NT, when playing with a weaker partner. In a balanced partnership, this practice is destructive.

Some expert partnerships play a weak notrump when nonvulnerable and strong when vulnerable. Because the meanings of other sequences change as well, I find it not to be worth the bother.

^{1 NT 2-176} **5-Card major.** Marty Bergen says to *always* open 1 NT with a 5-card major, with a balanced hand in the agreed point range. This often makes the hand easier to bid. However, we can miss a fit in opener's major when responder has a weak or invitational hand – when it counts most – or when responder has their own 5-card major. Yes, 5-card-major Stayman, which we play primarily to conceal opener's 4-card-major holdings, will find a fit in opener's 5-card major, when responder has game values.

³⁻¹⁷⁶ **Short suits and 6-card minors.** Practitioners of specialized systems such as Precision are often under pressure to open 1 NT with anything vaguely suitable and within range. We don't have such pressures.

With our 1 NT system, responder will insist on playing in a major suit with 5–5 majors. This works better if opener is not 2–2 in the majors, but this uncommon situation could be tolerated. However, we'll see that, when opener has 2–2 in the majors and responder has a weak hand with 4–4 majors, our crawling Stayman (coming up) should produce a disaster.

The ACBL permits a 1 NT opening with a singleton ace, king, or queen (with no side doubleton). I would not agree to this in a major suit, but it has some merit in a minor. Partner would usually insist in playing in our minor-suit singleton only with a 6-bagger, which may work out fine.

My investigations show that responder, when holding a weak hand with five small in a major suit, should always transfer to, and play in, that major. Even opposite a small doubleton, having that suit as trump can allow declarer to enjoy a trick or two that would not be available in notrump – although 1 NT may turn out to score better. It's when opener provides a third or fourth trump that getting into the major shines. Allowing hands with a singleton honor in a major for opener tips those odds in the wrong direction.

4. ♠ Q 10 4 ♥ A 3 ♦ K 6 2 ♣ A Q 9 7 3

Hand [4] is easy: 15 HCP, all suits stopped, and a fifth club – open 1 NT.

5. ♠ Q 10 4 ♥ A 3 ♦ K 6 ♣ A Q 9 7 3 2

On page 163, hand [5] is presented as a 1 ♣ opening with a 2 ♣ rebid. It's OK to open this hand 1 NT, so long as we 99% treat the suit as five cards. For example, never break the 2 ♦ response to Stayman. Also, don't break crawling Stayman, as responder could be short in our suit. 1 NT is the value bid, but if it blows up, it will be noticed and may have an adverse effect on either partner – see my article "In the Zone."

Transfers to Major Suits

Rule: Over a 1 NT or 2 NT opening, a transfer to a major suit is used only when a 4-4 fit in the other major is not an issue.

Texas Transfers

Responder's jump to 4 \diamond is a transfer to 4 \heartsuit ; likewise, 4 \heartsuit is a Texas transfer to 4 \spadesuit . Responder promises a suit of at least six cards and a play for game. Opener completes the transfer and usually plays there. However, responder may drive to slam by asking for keycards.

O2	R2	O3	4 \diamond (Hearts) Texas Transfer over 1 NT
4 \heartsuit	Required.		
	Pass	Usual.	
	4 \spadesuit	Asks for keycards (kickback).	
O2	R2	O3	4 \heartsuit (Spades) Texas Transfer over 1 NT
4 \spadesuit	Required.		
	Pass	Usual.	
	4 NT	Asks for keycards.	

Jacoby Transfers

Responder's 2 \diamond is a transfer to 2 \heartsuit ; likewise, 2 \heartsuit is a transfer to 2 \spadesuit . Responder promises a suit of at least five cards, but no points.

- Holding four trumps and maximum values, opener bids any doubleton, or 2 NT with 4-3-3-3 shape, as a game try. With four trumps and a minimum, opener jumps to three of the major – optional when vulnerable. \diamond^4
- Holding four trumps and maximum values, opener jumps to three of the major. [standard]

Otherwise, opener completes the transfer.

Responder May Be Weak

- A. Over the completed transfer, responder passes with a less than invitational hand. Respond 2 \diamond and pass 2 \heartsuit on hand [1]:

1. \spadesuit 7 3 2 \heartsuit 9 6 4 3 2 \diamond K 2 \clubsuit 10 4 2

Responder May Be Invitational

Note: With five or more *spades*, usually invite with Stayman, because it lets opener out at the two level.

- B. 2 NT: To invite game with five hearts, responder bids 2 \diamond and then bids 2 NT over 2 \heartsuit on hand [2] – definitely not 3 \clubsuit :

2. \spadesuit A 3 2 \heartsuit K 9 4 3 2 \diamond 2 \clubsuit Q 10 4 2

- C. 2 \spadesuit : To invite game with 5-5 majors, responder bids 2 \diamond and then bids 2 \spadesuit (non-forcing) over 2 \heartsuit on hand [3]:

3. \spadesuit Q 10 6 4 2 \heartsuit K 9 4 3 2 \diamond 2 \clubsuit K 2

- D. 3 M: To invite game with six or more cards, responder bids three of the major over the completed transfer. Respond 2 \diamond and bid 3 \heartsuit over the completed transfer on hand [4]:

4. \spadesuit K 10 2 \heartsuit K 9 8 4 3 2 \diamond 2 \clubsuit 10 4 2

Responder May Have a Game-Forcing Hand

- E. 3 NT: With game values and a 5-card major, responder transfers and then usually bids 3 NT, as on hand [5]:

5. \spadesuit A 3 2 \heartsuit K Q 4 3 2 \diamond 2 \clubsuit Q 10 4 2

- F. 4+ NT: A balanced slam try with a 5-card major.

- G. 4 M: Transfer and jump to game to invite slam with a 6-bagger but no shortness. *Use Texas if stronger or weaker!*

- H. New suit: Transfer and bid shows slam interest, or a 5-card suit or a void somewhere (not hand [5]). On hand [6], bid 2 \heartsuit . Our 3 \heartsuit over 2 \spadesuit shows five hearts (Stayman skipped):

6. \spadesuit Q 10 6 4 2 \heartsuit K J 4 3 2 \diamond 2 \clubsuit A 2

- I. Auto-splinter: A jump shift over the completed transfer shows a singleton or void in the bid suit, with slam interest. Respond 2 \heartsuit and jump to 4 \clubsuit on hand [7]:

7. \spadesuit Q J 10 6 4 2 \heartsuit K Q 4 \diamond A J 2 \clubsuit 2

Note: Experts employ the auto-splinter and don't play Roman keycard Gerber (RKG) here! \diamond^{4a}

O2	R2	O3	2 ♠ (Hearts) Jacoby over 1 NT
2 ♠	2-, 3-, or occasionally 4-card heart support.		
	Pass	Weak hand, to play.	
	2 ♠	5-5 majors, invitational.	
	2 NT	Exactly five hearts, invitational.	
	3 ♣, 3 ♠	Natural GF, usually slam interest.	
	3 ♠	6+ hearts, invitational.	
	3 ♠	(splinter) Hearts are trump, short in spades.	
	3 NT	Exactly five hearts, pass or correct to 4 ♠.	
	4 ♣, 4 ♠	(splinter) Hearts are trump, short in bid suit.	
	4 ♠	Semi-balanced slam try (did not use Texas).	
	4 NT	Five hearts, slam invitation.	
	5 NT	Five hearts, forcing, invites grand slam.	
3 ♠	4-Card heart support, minimum hand.		
2 NT	4-Card heart support, maximum hand, 4-3-3-3.		
Other	4-Card heart support, maximum, doubleton in bid suit.		
O2	R2	O3	2 ♠ (Spades) Jacoby over 1 NT
2 ♠	2-, 3- or occasionally 4-card spade support.		
	Pass	Weak hand, to play.	
	2 NT	Use Stayman, followed by 2 ♠, instead! *	
	3 ♣, 3 ♠	Natural GF, usually slam interest.	
	3 ♠	5-5 majors, game-forcing. [Opener never 2-2.]	
		3 ♠	Spades are trump.
		3 NT	Offer to play (chunky minors).
		Other	Control bid, hearts are trump.
	3 ♠	6+ spades, invitational.	
	3 NT	Exactly five spades, pass or correct to 4 ♠.	
	4 ♣, 4 ♠	(splinter) Spades are trump, short in bid suit.	
	4 ♠	(splinter) Spades are trump, ♠ singleton/void.	
	4 ♠	Semi-balanced slam try (did not use Texas).	
	4 NT	Five spades, slam invitation.	
	5 NT	Five spades, forcing, invites grand slam.	
3 ♠	4-Card spade support, minimum hand.		
2 NT	4-Card spade support, maximum hand, 4-3-3-3.		
Other	4-Card spade support, maximum, doubleton in bid suit.		

* See the "Backstory." See also "Stayman" on page 182.

Responder has 5-5 majors. With 5-5 majors and a *weak* hand, bid Stayman (next topic); pass opener's major suit or start a crawl over 2 ♠. With 5-5 majors and *invitational* values, respond 2 ♠, a transfer to hearts, and then bid 2 ♣ (not four, since Stayman was not used). Opener places the contract, maybe passing.

With 5-5 majors and *game* values or better, transfer to spades, and then bid 3 ♥. Opener's 3 NT is an offer to play; 3 ♣ sets spades as trump; 4 ♥ selects hearts, with no slam interest; a minor suit is a control-bid in support of hearts. No 4-card majors after a transfer!

Backstory

Two-level transfers are named after Oswald Jacoby.

The basics of the 5-5 majors scheme, based on the idea that a transfer denies exactly four cards in the other major, came to me from Andrew Hanes. I play it with Gary, and he has passed it on. When I asked in 2023, Andrew wrote:

I was playing 1NT-3♥ was invitational 5-5 and 1NT-3♣ forcing 5-5. A partner [likely the author] wanted to play 1NT-3♥ as a fragment so I started thinking about how to handle the invitational and forcing 5-5 hands and realized playing the above worked well, so I've been playing it that way for at least 10 years.

We expect others have discovered and play this excellent plan.

Invitational hand with five spades: experts now bid Stayman and rebid 2 ♣ over either 2 ♠ or 2 ♥, because it lets opener pass 2 ♣ to refuse the invitation. A replacement for sequences after a transfer to 2 ♣ is beyond the scope of this book; the interested reader should see my article "Transfers after Transfers."

Responder's second suit "at the three level ... is forcing to game and often suggests that responder is interested in slam." – Max Hardy, *Standard Bidding*, page 129. "Transfers after Transfers" addresses this situation as well.

♦ Alternative Methods

⁴⁻¹⁷⁸ **The standard super-accept** is a jump to 3 M with maximum values. Marty Bergen recommended our plan, but he required a jump with a minimum when vulnerable. Bergen super-accepts reduce the need to invite on marginal values and may keep the opponents out of our partscore auction.

^{4a-179} **Roman keycard Gerber (RKG).** RKG is discussed in notes to the next topic, Stayman.

Stayman

The Stayman 2 ♣ response *promises holding one or both major suits*, and asks opener to bid a major suit (2 ♥ with both) or 2 ♦ with any other hand. When a 4-4 major fit is possible, always use Stayman (or 5-card-major Stayman, described later), not a transfer.

Responder May Be Weak

Use 2 ♣ Stayman with any of these types of weak hands:

- A. *Garbage Stayman*: four or five diamonds, and four cards in each major; or 4-3 majors and 5 diamonds. Pass any response by opener. Hand [1] is an example of this from Wikipedia:

1. ♠ 5 4 3 2 ♥ 5 4 3 2 ♦ 6 5 4 3 2 ♣ -

- B. *Crawling Stayman*: at least four cards in each major suit. Pass a major-suit response from opener. Over a 2 ♦ response, bid 2 ♥. Opener corrects to 2 ♠ with exactly three spades and either two hearts or three clubs (see the next case). However, disaster results on hands [2 & 3], if opener has 2-2 majors.

1. ♠ 5 4 3 2 ♥ 5 4 3 2 ♦ 3 2 ♣ 4 3 2

2. ♠ Q 9 3 2 ♥ J 10 3 2 ♦ K 2 ♣ 10 9 2

With a weak 5-4 majors, usually transfer into the long suit; but use crawling Stayman when only the 4-carder has honors.

- C. *Club crawl*: Three spades, four hearts, and five *decent* clubs, a variation of crawling Stayman. If opener bids a major suit, we pass. If opener converts our crawling 2 ♥ bid to 2 ♠, we push on to 3 ♣ – opener must pass. The minor is always clubs, since we would have passed 2 ♦ with length. A worst case:

4. ♠ 5 4 3 ♥ 5 4 3 2 ♦ 2 ♣ Q 10 4 3 2

Responder Is Often Invitational

Whatever opener rebids, responder has these invitational bids:

- D. 3 M: with 4-card support, responder raises opener's major suit. Raise 2 ♠ to 3 ♠ with hand [5]:

5. ♠ A 8 4 3 ♥ K 5 4 ♦ 9 2 ♣ Q 9 6 5

- E. 2 NT: with the same hand, if opener rebids 2 ♦ or 2 ♥, we bid 2 NT. We have promised a major suit, so over 2 ♥, we must have spades. *Responder never bids 2 ♠ with only four!*

Invitational with four spades and five hearts poses a problem:

6. ♠ Q J 3 2 ♥ K 9 4 3 2 ♦ K 2 ♣ 10 2

If opener rebids 2 ♦, responder has to bid 2 NT, suppressing the fifth heart, because 2 ♥ would be weak (crawling). The hand is not strong enough to show hearts at the three level. Stayman is right with hand [6]; but give up on the bad spades of hand [7] – transfer to hearts and rebid 2 NT:

7. ♠ 9 8 3 2 ♥ K J 4 3 2 ♦ K 2 ♣ Q 2

- F. 2 ♠: promises 5+ spades, with or without four hearts. Opener passes to decline. With support, opener bids 3 ♠ (choice of games) or 4 ♠ to accept. Without a spade fit, opener accepts with 2 NT; responder bids 3 NT except with a 5-card side suit or a void.

With this modern, expert method, we should never play 2 NT or 3 ♠; also, when opener accepts with 2 NT, we get to explore for a side fit. These advantages outweigh the defect of responder declaring spades. *Try to remember not to use a transfer to invite with a hand that can be bid this way!*

Responder May Have a Game-Forcing Hand

Holding zero or one major suit with game values, 5-card-major Stayman (3 ♣) should be used instead of 2 ♣. However, responder should use regular Stayman when holding 4-4, 5-4, or 6-4 in the majors, or a 4-card major with a 5-card or longer minor suit to explore. The tools for bidding a slam are often better after 2 ♣ than after 3 ♣. After opener's rebid over 2 ♣:

- G. 3 m: responder's minor suit is forcing with 5+ cards, an unbid major, and usually a chance of slam. Bid Stayman and then 3 ♣ over opener's 2 ♦ or 2 ♥ with minimum hand [8]:

8. ♠ K 9 6 4 ♥ K Q 3 ♦ 2 ♣ A Q 9 5 4

H. 3 NT+: responder's notrump bid at an appropriate level says responder holds the unbid major. Jump to 4 NT with:

9. ♠ K 9 6 4 ♥ K Q 3 ♦ Q 2 ♣ A Q 9 4

Holding 4-4 majors, opener can place the contract in spades.

I. 4 M: with 4-card support, responder jumps to game in the major, to play there.

J. *Smolen* (3 oM over 2 ♦): when opener denies a major suit with 2 ♦, and responder has 5-4 in the majors, responder jumps to three of the 4-card major. Over this bid, opener selects 3 NT, 4 M, or bids their cheapest control with good values for a slam in a 5-3 major-suit fit.

10. ♠ A 9 6 4 ♥ K Q 9 6 3 ♦ K 2 ♣ A 4

Bid 3 ♠ to show this shape over opener's 2 ♦. If opener bids:

3 NT – Raise to 4 NT, inviting 6 NT.

4 ♥ – Pass should be best.

Other – Ask for keycards: opener is slam-worthy.

K. *Delayed Texas transfer* (4 ♦ or 4 ♥): when opener denies a major suit with 2 ♦, with 6-4 in the majors, responder transfers at the four-level to the 6-card suit (see page 178).

Reverse Baze consists of these three slam-oriented bids: ♦⁵

L. *Undisclosed splinter* (3 oM over 2 M): responder's three of the other major promises 4-card support for opener's major, a singleton or void somewhere, and slam interest. Opener bids the next step, and responder tells the shortness, LMH. ♦⁶

11. Example:

1 NT	2 ♣	
2 ♠	3 ♥	[some splinter for ♠]
3 ♠ [where? (LMH)]	3 NT	= clubs (low)
	4 ♣	= diamonds (middle)
	4 ♦	= hearts (high)

M. 4 ♣ over 2 ♥ or 2 ♠ is a balanced slam try in opener's major.

N. 4 ♦ over 2 ♥ or 2 ♠ asks for keycards in opener's major suit. (5 ♦ is the king ask; 5 ♣ should be the queen ask; play 4 NT.)

O2	R2	O3	R3	2 ♣ Stayman over 1 NT
Stayman, any strength, promises a 4-card major.				
2 ♦	No 4-card or longer major suit.			
	Pass	(garbage) Weak, 3-suited, with short clubs.		
	2 ♥	(crawling) Weak, both majors or 3=4=1=5.		
	2 ♠	All invitations with 5+ spades.		
	2 NT	Natural invitation.		
	3 ♣	5+ clubs, forcing to game, usually slamming.		
	3 ♦	5+ diamonds, forcing to game, usually slamming.		
	3 ♥	(Smolen) 4 hearts and 5 spades.		
	3 ♠	(Smolen) 4 spades and 5 hearts.		
	3 NT	To play.		
	4 ♦	(delayed Texas) 4 spades and six hearts.		
	4 ♥	(delayed Texas) 4 hearts and six spades.		
	4 NT	Natural, invitational.		
	5 NT	Natural, forcing, grand slam invitation.		
2 ♥	4 or 5 hearts.			
	Pass	To play (garbage or crawling).		
	2 ♠	All invitations with 5 (or 5+) spades.		
	2 NT	Natural invitation.		
	3 ♣	5+ ♣ & 4 ♠, forcing to game, usually slamming.		
	3 ♦	5+ ♦ & 4 ♠, forcing to game, usually slamming.		
	3 ♥	4 hearts, invitational.		
	3 ♠	4 hearts and a singleton or void, slam try.		
		3 NT	Where is it?	
			LMH: 4 ♣ = ♣, 4 ♦ = ♦, 4 ♥ = ♠.	
	3 NT	To play.		
	4 ♣	Artificial slam try without shortness.		
		4 ♦	(last train) Interested, but cannot RKB.	
		4 ♥	Refuses slam try.	
	4 ♦	RKB hearts.		
	4 ♥	To play.		
	4 NT	Natural slam invitation (4 spades).		
2 ♠	4 or 5 spades.			
	Pass	To play (garbage or crawling).		
	2 NT	Natural invitation.		

O2	R2	O3	R3	2 ♣ Stayman over 1 NT
	3 ♣	5+ ♣ & 4 ♥, forcing to game, usually slamming.		
	3 ♦	5+ ♦ & 4 ♥ s, forcing to game, usually slamming.		
	3 ♥	4 spades and a singleton or void, slam try.		
	3 ♠	Where is it?		
		LMH: 3 NT = ♣, 4 ♣ = ♦, 4 ♦ = ♥.		
	3 ♠	4 spades, invitational.		
	3 NT	To play.		
	4 ♣	Artificial slam try without shortness.		
	4 ♦	Diamond control.		
	4 ♥	(last train) Interested, but cannot RKB.		
	4 ♠	Refuses slam try.		
	4 ♦	RKB spades.		
	4 ♠	To play.		
	4 NT	Natural slam invitation (4 hearts).		

Key Features

- Use Stayman (or 5-card major Stayman, coming up), never a transfer, when a 4-4 major fit is possible.
- Regular Stayman includes garbage and crawling features.
- Stayman followed by 2 ♠ is *the* invitation with 5+ spades.
- Stayman followed by a minor is natural and forcing. Without some chance of slam, responder should ignore a small singleton and stick it in 3 NT instead of bidding a minor.
- Smolen, delayed Texas, and reverse Baze.

Backstory

Baze was erroneously attributed to Grant Baze, who did like and play it. In *Aces Scientific* (pp. 14, 119-121), Bobby Goldman described original Baze without the name, with 4 ♣ being a Roman-like Gerber and 4 ♦ as the balanced raise. Switching those bids, reverse Baze preserves a last train bid over 4 ♣, even with hearts trump.

Goldman also described Smolen, again without the name.

♦ Alternative Methods

⁵⁻¹⁸⁴ **Before Baze**, three of the other major was the only way to set trump, to explore for slam in opener's major. Indeed, due to the reduced space over a 2 NT opening, we only have the other major to set trump below game.

Roman keycard Gerber (RKG). Maritha Pottenger wrote the only article I could find about RKG. She recommends it to all her students, after a major suit response to Stayman: a jump to 4 NT is still quantitative, so 4 ♣ asks for keycards in responder's major suit. Eddie Kantar also recommended this, calling it RKB (Blackwood). This is part of original Baze and reasonable to play, although not quite the cat's meow.

RKG can also be played after a Jacoby transfer, but it is not needed when playing Texas. Furthermore, it conflicts with the expert auto-splinter.

Baze Extension. A reader interested in extending Baze to Jacoby transfers might turn to my article of this name as a starting point – it's not a good plan.

⁶⁻¹⁸⁴ **Void with spades trump**. An adjunct to the Baze shortness bid that *we do not play*, attributed to Mike Cappelletti, allows distinguishing a void when spades are trump: over 3 ♥, opener asks for shortness with 3 ♠; with a singleton, responder skips 3 NT and starts LMH at 4 ♣; responder's 3 NT shows a void (4 ♣ asks where, LMH). The Baze shortness bid does not come up often, so it seems best to keep it simple.

Both Minors

Game-forcing responses to 1 NT with both minor suits include 3 \diamond , 4 \spadesuit , and two major-suit fragment or splinter bids.

○ Plan A – Major Suit Fragment Bids

3 \heartsuit three hearts, one spade, and 5-4 minors (either way).

3 \spadesuit three spades, one heart, and 5-4 minors (either way).

○ Plan B – Major Suit Splinter Bids

3 \heartsuit one heart, three spades, and 5-4 minors (either way).

3 \spadesuit one spade, three hearts, and 5-4 minors (either way).

With either plan, opener may raise the fragment, to play in a 4-3 fit. Opener bids 3 NT with the short suit well-stopped. Otherwise, opener picks a minor, which is *forcing* and sets trump. Crosswood is on: 4 \diamond asks for keycards over 4 \clubsuit , and 4 \heartsuit over 4 \diamond (we can no longer play in hearts or ask at 4 \clubsuit).

The singleton bid is more likely to draw a lead-directing double and possible sacrifice, but could right-side the contract if we play in the 4-3 major-suit fit. It seems the more popular. The important thing is to agree and remember one method.

5-5 Minors, Forcing

Responder's jump to 3 \diamond shows at least five cards in each minor and is forcing to 3 NT or five of a minor. Opener rebids:

3 \heartsuit Hearts double-stopped, but need help in spades.

3 \spadesuit Spades double-stopped, but need help in hearts.

3 NT Both majors double-stopped.

4 m This minor is trump; next step asks for keycards.

Balanced with both Minors, Slamming

A 4 \spadesuit . response shows a hand with both minors, no shortness, and slam interest. Opener can bid 4 NT, 5 of a minor, or 6 of a minor.

Since 4 ♠ is forcing, it could be employed when interested in a grand slam. Responder may be 4-4 or 5-4 in the minors.

Be sure to confirm this plan with partner before trying it.

Backstory

Before expert standard settled on showing 3–1 majors, a jump to three of a major often showed 5–5 majors, invitational or forcing. Our methods handle those hands, and better: we can play an invitation in 2 ♠, and we can set trumps for slam at the three level.

In contrast, we have no other good way to bid a forcing hand with 5–5 minors, or (3–1)=(5–4) distribution.

In a 2023 club game, playing against GLM Steve Gladyszak, I pulled this hand and partner opened 1 NT, 15–17:

♠ A K ♥ A 8 ♦ K 8 6 3 2 ♣ J 10 6 4

After the play, Steve said there was a bid for this hand: 4 ♠. We had never heard of it before.

Size/Clubs, Diamonds, 5-Card-Major Stayman

The 2 ♠ response denies a 4-card major. It is used when responder has either a balanced invitation, or six or more clubs: weak, invitational, or (if we might not play 3 NT) strong.

The 2 NT response denies a 4-card major. It is used when responder has six or more diamonds: weak, invitational, or (if we might not play 3 NT) strong.

The 3 ♣ response is forcing to game. It shows a balanced hand with zero or one 4-card major. Our 5-card-major Stayman discovers major-suit fits, but opener never tells 4-card major-suit holdings to the opponents. Let's start here.

5-Card-Major Stayman (3 ♣)

The response of 3 ♣ \diamond^9 is forcing to game with a balanced hand and:

- one 4-card major suit; or
- no 4-card major (but one or two 3-card majors).

O2	R2	1 NT - 3 ♣: 5-Card-Major Stayman	
3 \diamond	No 5-card major.		
	3 \heartsuit	Four <i>spades</i> .	Opener: 3 NT, 4 M = play. Other = control-bid for slam in M.
	3 ♠	Four <i>hearts</i> .	
	3 NT	Play here.	
3 \heartsuit	Five hearts.		Responder: 3 NT, 4 M = play. 4 NT = quantitative (misfit). Other = control-bid for slam in M.
3 ♠	Five spades.		
No other responses are defined.			

Unless we find a fit in opener's 5-card major, we have better tools to explore for slam after a 2 ♣ Stayman response.

It's nice when this method finds a 5-3 major-suit fit. More importantly, opener's major-suit holdings are concealed, when opener does not have a 5-card major.

This works because responder should never have both majors: regular Stayman is sufficient when responder does have both majors, as we don't much care whether opener's major is four or five cards.

Transfer to Diamonds (2 NT)

Responder's 2 NT denies a 4-card major suit. It promises six or more diamonds with a weak, invitational, or (if we might not play 3 NT) game-forcing hand. If responder has a good hand with a short suit, and opener has no stopper there, slam will be in the picture.

O2	R2	O3	1 NT - 2 NT [♦, any strength]	
3 ♣	Opener would not accept 3 NT.			Common Continuations
3 ♦	Opener would accept 3 NT.			
	Pass	[3 ♣] Weak 5-5 minors (a kludge). [3 ♦] Weak, to play.		
	3 ♦	[over 3 ♣] Weak, to play.		
	3 NT	To play.		
	3 M	Singleton or void in bid major.		
		3 NT	Shortness double stopped.	
		4 ♣	Great fit - RKB ♦ (crosswood).	
		4 ♦	Bad fit - suggests playing here.	
		oM	5- or chunky 4-card suit.	
		5 ♦	Expert game try.*	
	4 ♣	RKB diamonds (crosswood).		

* Bid game and try to make it!

○ **Post-accept:** 3 ♦ accepts 3 NT, the plan above, with its kludge.

○ **Pre-accept:** 3 ♣ accepts 3 NT (3 ♦ refuses), no kludge. (With weak 5-5 minors, hope to bid 3 ♣ after passing.) ♦¹⁰

Size Ask (2 ♠) - Clubs or Balanced Invitation

Responder's 2 ♠ size or range ask denies holding a 4-card major suit. Except when balanced, it promises a 6-card or longer club suit, and any strength. These are the possible hand types:

- A balanced game invitation - we play 2 NT or 3 NT.
- A weak hand with clubs - we play 3 ♣.
- An invitational hand with clubs - we play 3 ♣ or 3 NT.
- A game-forcing hand with clubs - we play 3 NT or aim at 6 ♣.

Opener replies to show strength: 2 NT shows a minimum, and 3 ♣ shows a maximum:

O2	R2	O3	1 NT - 2 ♠ [Size Ask]	
2 NT	Opener has a minimum hand.			Common Continuations
3 ♣	Opener has a maximum hand.			
Pass	[2 NT]	Balanced invitation. [3 ♣] Clubs, weak.		
3 ♣	[over 2 NT] Clubs, weak or inv.			
3 NT	To play, invitational (balanced or clubs).			
3 suit	Clubs, singleton in bid suit.			
	3 NT	Shortness double stopped.		
	4 ♣	Bad fit - suggests playing here.		
	4 ♦	Great fit - RKB ♣ (crosswood).		
	oM	5- or chunky 4-card suit.		
	5 ♣	Hope I can make it.		
4 ♦	RKB clubs (crosswood).			

No longer must responder bid Stayman and expose opener's major-suit holdings, just to invite game in notrump (as when we played 2 ♠ as a pure transfer to clubs).

Key Features

- 2 ♠ is a size ask (balanced or clubs).
- 2 NT for diamonds. Decision: pre-accept or post-accept.
- 3 ♣ is 5-card-major Stayman.

Backstory

Gavin Wolpert wrote about the 2 ♠ size ask. We play 3 ♣ over 1 NT as 5-card-major Stayman, as recommended by Justin Lall. He called it puppet Stayman for its similarity to its predecessor, now used mostly over 2 NT, even though the requirements and responses are different.

There is a slight cost to overlaying the size ask on the transfer to clubs; when 2 ♠ is always a transfer to clubs, opener can indicate a hand that would accept an invitation to 3 NT, *based on a fit for clubs*. With the size ask, it's just minimum or maximum, without reference to clubs. The benefits of the size ask greatly outweigh the value of this rare club nudge. Furthermore, responder's hand type is not disclosed to the opening leader, at a notrump contract.

◆ Alternative Methods

⁹⁻¹⁹⁰ **2 NT as 5-card-major Stayman.** Unfortunately, when 3 ♣ is 5CMS, the next opponent gains a nearly free swing at it, to request a club lead against a likely 3 NT contract; if it happens that opener has no club stopper, we could be in real trouble, and already at the three level. Switching to 2 NT solves this problem – see the Appendix.

If we have been playing 3 ♣ as our 5-card-major Stayman bid for a while, changing to 2 NT may be more disruptive than the problem it would fix. There is little urgency until opponents actually start doubling our 3 ♣. I had this double happen soon after I wrote the preceding: the opponent got their club lead at 3 NT; it blew up the suit and the defense. Your mileage may vary.

¹⁰⁻¹⁹¹ **Pre-accept.** The post-accept method above supports the inference for selecting trump with a weak 5–5 minors. This inference works even better with the common description “likes diamonds,” rather than the more generally useful “would accept 3 NT.”

Gary and I have decided to stick with the much older *pre-accept*, where 3 ♣ says opener would accept 3 NT, because that’s the way we have always played. There is a memory cost to any change, so we are going with what we know. With a weak 5–5 in the minors, we’ll pass 1 NT; Gary noted that, if we need to play in three of a minor, the opponents probably have lots of majors, and they will be in the bidding. We have agreed that bidding 3 ♣ out of the blue, after passing, shows this hand.

Opening Bid Doubled or Overcalled

1 NT Doubled: Systems On

With values to at least compete, responder may ignore an opponent's double and go on about their business, whether the double is for penalties or has some artificial meaning. In addition, we have:

Rdbl Responder's redouble says to "run up the line," to bid suits until a playable fit is found. Responder should have two or three places to play.

Pass If responder passes (alert!), and the double comes around, opener must redouble. Responder may leave this in, to play for penalties, or escape, with weakness, into any long suit.

A transfer implies it is OK for opener to compete. When the 1 NT bid is strong, this basic system is fine. [◆¹¹](#) What about this auction?

– 1 NT (Pass) Pass
 (Dble) Pass (Pass) ?

Having denied a 5-card major or game interest, this is simpler. If we have some values, we pass, and hope partner makes it. Otherwise, with weakness, we bid a 5-card minor or redouble to run up the line.

2 ♣ Overall: Systems On

When an opponent overcalls our 1 NT opening with 2 ♣, we again play systems on, using double as Stayman. This is the only "stolen bid" double that experts play.

2 ♣ Landy. If an opponent overcalls 2 ♣ to show both majors, our double shows at least an invitational hand and the ability to punish at least one major suit. Otherwise, systems are on. [◆¹²](#)

2 ♦ or Higher Overcall - Lebensohl

When our 1 NT opening is overcalled above 2 ♣, responder's bid of a suit at the two level (if available) is to play; a bid at the three level is forcing to game. Lebensohl replaces a natural 2 NT:

- Opener relays to 3 ♣, which may be passed, to play there.

- Over 3 ♣, responder's suit bid is now competitive (but invitational if the bid of two of that suit was available); 3 NT and a cue-bid (Stayman) promise a stopper in the bid suit.
- A direct 3 NT or cue-bid is the same, but denies a stopper – “slow action shows stopper (SASS),” or “fast denies.” ^{◆13}

Negative doubles. The cue-bid as Stayman is fine, if the auction is at the two level and responder has the strength to drive to game. Otherwise, we need the negative double. It's clearly essential at the three level; most experts play it at the two level as well.

Example: We are vulnerable, partner opens 1 NT, and RHO bids 2 ♡. What should we do, holding:

♠ K 7 5 2 ♡ 9 ♦ Q 9 5 3 2 ♣ K 8 4

No bids are pleasing, including lebensohl 2 NT. If the tool is in our bag, we make a negative (takeout) double. Excellent!

In competitive situations, takeout doubles usually have an edge. They improve our chances of getting to our own best contract – the primary goal – and sometimes partner can pass for penalties.

Backstory

Long ago, when distinguished TD David Metcalf was a serious bridge competitor, he passed on the system for when our 1 NT is doubled.

Ron Andersen's book is the primary resource on lebensohl. It includes the negative double at the three level, but penalty doubles at the two level. Negative doubles at the two level are a more recent expert style. Many free articles on lebensohl are available online. Earlier, Marty Bergen wrote about lebensohl in the *Bulletin* and collected the articles in his second volume. (Ken Lebensold disavowed the convention, so lower case “lebensohl” is correct. In German, lebensohl translates to sole of life.)

◆ Alternative Methods

My article, “They Mess with Our One Notrump,” describes advanced methods to cope with interference by the opponents over our 1 NT opening bid:

¹¹⁻¹⁹⁴ **TNT (Touching/Non-Touching) Runouts:** for weak notrump openings.

¹²⁻¹⁹⁴ **Their two of a minor for both majors.**

¹³⁻¹⁹⁵ **Transfer lebensohl:** the most likely of the bunch to be worth the effort.

Artificial Response Doubled

Stayman 2 ♣ Doubled

Opener's redouble is an offer to play for game right there. If we make exactly two clubs redoubled, our score will exceed making 3 NT undoubled, except 3 NT vulnerable making five or more. With more confidence in making notrump than clubs, responder bids notrump at the appropriate level. (Responder bids 2 ♦ or 2 ♥ with a garbage or crawling hand, or 2 ♠ with a spade invitation.)

With a stopper in clubs, opener responds normally.

Lacking a stopper, opener passes. When 2 ♣ doubled is passed around, responder bids:

R2	O3	R3	2 ♣, doubled, passed around to responder
Pass	With a weak 3=4=1=5 behind doubler, let's play here.		
2 ♦	Garbage Stayman: opener passes or bids a major.		
2 ♥	Crawling Stayman, but not 3=4=1=5.		
2 ♠	Natural invitation.		
Rdbl	Forward-going.	<input type="checkbox"/> So that responder declares, opener:	
	2 ♦	Transfer to 4-card hearts.	
		2 ♥	3-Card heart support, non-forcing.
		3+♥	4-Card heart support.
	2 ♥	Transfer to 4-card spades.	
		2 ♠	3-Card spade support, non-forcing.
		3+♠	4-Card spade support.
	2 ♠	No major suit: minimum.	
	2 NT	No major suit: maximum.	

5-Card-Major Stayman 3 ♣ Doubled

Opener's redouble of 3 ♣ is an offer to play, and a bid promises a club stopper. When opener passes, responder can declare 3 ♣, hoping for +470/670, or redouble to repeat the ask: opener answers the *wrong 5-card major*, hoping to protect a potential club value by responder declaring.

If opener rebids 3 ♦ in either case, responder bids the *right 4-card major*. A 7-card major-suit fit may be played, when appropriate.

Transfer Doubled

Texas transfer is doubled. Completing the transfer promises the ace or king of the doubled suit. Otherwise, opener passes; responder may bid the major to declare, or redouble to re-transfer.

Jacoby transfer is doubled. When our two-level transfer to a major suit is doubled, the primary need is to know if opener has three or more cards in support. When this is the case, we complete the transfer normally – this much is standard.

With only two cards in responder's major, the focus shifts to a stopper in the doubled suit. Here is our non-standard plan:

- With a stopper and only 2-card support, opener redoubles. Given the stopper, responder can then bid notrump at the appropriate level, sign off at two of the major, or bid on.
- Lacking a stopper, and with only 2-card support, opener passes. With no interest in game, responder signs off at two of the major. With interest in game, responder may redouble to re-transfer, or bid on.

2 ♠ size ask is doubled. With a spade stopper, opener rebids normally.

O2	R2	O3	2 ♠ (size ask or clubs) doubled
Bid	Normal rebid, with a spade stopper.		
Rdbl	No stopper, likely 4-4 minors.		
	3 m	To play.	
	Other	Good hand with clubs.	
Pass	No spade stopper, denies 4-4 minors.		
	Rdbl	At least 4-4 minors	
	2 NT	No longer invitational – hope we can make it!	
	3 ♣	To play, with <i>five</i> or more clubs (weak with six clubs or formerly invitational).	
	3 ♦	To play (invitational strength with five diamonds).	
	3 ♥	Three good hearts, intended as forcing.	
	3 ♠	Asks 3 NT with half a spade stopper (Q-x or J-x-x).	
	3 NT	To play.	
	4 ♣	Invites 5 ♣, should deny three good hearts.	
	4 ♦	Asks for keycards in clubs.	

If opener lacks a stopper, we may be in trouble. We mostly give up on game, unless responder has a good hand with clubs. Since responder has no major suit, we focus on minors.

Example – Opener’s Redouble

1. ♠ 8 6 ♥ A J 5 2 ♦ A 9 3 2 ♣ A Q 3

Responder has at least one 4-card minor suit. Despite not being 4-4, opener should redouble on hand [1], to play in responder’s suit.

Examples – Opener Passes

- a. ♠ J 7 5 ♥ K 6 4 ♦ K Q 10 4 ♣ 10 9 2

With nowhere else to go, responder bids 2 NT on hand [a]. Opener may have ♠ Q-x, or the opponents may have only five spade tricks.

- b. ♠ J 5 4 ♥ A 6 4 ♦ 10 ♣ A Q 10 9 4 2

Responder bids 3 ♠ on hand [b], asking for half a spade stopper. Otherwise, we play in clubs.

- c. ♠ 5 ♥ K 6 4 ♦ K 10 4 ♣ A Q J 9 4 2

Responder bids 4 ♦ to ask for keycards in clubs on hand [c], thrilled that opener has no spade stopper.

○ Override: 1NT-opener’s redouble always offers to play.

This plan is easier to remember, but not as powerful.

Key Features

After the double of responder’s artificial bid, opener’s bid is the best news. Redouble shows something useful. Pass denies either.

Opponent Doubles	Opener’s Bid	Opener’s Redouble
2 ♣ or 3 ♣ Stayman	Club stopper	Offer to play
Jacoby transfer	3+ card support	Doubled suit stopper
Texas transfer	Doubled suit A or K	–
2 ♠ size ask	Spade stopper	Both minors

Backstory

Gary and I worked out the systems for doubles of responder’s bids in 2019 and refined them in 2022. Ours system differs from others we have encountered, especially on the redouble of a Jacoby transfer or size ask.

5. Higher Openings

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Two Notrump Opening

Overview of Responses

3 ♣	Stayman, at least one 4-card major, or a 6-card minor.
3 ♦	Transfer to a heart suit of at least five cards.
3 ♥	Transfer to a spade suit of at least five cards.
3 ♠	Puppet to 3 NT for crosswood or both minors.
3 NT	To play.
4 ♣	Gerber: respond 0/4, 1, 2, 3 aces.
4 ♦	Transfer to a heart suit of at least six cards.
4 ♥	Transfer to a spade suit of at least six cards.
4 ♠	Slam try, both minors, and no shortness.
4 NT	Slam invitation (quantitative).
5 NT	Forcing grand slam invitation.

Over 2 NT, or a 2 NT rebid after opening 2 ♣, we lose a level of responses that we have over 1 NT. We cannot invite a game.

Transfers to Major Suits

Rule: A transfer to a major suit is used only when a 4-4 fit in the other major is not an issue.

Texas Transfers

Responder's jump to 4 ♦ is a Texas transfer to 4 ♥; likewise, 4 ♥ is a transfer to 4 ♠. Responder promises a suit of at least six cards and expectations of making game. Opener completes the transfer and usually plays there. However, responder – or opener – may drive to slam, but only by asking for keycards.

Jacoby Transfers

Responder's 3 ♦ is a transfer to 3 ♥; likewise, 3 ♥ is a Jacoby transfer to 3 ♠. Responder promises a suit of at least five cards, but possibly no points. Opener usually completes the transfer. Holding strong trumps and maximum values, opener *super-accepts*: either jumping to game or bidding a doubleton ace or king as a slam try.

Over the completed transfer, responder may pass or bid notrump at the appropriate level with exactly five cards in the major. With six or

more cards in the major, responder may raise to game (a mild slam try, because Texas was not used). *Responder has no bid to ask for aces or keycards immediately over a completed three-level transfer* – that comes only when a fit has been disclosed. Texas provides the keycard capability. Responder’s new suit after a transfer is natural and forcing. If a major, it will be five cards – Stayman was not used.

O2	R2	O3	3 ♠ (Hearts) Jacoby over 2 NT
3 ♡	2-, 3-, or occasionally 4-card heart support.		
	Pass	Weak hand, to play.	
	3 ♠	5-5 majors, slam interest – <i>see chart below.</i>	
	3 NT	Exactly five hearts, pass or correct to 4 ♡.	
	4 ♣, 4 ♢	Natural, slam interest.	
	4 ♡	6+ hearts, mild slam try (did not use Texas).	
	4 NT	Five hearts, slam invitation.	
	5 NT	Five hearts, forcing, invites grand slam.	
4 ♡	Strong heart support, good hand.		
Other	Strong heart support, maximum, A-x or K-x in bid suit.		
O2	R2	O3	3 ♡ (Spades) Jacoby over 2 NT
3 ♠	2-, 3- or occasionally 4-card spade support.		
	Pass	Weak hand, to play.	
	3 NT	Exactly five spades, pass or correct to 4 ♠.	
	4 ♣, 4 ♢	Natural, slam interest.	
	4 ♡	5-5 majors, game-only, pass or correct.	
	4 ♠	6+ spades, mild slam try (did not use Texas).	
	4 NT	Five spades, slam invitation.	
	5 NT	Five spades, forcing, invites grand slam.	
4 ♠	Strong spade support, good hand.		
Other	Strong spade support, maximum, A-x or K-x in bid suit.		

Responder Has 5-5 Majors

With 5-5 in the majors but no slam interest, responder transfers to spades and then bids 4 ♡. With slam interest, responder transfers to hearts and then bids 3 ♠, saving space for investigation. \diamond^2

O3	R3	5-5 majors, slam interest: 2 NT - 3 ♠; 3 ♥ - 3 ♠		
3 NT	Offer to play, non-forcing, possibly 2-2.			
4 ♣	Hearts trump, best hand, RKB ♥!		Common Step Continuations 3014 or 1430, as usual	
4 ♠	Spades trump, best hand, RKB ♠!			
	Step 1	♠ or 3 / ♠ or 4		
	Step 2	♠ or 4 / ♠ or 3		
	Step 3	2 without the queen of trump		
	Step 4	2 with the queen of trump		
4 ♥	Hearts are trump, not the best hand.			
4 ♠	Spades are trump, not the best hand.			

❑ Opener's best-hand trump selection asks for keycards!!!

○ Opener's best-hand trump selection simply forces to 5 M.

Stayman

The Stayman 3 ♣ response *promises holding a 4-card major suit or a minor suit of at least six cards*. Garbage works, but crawling would conflict with Smolen. Puppet Stayman and its variations are popular, but they remove features, add pit traps, or add complexity. ♠¹

Double-delayed Texas. Use Smolen with 5-4 or 6-4 majors. Over opener's 3 NT, *now* responder transfers to a 6-card major.

The other major is the only way for responder to show slam-interest in opener's major or to get to ask for keycards – there is no Baze. ♠^{1a}

Slam try in 6-card minor. Over any of opener's rebids, with a 6-card or longer minor, responder bids it, cancelling the promise of a 4-card major. Unfortunately, it is possible to miss a 4-4 fit in the major that opener has not bid, when holding a 6-card minor. This minor-suit slam try is rarely used, but it's the only way to get opener's opinion.

O2	R2	Standard Stayman over 2 NT
3 ♠	No 4-card major.	
	Pass	Short clubs (garbage).
	3 ♥, 3 ♠	Smolen: 5+ cards in the other major.
	3+ NT	Natural.
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	6+ cards, forcing slam try (likely no major).
3 ♥	Four hearts (possibly four spades).	
	3 ♠	Artificial slam try; hearts are trump.
	3+ NT	Natural, four spades but fewer hearts.
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	6+ cards, forcing slam try (likely no major).
3 ♠	Four spades, and not four hearts.	
	3+ NT	Natural, four hearts but fewer spades.
	4 ♣, 4 ♦	6+ cards, forcing slam try (likely no major).
	4 ♥	Artificial slam try; spades are trump.
No other bids are defined.		

Minors: 3 ♠ and 4 ♠ Responses

The 3 ♠ response is a puppet to 3 NT, \diamond^{2a} so responder can move toward a minor-suit slam. 4 ♠ is a balanced slam try with at least 4-4 minors.

R1	O2	R2	O3	Minor Suit Slams: 2 NT - 3 ♠; 3 NT
3 ♠	With both minors or RKB in one long minor.			
	3 NT	Required.		
		4 ♣	Long <i>diamonds</i> , asks for keycards.	
		4 ♦	Long <i>clubs</i> , asks for keycards.	
		4 ♥	At least 5-5 minors, short hearts.	
		4 ♠	At least 5-5 minors, short spades.	
			4 NT	Best for notrump.
			5 m	Good hand for play in m.
			6 m	Great hand for play in m.
		4 NT	5-4 minors, 2-2 majors.	
4 ♠	Balanced slam try with at least 4-4 minors.			

Interference over 2 NT or a Response

If 2 NT, 3 ♣, or a transfer is doubled, we play the same as after our 1 NT opening; also, negative doubles at the three level – see page 194.

3 ♠ Doubled

- 3 NT Shows the ace or king of spades.
- Rdbl Shows ♠ Q-x or longer (useful opposite the king).
- Pass Otherwise.

Responder may pass 3 NT, bid 3 NT, or go on about their business.

Key Features

- Texas and Jacoby transfers apply.
- Stayman promises a 4-card major or a 6-card minor.
- The other major is an artificial slam try in opener's major.
- No delayed Texas after 3 ♣ Stayman – responder's 4 ♣ or 4 ♦ is a natural slam try. Use Smolen with 5-4 or 6-4 – and finally transfer over 3 NT with 6-4.
- With 5-5 majors and game-only values, bid 3 ♥ (spades), and next bid 4 ♥. Opener should pass or correct to 4 ♠.
- With 5-5 majors and slam interest, bid 3 ♦ (hearts), and next bid 3 ♠. Opener's 4 ♣ shows the best hand and hearts, and opener's 4 ♦ shows the best hand and spades – either asks for keycards!
- 3 ♠ is a puppet to 3 NT, for crosswood, at least 5-5 minors, or a mild slam try with 2=2=(5-4). 4 ♠ may be stronger, balanced with at least 4-4 minors, at least inviting a slam.
- When 2 NT, Stayman, or a transfer is doubled, we play the same as after a 1 NT opening. After the double of responder's bid, opener's bid is the best news; redouble is useful; pass is worst.
- When the 3 ♠ puppet to 3 NT is doubled, bidding 3 NT shows the ♠ A or ♠ K; redouble shows ♠ Q-x or longer.

Backstory

Billy Miller recommended the handling of 5-5 majors with slam interest in his column in the November 2015 Bulletin. I discovered it in a pile of my bridge stuff, and we adopted it in 2023. Just before publication, Gary proposed, and I accepted that opener's best hand bid should ask for keycards. "Opener would know right away whether two keycards were missing and thus avoid the risk of playing at the 5 level; and playing in 4 NT might win all the matchpoints."

The 3 ♠ response to 2 NT lets responder bid crosswood – so much better than Gerber – for either minor. The bids showing both minors can be useful. This 3 ♠ response first appeared in 2011, in my first article on RKB.

♦ Alternative Methods

¹⁻²⁰³ **Puppet Stayman.** Many partnerships prefer that 3 ♣ ask for a 5-card major over 2 NT, and sometimes it works well for them. My article, “Responses to a 2 NT Opening,” compares – in detail – various systems over our 2 NT opening, differentiated by the form of Stayman used:

1. Standard Stayman;
2. Puppet Stayman, including its muppet variant;
3. 5-card-major Stayman; or
4. Semi-puppet Stayman.

The standard-Stayman system presented above is the only one the author plays. When opener is 5-3-3-2, it’s kind of a crap shoot, whether a 5-3 fit in opener’s major will play better in 3 NT or 4 M. If we can live without finding that fit, then this method is great. Marshall Miles’ flavor of 5-card-major Stayman could be worth consideration, but as with puppet and muppet, it contains a pit trap.

GLM Stephen Gladyszak remarked at the table that strong players do not play puppet Stayman. I decided to ask a couple of other strong players, to confirm. I asked the question, “Do you prefer to play puppet Stayman over a 2NT opening?” GLM Mark ‘Shark’ Aquino replied:

A lot of folks do prefer this, but I think having Smolen available after { 2N – 3♣; 3♦ } is much more valuable.

I sent back “Thanks – I agree.”

Semi-puppet Stayman. A while later, GLM Adam Grossack sent

I like to play semi-puppet. Responder must have a 4-card major to bid Stayman.

The 2014 WBF convention card for Adam with brother Zach is the only mention online – presumably, they invented it.

Semi-puppet Stayman *promises holding a 4-card major.* Given that restriction, It contains no pit-traps, includes Smolen, and finds a 5–3 fit in opener’s major. It’s described in my article, “Responses to a 2 NT Opening.”

^{1a-203} **Roman keycard Gerber (RKG)** could be played after Stayman over 2 NT, but it would wipe out Stayman with a long minor suit. After a transfer, it

would wipe out responder's natural 4 ♣ to show a 2-suiter. There's more about RKG on page 187.

²⁻²⁰² **Responder's flip.** After a transfer to hearts, responder's 3 ♠ and 3 NT rebids could be inverted, so that opener declares spades. This seems too rare to be worth the risk.

^{2a-204} **Minor Suits.**

Minor-suit Stayman is more of a place holder than a worthy method for 3 ♠.

3 ♠ puppet to 3 NT, RKB continuations. Our plan allows responder to set a minor suit as trump and ask for keycards at the same time. This is an important capability. Unless responder is looking at the king and queen of trump, it is much better than Gerber. We use Stayman to invite a minor suit contract, whether or not we have a major. If we require a major to bid Stayman, we might just as well have responder's 4 ♣ or 4 ♦ after Stayman set the other minor as trump and ask for keycards – no invitations possible.

3 ♠ puppet to 3 NT, natural continuations. Many partnerships use a natural continuation in a long minor. With this plan, Stayman promises a 4-card major – there is no longer a reason to not have one.

Replacing Gerber. The best plan could be to stop using Gerber and repurpose the immediate 4 ♣ response. My article, "Responses to a 2 NT Opening," contains two untested plans:

1. *Long Minor Slam Try.* This plug-and-play plan should work for many existing systems. 4 ♣ is a slam try in an unspecified minor. Opener bids 4 ♦ to accept clubs (and possibly diamonds), 4 ♥ to accept diamonds (but not clubs), and 4 NT to play. These bids could be pushed around so that opener declares diamonds.
2. *4 ♣ with diamonds; 3 ♠ with clubs or both minors.* This plan won't work unless responder's direct 3 NT is to play. Over 4 ♣, opener's 4 ♦ is waiting; anything else accepts slam and is a keycard response for diamonds. Over 3 ♠, opener's 3 NT is waiting, with diamonds better than clubs; 4 ♣ says clubs are trump; anything else accepts slam and is a keycard response for clubs.

See the article for the full details of these plans.

Strong Two Club Opening

Introduction

The chance of picking up a hand with 22 or more HCP is 0.42% (1 in 238). For a partnership, that comes out to once in five sessions. When the partnership is focused on events with IMP scoring, the 2 ♣ system is important, due to the outsize value of slams. With interest in all events, and matchpoints in particular, we just need a decent system that is easy to remember.

Suit Responses

A standard suit response to 2 ♣ promises at least five cards (six in a minor), headed by two of the top three honors. The hand must also contain at least 8 HCP, or perhaps A-K-10-x-x in a major. For pairs not playing standard, a suit-positive response ranges from much lighter to not permitted at all. ♠³

Game-Force Values

Over a standard 2 ♣ opening, an ace, king, or (for most pairs) two queens is sufficient to force to game. This should give a balanced opening a play for 3 NT; we assume the same for an unbalanced opening, although a lone king could be orphaned opposite shortness.

Interference

○ Plan 1 – 2 ♣ responder's X/XX = bad hand (standard).

Pass Pass is positive, lacking a suit response – opener's double is takeout. ♠⁴

X/XX Double or redouble is negative (bad hand).

Bid A suit is positive, but requirements are relaxed.

□ Plan 2 – 2 ♣ responder's X/XX positive.

In 2022 we gained a trap pass by switching to playing:

Pass Pass is negative or trapping – opener's double is takeout.

X/XX Double or redouble is positive, lacking a suit response.

Bid A suit is positive, but requirements are relaxed.

When to Open 2 ♣

A strong 2 ♣ opening bid is appropriate for these types of hands:

- A strong balanced hand:
 - Invitational, about 23 HCP, or
 - Forcing to game.
- A strong 1-suited hand:
 - Invitational with a major suit (about 9 tricks). Playing the Parrish relay, invitational with a minor also works.
 - Forcing to game with any suit.
 - Good suit, or
 - Self-sufficient suit.
 - Playing birthright, a running suit with all side suits stopped. (Our optional 3 NT opening can handle this.)
- A rare 2-suited, game-forcing hand, longer than 5-4.

A 2 ♣ opening bid should never be 3-suited. Opener's new suit is forcing, so that opener can get responder to choose one of two suits for game. Opener's second suit will be at the three level or higher. No way can opener afford to bid three suits!

As usual, the sensible interpretation of "forcing to game" is 3 NT or higher, but opener's new suit is always forcing.

When deciding whether or not to open 2 ♣ on an unbalanced hand, especially a two-suiter, consider what might happen if we open one of a suit instead:

- A. If the one bid is passed out, are we likely to miss a game?
- B. How likely is it, that everybody will pass our one bid?
- C. If we open 2 ♣, does the hand have the strength to penalize interfering opponents?

For example, given modest support, we basically have game in hand with hand [1]:

1. ♠ A K 10 9 6 2 ♥ A K 10 9 6 2 ♦ – ♣ 2

If a 1 ♠ opening is passed out, we may well miss a game. However, there is almost no chance of that: 26 HCP and lots of minor-suit cards are out there. If we open 2 ♣, the opponents may be at the five level

before we name a suit. It will be difficult to bid our hand or to penalize the opponents.

2. ♠ A K 10 9 6 2 ♥ A K 2 ♦ A K 6 ♣ 2

Hand [2] has 4 losers, but 21 HCP and six quick tricks, four of them in 3-card suits. Open 2 ♣, and invite in spades.

A strong 1½-suiter. These hands can present problems when opened 2 ♣. Sometimes we have to treat them as 1-suiters, but not with primary spades and secondary hearts. Let's first consider a typical auction for hand [3], which is not quite strong enough to open 2 ♣ and then bid both suits:

3.

♠ A K 10 9 6 2
♥ A Q 6 2
♦ A K
♣ 2

♠ 4 3
♥ J 7 4
♦ 9 7 6 5
♣ K Q 7 3

1 ♠
3 ♥ [natural GF]
4 ♠ [only 4 hearts]

1 NT [forcing]
3 ♠ [catch-all]
Pass

An immediate raise of opener's second suit (hearts) would promise four cards, so 3 ♠ is a catch-all. If unavoidable, it could be a singleton. It helps that we know where we are going with our jump shift: an 8-card heart fit, or 4 ♠.

4.

♠ A K 10 9 6 2
♥ A K 6 2
♦ A K
♣ 2

♠ 4 3
♥ J 7 4
♦ 9 7 6 5
♣ Q 7 4 3

2 ♣
2 ♠ [5+ spades]
3 ♥ [natural GF]
4 ♠ [only 4 hearts]

2 ♦ [waiting]
3 ♣ [second negative]
3 ♠ [catch-all]
Pass

4 ♠ is a good prospect on hand [4] opposite 2-2 majors, so this hand should be opened 2 ♣. From there, the auction should be effectively the same as for hand [3].

Major suits are easy after opening 2 ♣, compared with minor suits; and diamonds are hardest. Plan how the bidding is likely to go. When still uncertain whether to open at the one level or 2 ♣, the one level is likely to be the better choice.

With both minors, 3-loser hand [5] is not game in hand; Gary correctly opened 1 ♦ in an online game:

5. ♠ A K ♥ 2 ♦ A K 6 4 3 ♣ K Q J 10 6

LHO bid 1 ♥ and then 3 ♥. With good judgement by both partners, they bid an excellent club slam, outscoring all the 2 ♣ openers, who got preempted. Avoid opening 2 ♣ with a two suiter.

2 ♥ Bust & Parrish vs. 2 ♦ Waiting & Birthright

2 ♥ Bust with the Parrish relay is our recommended system over the 2 ♣ opening. The 2 ♦ response is an artificial positive, showing at least an ace, a king, or two queens – but not suitable for a standard response in a suit. The 2 ♥ response is an artificial negative, denying the values for 2 ♦. 2 NT is a suit-positive in hearts.

Parrish relay. Over 2 ♥ negative, 2 ♠ is an artificial puppet by opener, requiring responder to bid 2 NT (the relay). Opener then bids a long suit, which is non-forcing. This allows opening 2 ♣ without game in hand, based on *any* long suit. This is a significant benefit for clubs, diamonds, and hearts, at the cost of not being able to bid a natural 2 ♠ over 2 ♥ negative. ⁵ Over any non-forcing suit bid by opener, responder can look down, see the queen of trump or a ruffing value, and raise!

Parrish is unlikely to wrong-side 3 NT. Opener has shown an unbalanced hand. The 2 ♥ responder is not likely to fix opener's problem with notrump, so the final contract should be in a suit. On Bridge Winners, Adam Parrish wrote regarding his convention:

There are a lot of benefits from having 2 ♦ be GF. And from not having to use the cheaper minor as artificial. (I feel like I always have a decent hand with clubs when I play that method.)

I have a certain fondness for the Parrish Convention. It's simple and effective and easy to learn if you already know Lebensohl. It makes the 2 ♥ bust, which I prefer to a waiting 2 ♦, much more

playable. Its major downside is that it's harder to show two-suiters with spades after 2 ♣ - 2 ♥, but those hands are quite rare.

I have had very bad luck passing 2 ♥.

□ Plan A - 2 ♥ Bust & Parrish Relay

R1	O2	R2	O3	2 ♥ Bust & Parrish Relay	
2 ♦	Positive (GF, at least A, K or QQ), lacking a good suit.				
	2 ♥, 2 ♠	Natural.			
	2 NT	Natural, balanced, unlimited.			
	3 ♣, 3 ♦	Natural.			
	3 ♥, 3 ♠	Natural, at most one loser opposite a void, sets trump, requires control-bidding.			
	3 NT	A running suit with all side suits stopped; any action by responder is a slam try.			
2 ♥	Negative (No ace or king, and at most one queen).				
	2 ♠	Parrish, puppet to 2 NT.			
		2 NT	Required relay.		
			3 Suit	Natural & non-forcing.	
			3 NT	6+ major & 4 major, forcing.*	
				4 ♣ = no; 4 ♦ / 4 ♥ = four ♥ / ♠.	
			4 m	6+ major & 4 minor, forcing.*	
				Step 1	No fit for minor.
				Step 2	4-card fit for minor.
				4 M	Choice of games.
	2 NT	Balanced, about 22-24 HCP, non-forcing.			
	3 Suit	Natural and forcing. (Responder 3 NT neutral.)			
	3 NT	Balanced, 25+ HCP. ○ Stayman and transfers. ○ Could be based on a long, strong suit.			
2 ♠ 2 NT 3 ♣ 3 ♦	Suit-positive response (2 NT = hearts).				

* Added by Pete: unless a 4-4 fit is found, we *always* play the long major. Responder always declares hearts in this optional section, having bid 2 ♥.

An advanced partnership that plays 2 ♥ bust should be playing Parrish - if not, add it, or switch to Plan B.

○ Plan B – 2 ♦ Waiting & Birthright (Kokish Relay)

A partnership that plays 2 ♦ waiting should be playing *birthright*, commonly known as Kokish relay – if not, either add it, or switch to Plan A. Few pairs should look further than the optional “Pete’s breaks” in the chart below, but I do in my article. [♦⁶](#)

- ❑ Over 2 ♦, opener’s jump in a major is strong (as charted). After birthright 2 ♥, 3 ♥ is non-forcing.
- Over 2 ♦, opener’s jump in a major is non-forcing. After birthright 2 ♥, 3 ♥ is forcing.

R1	O2	R2	O3	Birthright (Kokish Relay)	
2 ♦	Waiting: negative, or positive lacking a good suit.				
	2 ♥	Birthright: either a balanced game force, or unbalanced with hearts.			
		2 ♠	The relay, allowing opener to continue.		
			2 NT	Game-forcing, balanced.	
			3 ♥	Natural and invitational.	
			Other	Natural & forcing, primary hearts.	
		2 NT	Any 6+ ♠, any strength.		
			3 ♠	GF, spades are trump.	
			Other	Hearts (including 3 NT).	
		3 ♣	6+ ♣, negative, no side queen.		
		3 ♦	6+ ♦, negative, no side queen.		
	2 ♠	Natural and forcing; new suits forcing.*			
	2 NT	Balanced, about 22-24 HCP, non-forcing.			
	3 ♣, 3 ♦	Natural and forcing; new suits forcing.*			
	3 ♥, 3 ♠	Natural, at most one loser opposite a void; sets trump and requires control-bidding.*			
	3 NT	A running suit with all side suits stopped; any action by responder is a slam try.			

* Responder’s second negative: cheaper minor or 3 NT (skip majors).

Backstory

Eric Kokish was a Canadian national champion bridge player, writer, and coach of international champion teams. His “Recapturing Your Birthright” appeared in *Melange de Bridge*. This author always knew it as Kokish relay, or just Kokish. I had the highest respect for him – I had two gracious responses to

letters back in the day – I plan to honor his memory with the name *birthright* for this convention, which he strongly preferred. Birthright is the name in BWS. Birthright is not mentioned in the *Encyclopedia*; the “Kokish Relay” article mentions Danny Kleinman’s bids similar to “Pete’s breaks.”

Bill Root described the popular “cheaper minor” second negative as it appears here. He noted that other methods are in use.

Max Hardy and others describe standard methods for interference over the 2 ♣ opening.

Adam Parrish is a North American champion player, teacher, writer, and Bridge Winners admin. Parrish published his convention in his column in the July 2020 *Bridge Bulletin*. It is a solid improvement to 2 ♥ bust.

For more depth on these issues, see my article “The Strong Two Club Opening.”

Polls

2012	2022	Polls on Bridge Winners
39%		2 ♦ GF, 2 ♥ bust
	25%	2 ♦ GF, 2 ♥ bust (opt: Parrish, Kokish, or other)
30%		2 ♦ waiting, rebid cheap minor with bust
	52%	2 ♦ waiting (options: Kokish or other)
13%	11%	Controls/steps (options: Kokish or other)
13%	12%	Other

Any system of responses to the 2 ♣ opening will have strengths, weaknesses, and differing complexity. Opinion has changed since Polly Siegel’s poll from 2012; and the “2 ♦ GF, 2 ♥ bust” system is no longer the most popular system on Bridge Winners. However, a follow-up poll shows that the Parrish relay is not yet in general use.

♦ Alternative Methods

3-20⁸ General Two Club Notes

Transfer Positives. Suit-positive responses can be swapped around, in hopes of having opener declare or to save space on some auctions.

Jump responses. Gary and I play, at his request, that responder’s jump response in a major suit denies the strength for a positive response, showing a 6-card suit at the three level, and a 7-card suit at the four level. These clearly can be valuable, but they run the risk of blowing up opener’s auction.

BWS says, “A suit-bid response to two clubs from three hearts to four diamonds indicates a one-loser suit.” That seems like a narrow agreement

designed to keep responder out of opener's way – a sensible plan, in general. And a one-loser suit does happen.

Opener's jump rebid. An alternative method with 2 \diamond waiting is to play that opener's jump rebid in a major suit is non-forcing (invitational). This makes opener's non-jump bid in a major forcing to game (including birthright 2 \heartsuit). So long as we agree that opener's repeat of a major suit sets trump and starts cue-bidding, this style is largely equivalent to the standard methods in the chart. I do not recommend this style, but mention it for completeness.

⁴⁻²⁰⁸ **Responder's double/redouble.** A majority of commenters on Bridge Winners play that a double or redouble is negative (bad hand), even after a 4 \heartsuit overcall. Many commenters do not like this, but they propose multiple, conflicting plans.

⁵⁻²¹¹ **Parrish Notes**

Without Parrish. We did without Parrish for decades: any new suit by opener was forcing. Without Parrish, this system has but one way for opener to get to 3 \heartsuit over the 2 \heartsuit negative response: bid it. This forces additional considerations on both opener and responder, regarding the heart suit. If opener has primary hearts, and gets the 2 \heartsuit response, 3 \heartsuit is forcing: opener may have a game-forcing two-suiter, wanting to find the correct trump suit. So, passing the 2 \heartsuit response may be the only acceptable solution with an invitational opening. Therefore, responder might consider bidding 2 \diamond when holding only \heartsuit Q-x-x. Just play Parrish – all this goes away.

Balanced game force. Whether playing Parrish or not: a 2 \heartsuit negative response requires opener to jump to 3 NT with a game-forcing balanced hand. Birthright and other systems address this, a main defect of 2 \heartsuit bust.

⁶⁻²¹³ **Parrish and Birthright Together.**

Some pairs play both Parrish and birthright with 2 \heartsuit bust. The main advantage is a disadvantage: more sequences to learn. Ken Rexford wrote a whole book about such a system.

Birthright is at its best without 2 \heartsuit bust, because it assures opener can get to 2 NT, forcing, with systems on. When playing both, the 2 \heartsuit bust response preempts birthright. Either system alone is better for most partnerships.

Marshall Miles presents a strong system on pages 91-96 of *Modern Constructive Bidding*: 2 \heartsuit positive and 2 \diamond negative with birthright. A negative response denies two kings, an ace and 7+ HCP, or a king and 8+ HCP. A suit positive response requires a 5-carder headed by the ace or king. Miles allows longer suits to be weaker, but the honor can improve slam bidding.

Three Notrump, Four Notrump, Five of a Major

3 NT Opening

□ Plan 1 – Namyats

3 NT – preempt to four of a minor. Responder's choices:

- Pass Stoppers in all four suits.
- 4 ♣ Pass or correct.
- 4 ♦ Slam try, asking for shortness (4 NT = minor).

Four of a minor – strong preempt in a major. A 4 ♣ opening to shows a hand with long hearts and about 8 to 8½ tricks; 4 ♦ shows an equivalent hand with spades. The direct preempt to four of a major then shows a lesser hand.

Responder bids trumps to play, makes the intervening bid with slam interest, or asks for keycards.

○ Plan 2 – 3 NT to Make – Long Suit and Stoppers

This opening shows a long, running suit and stoppers all around. \diamond^7
These two 3 NT hands might otherwise be opened 2 ♣, when playing birthright:

1. ♠ A 8 ♥ A 5 2 ♦ A K Q J 3 2 ♣ A 3 [perfect: 9 tricks]
2. ♠ K 2 ♥ K 8 2 ♦ A Q ♣ A K Q 8 7 6 [Larry Cohen]

These weaker hands that need help from partner would also be opened 3 NT:

3. ♠ K 2 ♥ K 8 2 ♦ K 7 ♣ A K Q J 7 6
4. ♠ A ♥ Q 10 3 ♦ K 7 3 ♣ A K Q J 7 6

After the opening 3 NT bid, responder passes all bad hands, and we cannot play in responder's suit. Responder may only bid with prospects of slam in notrump or opener's suit. In such a case, the number of aces held by the partnership is paramount.

Intend to bid a slam. 4 ♣ is Gerber for aces (0/4, 1, 2, 3). Responder promises sufficient tricks for slam, if the opponents do not hold two aces. If we have all the aces, then responder tells partner by asking for the number of kings (0/4, 1, 2, 3) with 5 ♣.

Invite a slam. With an *invitational* hand, responder *tells* aces, as if opener had bid Gerber: 4 \diamond = 0, 4 \heartsuit = 1, etc.

Some combination of two aces or kings would be a minimum invitation. Any ace in opener's hand could be singleton, so a KQ combination is not sufficient without a potential side entry.

With fewer than 3 total aces, or fewer than 11 tricks, opener signs off in 4 NT. With 3 aces and 12 tricks, opener bids 6 NT. With 11 or 12 tricks, opener's bid of the long suit is a *forcing* invitation. Responder assumes 11 tricks and bids 5 NT to refuse, 6 NT with an extra honor trick, or 6 of the suit with a sure ruffing value; opener may raise.

a. Responder holds:

\spadesuit K 3 \heartsuit K Q J 3 \diamond 7 6 5 \clubsuit 10 9 5 4

Opener's only possible stopper in hearts is the ace. Assuming opener can get here with a heart or spade, this hand is worth three or four tricks. Bid 4 \clubsuit (Gerber). Opener [1], on the previous page, bids 4 \diamond (4 aces). We can count 13 tricks and bid 7 NT.

b. Responder holds:

\spadesuit K 9 7 3 2 \heartsuit K J 9 4 \diamond 8 6 5 \clubsuit 5

Responder tries 4 \diamond (0 aces).

Opener [1] bids 5 \diamond , counting 11 tricks opposite two kings. Responder bids 6 \diamond , with a ruffing value, where we play.

Opener [4] hopes to make 4 NT and bids it.

Strong 2 \clubsuit and birthright 3 NT. The same methods could be played on this auction:

2 \clubsuit – 2 \diamond [waiting]; 3 NT [long suit] – ?

Playing birthright, opener never needs to jump to 3 NT on a balanced hand, so it shows a long, strong suit with stoppers.

The opening 3 NT opening could be used to show a lesser hand, when playing birthright.

When playing 2 \heartsuit bust, this 3 NT opening provides a capability not otherwise available.

4 NT Opening

A 4 NT opening asks responder to bid an ace:

- 5 ♣ No aces.
- 5 ♦ Ace of diamonds.
- 5 ♥ Ace of hearts.
- 5 ♠ Ace of spades.
- 5 NT Two aces.
- 6 ♣ Ace of clubs.

Interference. If they overcall 4 NT, modified DoP1 applies:

- Dble No aces, or the ace of the bid suit.
- Pass The ace of a suit below the bid suit.
- Bid Normal response, as above.

The suit an opponent bids will likely be opener's void. Only show that ace at 6 ♣ (for which opener is ready).

Opener's new suit is to play.

Five of a Major (or Higher) Opening

The spectacular, natural opening bid at five of a major promises no losers outside trump, but two top trump losers. Holding one of the top trumps, responder raises to six; with two, responder raises to seven. Don't try notrump – there is probably a void (or two) involved.

An opening six-bid promises 12 tricks with one trump loser.

Backstory

Gary and I agreed to ditch gambling 3 NT in favor of the running suit with stoppers in 2022. I came up with the dual Gerbers, and he said two kings or better to invite. This should let us bid laydown slams.

Namyats is Stayman spelled backwards; his partner, Victor Mitchell, named this convention after him.

Max Hardy provided the only discussion I could find of Namyats 3NT, starting on page 158 of his *Advanced* book. When opener's 3 NT shows a broken 8-card minor suit, Hardy suggests, to facilitate responder's pass of 3 NT:

The suit must be headed by either the ace or king (but not both). With that agreement, when responder holds stoppers in both major suits and the ace or king in each of the minor suits (along with at least one small card in the suit), responder can pass knowing that the bidding side holds at least ten cards in the minor suit, including both the ace and king.

Pat or Steve Lapidès opened five of a major against me in 1971, at their home, when I was living in Baltimore. I've never seen it since. Max Hardy provides examples in his *Standard* book, page 173.

♦ Alternative Methods

⁷⁻²¹⁶ **Plan 3: Gambling 3 NT.** Many pairs play this way, with a long, running suit and denying any stopper on the side. With three suits stopped, responder passes. With a suit open, responder *should* bid 4 ♣; opener passes or corrects. Responder can ask for a singleton with 4 ♦.

The best defense against the gambling 3 NT is to lead an ace, inspect dummy, and attack. This plan is particularly effective if responder left it in with an unstopped suit or a poorly-placed, unprotected king or queen.

Defect: Gambling 3 NT usually wrong-sides a 3 NT contract.

The older style promises one side stopper, a true gamble for everybody.

Modified Namyats. This plan lets us show a good preempt to four of a major, without giving up a natural jump to four of a minor (one of my favorite bids). The meanings of Namyats 3 NT and four of a minor are switched. Richard Lee got the idea from Long Island pro Alan Tucker, back when the 3NT bid was not GCC-legal; Tucker's continuations are lost to posterity.

	Namyats	Modified Namyats
3 NT	Preemptive, with either minor.	Strong preempt to 4 ♥ or 4 ♠.
4 ♣	Strong preempt of 4 ♥.	Natural, preemptive.
4 ♦	Strong preempt of 4 ♠.	Natural, preemptive.

We would need methods over 3NT. Here is an untested plan:

- 4 ♣ Shows slam interest and asks opener to bid the suit *below* trump. Responder's bid of the trump suit is non-forcing. RKB/kickback and control-bids are available to both partners.
- 4 ♦ Asks opener to bid trumps, either with no slam interest, or planning RKB (wanting opener to declare).
- 4 ♥ Short hearts, pass with hearts, slam try in spades only (4 NT = RKB ♠).
- 4 ♠ Short spades, pass with spades, slam try in hearts only (4 NT = RKB ♥).

Preemptive Openings

The Rule of 2-3-4

Our three-level and higher preempts include all the opening suit bids from 3 ♣ to 5 ♦. We estimate the number of tricks in hand, and follow the *rule of 2-3-4* according to vulnerability:

Unfavorable	Down two (or one and a half) in hand.
Equal	Down three in hand.
Favorable	Down four (or four and a half) in hand.

This is important for partner to be able to judge what to do with a good hand, or a fitting bad hand. \diamond^8 At favorable vulnerability:

1. ♠ 9 7 3 ♥ 4 ♦ 8 6 5 ♣ K Q J 6 3 2 [5 tricks: 3 ♣]
2. ♠ 9 7 3 ♥ 4 ♦ 8 5 ♣ K Q J 9 6 3 2 [6 tricks: 4 ♣]

At unfavorable, pass both hands; at equal vulnerability, open 3 ♣ on hand [2] only. We count a four-card side suit as a trick, we want values in our long suit(s), and an ace (especially on the side) is a negative factor in deciding to preempt.

When the opponents bid over our preempt, we have gained an edge. Preempts work, and we have reduced bidding space for the opponents. Any further action resets our advantage, and starts over with the opponents in the bidding. If we have something useful to do, by all means, do it. Just be aware that this factor weighs against further action, like trying to win the board twice.

See also “RKB over Our Preempt” on page 241.

Weak Two-Bid

We don't particularly follow the rule of 2-3-4 at the two level. However, we may open a weak two-bid on a 7-card suit that meets the requirements for a two-bid, but does not meet the rule of 2-3-4 for the three level.

□ Good Suit and Feature, vulnerable, first or second seat: This weak two bid promises a good suit: two of the top three honors; some permit A-J-10-x-x-x. The point is for responder to see honor-

doubleton and hope to run the suit. When playing “good suit” nonvulnerable, we might permit a chunky 5-card suit, with a 4-card suit on the side.

A response of 2 NT or a new suit (both forcing) asks opener to bid a high-card feature with a maximum, preferably an ace or king. 3 NT over 2 NT shows opener’s suit is headed by the A-K-Q.

Third seat. Anything goes, subject to common sense.

Fourth seat. The fourth-seat 2-bid shows a good suit and an expectation of a positive score, but little chance for game. This is standard; Billy Miller says 11–13 HCP.

☐ Relaxed Suit Quality: ○ Nonvulnerable or ○ Always

When we are vulnerable, the good-suit methods above make sense. Nonvulnerable, especially at matchpoints, we need to get in there more often. Some pairs allow almost any 6-card suit to be opened. However, if we don’t promise at least the queen, partner cannot afford to lay down the king from K-x, when on lead. A slightly heavy compromise is at least Q-J-9-x-x-x.

Responses to 2 NT. When the weak two-bid might not provide a good suit, feature responses are no longer sufficient. Three other plans make sense: Ogust rebids, 5BMG rebids, and ranked rebids.

Nonvulnerable Opener’s Rebid after Responder’s 2 NT Inquiry				
Bid	○ Modern Ogust	○ 5BMG	Step	○ Ranked
3 ♣	bad suit & bad hand	5-card suit ²	3 x ⁴	Worst hand
3 ♦	good suit & bad hand	Bad hand	1	Fair hand
3 ♥	bad suit & <i>good hand</i> ¹	Medium hand	2	Good hand
3 ♠	good suit & good hand	Good hand	3	Best hand
3 NT	6-card suit headed by A-K-Q. ³			

¹ Modern Ogust: hold hand over heart; hearts has a good hand.
² 5BMG: 3 ♦ asks BMG over 3 ♣ rebid, except 3 ♥ with ♦ trump (3 ♦ to play).
³ Allison & Mike Cappelletti: 5BMG with 3 NT = four cards in the other major.
⁴ For ranked rebids, the opening suit is worst, which the other steps skip over.

These methods let us bid lots and wreak havoc upon the opponents, but life is not so good when responder has a good hand. A new suit is still forcing, unless we are doubled.

Lead Direction: McCabe Adjunct over a Double

When partner opens a weak two-bid and *RHO doubles*, we want to raise when we can. However, partner will probably be leading against their contract, so we'd like to suggest a good lead. The author likes to bid the suit he wants led, with opener's suit as a bolt hole.

The McCabe adjunct formalizes this plan: a new suit is a forcing, lead-directing, alertable raise. Opener may still lead their suit when not needing a lead through. A direct raise of the major suggests that partner lead their own suit. Max Hardy requires responder to hold the ace or king for a direct raise; without it, either make a lead-directing bid, or start a signoff (see the chart below) and then raise.

With a good hand or a long-suit runout, we use 2 NT or redouble; unfortunately, people assign these bids differently.

McCabe	○ Weak Two-Bid Basis	○ Lebensohl Basis
2 NT	Game try – systems on.	Puppet to 3 ♣ for signoff.
Redouble	Puppet to next step for signoff.	Strong – penalties.
Raise	Preemptive raise, suggests leading the suit.	
New suit	Preemptive raise, suggests leading the new suit.	

McCabe should be on after a third-seat opening, but remember that partner may have taken a liberty.

- Play McCabe adjunct, as selected in the table above.
- Just wing it.

McCabe can also be played when a higher preempt is doubled, or when our preempt is overcalled. Some may play it without interference. The details are left to the interested reader.

Backstory

My testing suggests that Ogust rebids are better than feature rebids, when responder bids 2 NT over a weak two-bid that could be as weak as Q-J-9-x-x-x. I have not tested modern Ogust, 5BMG, and ranked rebids against each other. A period of frequently opening 5-card suits has produced disappointing results for the author, who now leans toward the ranked responses that Gary brought to our partnership from Paul Munafo in 2024.

Harold Ogust's original red-suit responses to 2 NT are switched (show off a ring on your hand: diamonds shows a good hand). *GHAK!* The *Encyclopedia of Bridge*, 7th Ed., says people now reverse those meanings of the red suit responses, without giving a reason. The modern plan does let a 2 \diamond opener declare 3 \diamond with a good suit. The main problem with Ogust rebids is remembering what the red suits mean!

The original name of McCabe adjunct is often shortened. The *weak two-bid basis* (my name) was described by Robert Todd, Marilyn Hemenway, and Karen Walker. This method appeals by minimizing the changes to what we are already playing over the weak two-bid. When the opening bid was below 2 \spadesuit , this redouble may let us get out cheaper.

The *lebensohl basis* (my name) was described by Dr. James Marsh Sternberg and Max Hardy; it was mentioned by Hemenway and Walker. This method provides more space for both sides when responder is strong.

Finally, there is transfer McCabe. This plan provides all the same capabilities, but the transfer combines running out to a suit with lead direction (just convert the accepted transfer). Robert Todd describes it with the redouble being a transfer to the next suit and 2 NT being the strong hand, which makes better use of the space than flipping these two. Critics complain that the transfer gives the opponents an extra cue-bid and lead-directing double.

For further discussion of McCabe, see the Dehlin thread on Bridge Winners, "McCabe above 2 level?"

Alternative Methods

⁸⁻²²⁰ **Weaker preempts.** Experts are preempting with less and less. It's not clear whether they have lowered their ranges, or expanded them (providing less accuracy).

Tom Breur pointed me to this routine example of a 2 \spadesuit opening at favorable vulnerability from the 2023 Bermuda Bowl (World Bridge Teams Championship), bid by Roll of Israel against Norway:

\spadesuit Q 7 6 5 3 2 \heartsuit K 9 \diamondsuit J 4 3 \clubsuit 10 5

6. Keycards

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Introduction

Asking for aces or keycards is a major tool for bidding sound slams at bridge, and Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKB) is the preeminent such tool. The five keycards are the four aces and the king of trump. The queen of trump (or 10 combined trumps) is the sixth key feature. Slam is unsafe, if we are missing two of these six features.

Not a slam try. We don't roll into RKB just because a slam is *possible*. We use it when we *plan to bid* a small slam. RKB is a slam safety check. When we are about to cross the street, we look both ways first. When we have decided to bid a slam, we check for keycards, so we don't get hit by double-decker losers. If no more than one key feature is missing, we bid the slam. RKB is the *wrong tool* if we don't know what to do, once we get the answer.

The main tool leading up to using RKB is control-bidding, colloquially called cue-bidding. We have seen this in detail, in "Serious 3 NT and Last Train" on page 97.

Basic approach. With spades trump, let's work through the basic approach. One partner decides to bid a slam and bids 4 NT to ask for keycards. Assuming popular 1430 methods, the replies are:

- 5 ♣ 1 or 4 keycards.
- 5 ♦ 0 or 3 keycards.
- 5 ♥ 2 or 5 keycards, without the queen of trump.
- 5 ♠ 2 or 5 keycards, with the queen of trump.

If the reply is 5 ♥ or 5 ♠, we have the full picture. If two (or more) of the six features (four aces plus the king and queen of trump) are missing, we sign off in 5 ♠. If one is missing, we bid 6 ♠. No dithering is expected – we count – carefully – and act.

We have them all. If none of the six key features is missing, we bid 5 NT, to ask for specific kings, *whether we want that information or not*, because asking for kings tells partner we have them all.

Rule: *If we have them all, asker must use the king ask.*

If replier counts 13 tricks, they bid a grand slam. Powerful!

If the reply is 5 ♣ or 5 ♦, we have at most one missing keycard, and we are not looking at the trump queen, then we use the queen ask: 5 ♦ over 5 ♣, or 5 ♥ over 5 ♦. Without the queen, replier signs off in 5 ♠. With it, replier bids their cheapest side king, or 5 NT with none.

Rule: *If we have five keycards, but the status of the trump queen is unknown, asker must use the queen ask.* ♦¹

□ Grand slam picture jump.

The queen ask does not say whether or not we have all five keycards. A replier holding the queen of trumps who counts 13 tricks, *if we have them all*, jumps to six of the trump suit. This demands that asker bid a grand slam, if we do have them all. ♦² *Be sure to discuss this non-standard treatment with partner.*

○ We'll develop another way to bid those lay-down grand slams.

1. Example – grand slam picture jump:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder</i>
♠ A K 10 6 4	♠ Q J 3
♥ A 7 6	♥ 8 3
♦ A 6 3	♦ K Q J 8 6 2
♣ A 4	♣ 7 6
1 ♠	2 ♠ [fit-jump not available]
2 NT [nondescript GT]	3 ♦ [secondary ♦ value]
3 ♥ [♥ control, slam try]	4 ♦ [another secondary ♦ value & source of tricks]
4 NT [RKB ♠]	5 ♦ [1430: 0 or 3]
5 ♥ [queen ask]	6 ♠ [grand slam picture jump]
7 ♦ [might be safer]	7 NT [2 jacks: no ruffs needed]

Backstory

Easley Blackwood developed his ace-asking convention in 1933.

Eddie Kantar wrote *five* editions of a whole book on asking for keycards. For most people, a whole book is overkill. The many versions of my RKB article are only one chapter in this book. There is still plenty of system here.

The grand slam picture jump was invented by partner Richard Lee – at the table – and I did not field it, because I don't bid speculative grand slams. I latched onto the idea and wrote about it in 2011. After tossing around words

like demand (my favorite since 2022), tell, charge, and feature jump, Gary and I settled on grand slam picture jump in August 2024.

♦ Alternative Methods

¹⁻²²⁸ **King ask and queen ask.** It is standard that asking for kings says, we have all six key features. When I returned to bridge in the 1990s, Jim Negro told me the rule to always ask for kings when we do have them all. This should be standard, but I cannot find a reference stating that. I added the rule for the queen ask, to enable the grand slam picture jump.

²⁻²²⁸ **Extra values.** As a reply to the queen ask, still assuming spades are trump, 5 ♠ denies the queen. Two bids might say, “I have the queen without a side king,” 5 NT and 6 ♠. For Kantar, 6 ♠ denies a queen, singleton, or doubleton on the side. Holding one of those “extra value” features, Kantar bids 5 NT. This allows asker to probe for that value, *with the knowledge it is there*. It would be quite rare for this nuance to prove useful.

Suppose replier wants a grand slam picture jump, but has to settle for 5 NT or bidding a king to show the trump queen. Except for a 6 ♠ signoff, asker’s bid is an active request to bid a grand slam with a specific feature, not just a statement that we have them all. Asker usually bids 6 ♠, and replier cannot move.

The grand slam picture jump is superior. If we won’t play it, we should consider playing *two queen asks*: the cheaper lacking one keycard, and the second promising all five keycards.

Some pairs do employ one bid, perhaps the bid below 6 trump, as a general grand slam try. The following example shows this in action, by two pairs.

2. “The Bidding Box” (1), July 2023 *Bulletin*:

West	East
♠ Q 9 6	♠ A K J 10 4
♥ J 6	♥ A K 5 3
♦ A K 6 3 2	♦ Q 4
♣ 10 3 2	♣ A 5

Both Easts started with a 1 ♠ opening and forced to game, according to their system. Both Wests responded 1 NT and showed a 3-card limit raise. The auctions started differently, but converged at this point:

...	[spades are trump]	4 NT	[RKB spades]
5 ♣	[one or four]	5 ♦	[queen ask]
6 ♦	[♠ Q and ♦ K]	6 ♥	[by both Easts]

Both pairs played that 6 ♥ was a last train bid for a grand slam.

Asking Bids & Replies

When spades are trump, 4 NT is the Roman Keycard Blackwood asking bid, the *RKB ask*. The first four replies are well known.

Step	4 NT:	3014 Replies	1430 Replies
1	5 ♣	0 or 3 keycards.	1 or 4 keycards.
2	5 ♦	1 or 4 keycards.	0 or 3 keycards.
3	5 ♥	2 or 5 keycards, <i>without</i> either the queen of trump or length that guarantees a 10-card fit.	
4	5 ♠	2 or 5 keycards, <i>with</i> either the queen of trump or length that guarantees a 10-card fit.	
<i>With a useful void and values for slam:</i>			
5	5 NT	Even: 0 (if asker opened 2 ♣ or jump shifted), 2 or 4 keycards. Asker figures out the void.	
Higher suit		Odd: 1 or 3 keycards, void in the bid suit. When the RKB ask is a suit, 5 NT shows a void in the ask suit.	
6 Trump		Odd: 1 or 3 keycards, void above trump.	

The *void-showing replies* are mainstream methods. \diamond^3 (Never count a void as an ace, lest partner decide to play notrump!)

Another Suit Is Trump

Our plan when another suit is trump is to use a bid that is at least as efficient as 4 NT is for spades:

Trumps	RKB Ask	Name
Spades	4 NT	
Hearts	4 ♠	Kickback
Diamonds	4 ♣	Crosswood
Clubs	4 ♦	

Later, we'll see details for kickback and crosswood. The same step replies apply; for example, if clubs are trump, then 4 ♦ is the RKB ask, and 4 NT is the third step, showing 2 keycards without the queen of trump. First, let's see the full system of replies, with only occasional mentions of a specific trump suit or the RKB ask.

3014 and 1430 replies both work well. Either may occasionally provide an advantage. \diamond^4

Sign Off Below Slam

When asker determines that the partnership is likely to lose two tricks, they sign off, often by bidding five of the trump suit, bidding 4 NT, or passing the RKB reply. Definitely choose a plan below. Do not play that there is any choice over the sign-off; that will surely lead to director calls and adverse rulings, if asker dithers at all.

❑ Plan A – Partner always passes the sign-off

This works well with crosswood, kickback, and serious 3 NT.

○ Plan B – With 3 or 4, partner bids on

When holding 3 or 4 keycards, reply to a queen ask. When holding 0, 1, or 2 keycards, replier always passes the sign-off. ♦^{4a}

Rule: If replier may overrule a sign-off, asker must hold a keycard, to avoid getting too high on a “3-overrule.”

Play in Notrump

When a *minor suit* is trump, and the RKB ask is not 4 NT, we want to be able to sign off at 4 NT (or non-jump 5 NT) as often as possible. Those bids are an offer to play, unless needed for the queen ask.

When a *major suit* is trump, 5 NT is never an offer to play. When hearts are trump and 4 ♠ is the RKB ask, a non-jump 5 NT is asking or telling about the *spade* suit.

Trump-Negative vs. Diesel (Cheaper NT/T Negative)

Partnerships employ two main ways to deny a requested feature, such as the queen of trump or a side king.

○ Trump-negative: The negative reply is a return to trump.

Notrump gains a surrogate meaning, such as the king of the RKB-ask suit.

❑ Diesel: negative is the cheaper bid, notrump or trump (NT/T).

This lets us stop immediately and play notrump, a potentially huge issue at matchpoints, when a minor suit is trump. The higher NT/T gains a surrogate meaning, such as the king of the RKB-ask suit.

In this book, we play Diesel: the cheaper NT/T bid is negative.

The King Ask

Eddie Kantar calls the king ask the *specific king ask*. Asker's bid of *five of the RKB ask strain* (e.g., 5 NT with spades trump) promises that all keycards and the trump queen (or extra length) are held:

Cheaper NT/T	No side king to show.
Suit	Cheapest king.
Higher NT/T	The king of the RKB-ask suit.
7 ♣	Promises an undisclosed source of tricks, or all three side kings and undisclosed values.

At any time, of course, replier may count tricks and bid a grand.

The Queen Ask

When the reply does not speak to the queen of trump, and we are not looking at it, the next available bid that is not the king ask, trump, or notrump asks for her majesty.

Replies to Queen Ask	
Cheaper NT/T	Neither the queen of trump nor <i>sufficient extra trump length to guarantee a 10-card fit</i> .
Suit below 6 trump	Cheapest king, with the queen or extra length. If 6 NT should be playable, it's OK to show a king between 6 trump and 6 NT.
Higher NT/T	The queen of trump or sufficient extra trump length to guarantee a 10-card fit, but no side king.
Jump to 6 trump	<i>Grand slam picture jump</i> : Shows the queen or extra trump length, <i>plus a source of tricks (or three side kings and extra values)</i> . If we have all six key features, asker must bid a grand slam.

Exception: When clubs are trump, 4 ♦ is the crosswood RKB ask. When the reply is 4 ♠ (second step), 4 NT is the queen ask, since no suit bid is available below 5 ♣ – sorry, we cannot play 4 NT.

The Second-King Ask

After a king-showing reply to either the queen ask or king ask, asker's new suit promises all the keycards and asks for the king of that suit. If either of two is enough, ask for the cheaper.

Cheaper NT/T	No king to show.
Suit	No, but have the king of the bid suit.
7 ♣	King of the ask suit.

After a Useful Void Reply

After a useful void reply, there can be no king ask. \diamond^5

Asking for the queen, after a void reply. When the reply to the RKB ask shows a void, and a bid is available below 6 trump, the next such bid *confirms all the keycards* and asks for the trump queen:

Cheaper NT/T	Neither the trump queen nor sufficient extra trump length to guarantee a 10-card fit.
7 ♣	Have either the queen or extra trump length. <i>Bid 7 ♣, not 7 trump, in case asker plans to play in a solid suit different from the asking trump suit.</i>

Play in Another Suit

If we have bid and raised a second suit, asker's bid of six in that suit is to play.

3. Example – play in another suit:

Opener

♠ A 4
♥ Q 10 9 6 5
♦ 3
♣ K Q J 6 4

1 ♥
3 ♣ [extra values, GF]
3 ♠ [1st or 2nd round control]
4 ♠ [RKB ♥]
6 ♣ [to play]

Responder

♠ ? 6 2
♥ K J 3
♦ A 10 5
♣ A 10 7 2
2 ♣ [GF, unless rebid]
3 ♥ [hearts are trump]
4 ♦ [♦ courtesy, ♣ A or K only*]
4 NT [0 or 3 keycards]
Pass

* An own-suit control-bid promises two of the top three honors. A 2/1 response suit should contain an ace or king, especially when planning to raise.

When pushing to a thin slam, it's wise to play in the strongest contract, even at matchpoints. Opener can see that playing in clubs may produce an extra trick. 6 ♥ makes only if we get a second spade

or diamond trick (e.g., responder holds the ♠ K). In contrast, 6 ♣ will make, unless the opponents establish a spade trick on the opening lead, clubs split 4-0, or the opponents negotiate a heart ruff.

This offer to play is sensible, but not standard. A suit at the six level is an offer to play in:

- Any suit (killing off most third-round-control asks – see below).
- A suit bid by partner.
- A suit that has been bid and raised. (This choice is also recommended by Eric Rodwell).
- No suit.

The Third-Round-Control Ask

Any bid by asker that has no defined meaning is a grand slam try, asking for third-round control of the bid suit. Once we ask for kings or the trump queen, there are only a few bids available to be third-round-control asks. However, immediately after the reply to the RKB ask, there are a bunch of potential third-round-control asks. Also, a second-king ask in a suit where replier has already shown or denied a king becomes a third-round-control ask. Our replies are consistent with the rest of this system: \diamond^6

Cheaper NT/T	No third-round control.
Higher NT/T	Queen of bid suit.
Non-trump suit or 7 ♣	Two or fewer cards in bid suit.

Before deciding to play the third-round-control ask after crosswood, consider that asker may wish to offer to play in an unsupported major suit, or to offer a choice of slams when 5 NT is not a jump.

4. Example:

<i>Opener</i>	<i>Responder A</i>	<i>Responder B</i>	<i>Responder C</i>
♠ A J 10 7 6	♠ K Q 5 4	♠ K Q 5 4	♠ K Q 5 4
♥ 8	♥ A 10 5	♥ A 10 5	♥ A 10 5 2
♦ K Q 5	♦ A 7 6	♦ A 7 6	♦ A 7 6
♣ A K 6 4	♣ 7 5 3	♣ Q 7 5	♣ 7 5

1 ♠		2 NT	[Jacoby: 4-card forcing raise, usually balanced]
3 ♥	[singleton or void (standard rebid)]	4 ♦	[♦ courtesy, no ♣ control]
4 NT	[RKB ♠]	5 ♣	[0 or 3 keycards]
5 ♦	[queen ask]	5 NT	[♠ Q, no king to show]
6 ♣	[third-round ask in ♣]	?	

Responder A bids 6 ♠ with no third-round control, where we play. Responder B bids 6 NT with the ♣ Q; 7 ♠ is excellent. Responder C bids 7 ♣ with club shortness, a doubleton being third-round control; in 7 ♠ we should be able to ruff both clubs in dummy.

5. “The Bidding Box” (5), March 2023 *Bulletin*:

We are nonvulnerable.

Dealer (South) is vulnerable and opens 3 ♥.

The opponents are otherwise silent.

<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
♠ A K 6 3	♠ Q 10 8 7 4
♥ A K	♥ 5 2
♦ A K J 6 4	♦ Q 10 7
♣ A 10	♣ 9 5 2

Our auction:

Double [of South's 3 ♥]	3 ♠
4 ♥ [big hand]	4 ♠
4 NT [RKB ♠]	5 ♦ [0 or 3 keycards]
5 ♥ [queen ask]	5 NT [♠ Q, no king]
6 ♦ [3rd-round-control ask]	6 NT [♦ Q]
7 ♠ [only count 12 w/o ruff]	Pass

After the cue-bid, 4 NT asks for keycards. West counts four spades, five diamonds, and three more top tricks. The 13th trick will come from a ruff or a fifth (unseen) spade on dummy.

Backstory

In his book, Eddie Kantar offered more options and details on the third-round-control ask, as well as a chapter on double-agreement sequences.

The original RKB replies, now called 3014, retained similarity to the original Blackwood replies (0 or 4, 1, 2, 3) and are easier for “finger bridge.” (Don’t laugh! I once played 1430 in a tournament with a 10-fingered, strong partner who twice messed up his RKB replies.)

Jeff Rubens introduced kickback in the third of six parts of “The Useful-Space Principle” series in *The Bridge World*. Kickback uses the next bid above four of the trump suit as the RKB ask. It’s most commonly used when hearts are trump, but may also be used for minor suits. Robert Munger, Norman Pestaina, and David Caprera wrote about kickback. Munger and Pestaina describe the trump-negative plan.

Gary accepted and helped me refine my invention of crosswood, where the other minor is used to ask for keycards when a minor suit is trump. I first wrote about it in 2011; others may have played this way before I came up with the idea and gave it a name. I was inspired by a couple who played that 4 ♣ was always Gerber, in any auction. These folks were never in doubt about the bid. Once we decide a minor is trump, we should not be in doubt, either.

In years around 2016, Mike Diesel produced a series of six books about RKB 1430; in 2024, he was working on an omnibus edition. His cheaper/higher replies are an important advance, and it seems appropriate to give them his name. Otherwood™ is Diesel’s proprietary name for his RKB system, which includes using the other minor as the RKB ask.

Delayed kickback (2016) is described in my article “Delayed Kickback for Hearts.” When it applies, hearts are trump, and 4 NT takes on the meaning of the displaced 4 ♠ bid (often a cue bid in spades). It applies in these cases:

Two delays: if hearts have become trump and the partnership made at least two bids below 4 ♠, *after* the fit has been confirmed, even if one partner has shown a spade suit.

One delay: if hearts have become trump and the partnership made one bid below 4 ♠, *after* the fit has been confirmed, so long as neither partner has shown a spade suit.

No delay: after a jump to the four level makes hearts trump.

♦ Alternative Methods

³⁻²³⁰ **Even keycards with a void.** Eddie Kantar recommended 5 K for this, where K is the RKB-ask strain, as do others. Kantar wrote: “Partner has to figure out where the void is, but it is usually obvious.”

The chart of optional continuations, below, is both simplified and enhanced from Robert Munger’s plan. In addition to the surrogate at 5 NT, note the 5 K + 3 reply.

A1	R1	A2	R2	Even keycards with void – Asking for the void
4 K	RKB ask.			
	5 K	Even number of keycards with unspecified void.		
		5 K + 1	Asks for the void (LMH, to avoid dual surrogates).	
			5 K + 2	Void in lowest-ranking side suit.
			5 K + 3	Void in middle-ranking side suit.
			6 trump	Void in high-ranking side suit.
		5 K + 2	Queen ask: 6 trump = no.	
		5 K + 3	Puppet to 6 trump; FYI, we have them all.	
		6 trump	Sign-off: a keycard is missing or major wastage.	
	5 NT	[K is a suit] Odd number of keycards, void in K.		

⁴⁻²³⁰ **3014 vs. 1430.** A heavy majority of pairs appear to use 1430 replies, because it's likely to be better when the RKB-ask is two or more steps higher than four of the trump suit. It's important to understand that 1430 replies only push the problems around, changing the odds. Eddie Kantar had two sets of rules for using *both* variants. Kickback and crosswood are better than pushing the problems around.

^{4a-231} **Asking with zero keycards.** Eddie Kantar wrote about 0 or 3, 1 or 4:

It is assumed that a player of your caliber will know from the bidding which number partner has. If your partner has trouble differentiating, gin rummy is a viable option.

However, some experts do play that the sign-off is to be overruled when holding three or four keycards. They may set up rules for when the signoff must not be overruled, such as after a 2 ♣ opening, etc. Play real sign-offs!

⁵⁻²³³ **Availability of asks after a void reply.** The table below shows that a void reply is always at least five of the RKB-ask strain, so there is no king ask. The next available bid is the queen ask, except in cases marked with an asterisk (*), where there is no such bid below six of the trump suit.

			Even KC Any Void	Odd Keycards, Void in			
Trump	Ask	Step4		♣	♦	♥	♠
♣	4 ♦	5 ♣	5 ♦	–	5 NT*	5 ♥	5 ♠
♦	4 ♣	4 NT	5 ♣	5 NT	–	5 ♥	5 ♠
♦	4 ♥	5 ♦	5 ♥	6 ♣*	–	5 NT	5 ♠
♥	4 ♠	5 ♥	5 ♠	6 ♣	6 ♦*	–	5NT
♠	4 NT	5 ♠	5 NT	6 ♣	6 ♦	6 ♥*	–

⁶⁻²³⁴ **Third-round-control ask – optional special case.** *If replier has shown the suit:* respond in steps, skipping the “no” reply from the table: 1=Q, 2=K, raise=KQ. (Good luck remembering this!)

Interference, Crosswood, Kickback, Exclusion, Our Preempt

Interference – Roman DoP1 & RoP1; DEPO

Interference over RKB is infrequent, but we must be ready for it when it comes. If they bid below 5 trump, we play *Roman DoP1* (pronounced dopey), which stands for *double zero, pass one*:

Step	Bid	Roman DoP1 & RoP1	Gerber
	Dble/Rdbl	0 or 3 keycards.	0 or 4 aces.
	Pass	1 or 4 keycards.	1 ace.
1		2 or 5 keycards, <i>no queen</i> .	2 aces.
2		2 or 5 keycards, <i>with queen</i> .	3 aces.
		<i>With a useful void:</i>	
	5 NT	Even: 0, 2 or 4 keycards with a void in an enemy suit.	
	Suit	Odd: 1 or 3 keycards with a void in the bid suit.	
	6 Trump	Odd: 1 or 3 keycards with a void that would require a bid higher than 6 trump to show.	

Roman DoP1. This plan is independent of whether we play 3014 or 1430. Double takes the place of the reply that includes 0 (zero) keycards (or aces), whatever that would have been. Pass takes the place of the reply that includes 1 keycard. The new 1st step shows “two without,” etc. Other plans, sometimes called DoP1 or DOPI, complicate things unnecessarily. \diamond^7 Be sure to agree with partner to the details of this *Roman DoP1* system of responses.

Roman RoP1. We gain two cheaper void-showing bids if we play *redouble zero* (replacing the 0 response), *pass one*, etc.

Over a double of a keycard ask: **○ Roman RoP1** **○ Ignore a double**

DEPO. If they bid at 5 trump or higher, we play plain DEPO (depot): *double even* (0, 2, or 4), *pass odd* (1, 3 or 5) keycards or aces, ignoring steps and the trump queen. This plan allows us to stop (and double) below slam. Any bid shows a void, as above.

If they interfere over any other keycard or ace ask, we play the same way. With Gerber, we treat notrump as the trump strain: DEPO applies at notrump of the Gerber level (4 NT over 4 ♣), or higher. This is BWS, except for the addition of this DEPO barrier.

The queen ask (top priority), king ask, and second-king ask are still operative on competitive RKB auctions, space permitting.

Rule: *In competition, only show a void in a suit that the opponents have shown.*

The void-showing replies begin just higher than replies described above. For example, if spades are trump and an opponent bids 5 ♦ over 4 NT, then the two steps are 5 ♥ and 5 ♠; 5 NT and higher bids are void-showing – the cheapest shows an even number of keycards.

Other Suits – Crosswood and Kickback

We ask with crosswood for minors and kickback for hearts. ♦⁸

Crosswood

When a minor is trump, we use *crosswood*: when possible, four of the other minor asks for keycards:

Rule: *4 ♦ is the RKB ask when clubs are trump, and 4 ♣ is the RKB ask when 4 ♣ is available and diamonds are trump.*

Exception: When diamonds become trump at the four level, the 4 ♣ RKB ask is too low. In this case, *4 of the cheaper major not shown by either partner, or 4 NT if neither, becomes the RKB ask.* This exception also applies when either minor is trump, and bidding by the opponents prevents us from asking with the crosswood minor. Asker's non-jump 5 NT is always natural, when the non-void reply is above five of our minor.

Crosswood reduces the disaster potential of alternative methods, by *dedicating* four of the other minor as the RKB ask. This bid is seldom needed to be natural, although we might miss having it as a control-bid, splinter, or EKB.

When diamonds are trump, crosswood allows us to play in hearts more often. A bid of four of either major can be an offer to play, in a likely 7-card fit.

- The king ask is five of the other minor, if available and not needed as the queen ask; otherwise, five of the actual RKB-ask suit is the king ask.

Rule: *The queen ask has priority over the king ask.*

- When a minor suit is trump, asker's simple bid of notrump is to play, unless it is the only possible queen ask (4 NT over a 4 ♠ reply, with clubs trump).
- Asker's *jump* to 5 NT is "pick a slam."

Kickback

When hearts are trump, using 4 NT as the RKB ask can blow up when asker holds fewer than two keycards. Also, there is no queen ask below 5 ♥ when the reply is 5 ♦. To address these problems, we dedicate 4 ♠ as the RKB ask, when hearts are trump.

Rule: *When hearts become trump, spades can never become trump, and 4 ♠ is always the RKB ask.*

When hearts are trump, 4 NT takes the place of whatever a 4 ♠ bid would otherwise have meant, often a control-bid.

A jump to 4 ♠ is not kickback, if the bidder could have set trump, but failed to do so: ♦⁹

1 ♥ - 2 ♦

3 ♦ - 4 ♠ [EKB ♦, spade void - 3 ♥ would have set ♥]

Consider this auction:

1 ♠ - 2 ♥

2 ♠ - 3 ♣

3 ♠ - 4 ♣

4 ♥ - ?

The belated 4 ♥ bid does not truly set trump; therefore, responder's 4 NT would be an offer to play. Game over slam.

Responder's 4 ♠ says spades must be better than hearts (and the notrump ship has sailed). Spades are now trump, so opener's 4 NT over 4 ♠ would ask for keycards in spades.

RKB over Our Preempt: 0, 1, 1+, 2, 2+

Poor man's keycard. When partner preempts with a natural bid at two of a suit, three of a suit, or 4 ♣, our immediate bid of 4 ♦ asks for keycards over clubs, and 4 ♣ asks over all other suits.

4 ♣ Asks for ♦, ♥, ♠		Over partner's opening preempt	4 ♦ Asks for ♣	
Step	Bid	Meaning	Bid	Step
1	4 ♦	0 keycards.	4 ♥	1
2	4 ♥	1 keycard, without the trump queen.	4 ♠	2
3	4 ♠	1 keycard, with the trump queen.	4 NT	3
4	4 NT	2 keycards, without the trump queen.	5 ♣	4
5	5 ♣	2 keycards, with the trump queen.	5 ♦	5

The fifth step (e.g., A-K-Q) is surely enough. Three keycards should be opened at the one level, so we do not need a reply for that.

Exclusion Keycard Blackwood (EKB)

Exclusion keycard Blackwood (EKB), also called *voidwood*, is a void-showing jump into a suit above either game or the RKB-asking bid.

Rule: For purposes of EKB only, if no trump suit has been agreed, the suit last bid (or shown) is trump.

Strike fast, or lose the chance to make an EKB ask! Kantar gives the example { 1 ♠ – 2 ♥; 5 ♦ }. If we raise hearts, partner may bid 4 ♥, and now 5 ♦ (no longer a jump) is a control-bid. More examples:

1 ♠ – 2 NT; 5 ♦ [EKB ♠ over Jacoby 2 NT, diamond void]

1 ♠ – 2 ♦; 4 ♥ [EKB ♦, ♥ void, above 4 ♣ tho below game]

EKB for the other minor: After an *inverted minor raise*, four of the other minor is always the RKB ask, so it cannot be EKB. The jump to four of the *agreed* minor is either a splinter or EKB, with a *splinter* taking priority:

1 ♣ – 2 ♣ [limit raise or better]

4 ♣ [EKB, ♦ void – 3 ♦ would be a splinter]

1 ♦ – 2 ♦ [limit raise or better]

4 ♦ [splinter, short ♣, if our 3 ♣ would be natural]

6. Keycards – Interference, Crosswood, Kickback, Exclusion, Our Preempt

The jump in the agreed minor is not needed to be natural – we have plenty of forcing bids available.

After EKB at four of the agreed minor, if the queen of trump has not been shown, the next non-trump bid asks for it.

If available, the king ask is the cheaper of the void and the suit above trumps, skipping the queen ask, if any. Returning to the agreed minor is always a sign-off.

EKB over a Notrump Opening: Kantar says EKB applies after a Jacoby transfer:

1 NT – 2 ♠; 2 ♥ – 5 ♣ [RKB ♥, club void]

What else could this jump over game be? (In contrast, a five-level bid after Texas is not a jump – a dangerous bid to attempt to utilize.)

EKB is possible after a reply to Stayman:

1 NT – 2 ♣; 2 ♠ – 5 ♦ [RKB ♠, diamond void]

EKB Replies: 0, 1, 2, 2+, 3

The ace of the void suit no longer counts, so there are four keycards and the queen of trump. We want zero to be cheapest, and two to be cheap – one might not be enough for slam, with or without the queen of trump. We cannot tell three from zero when they share a step (10 HCP in the void suit are not visible), and if that first step is trump, we would have to guess. ^{◆10} Before firing the EKB rocket, we must be sure that no reply will boost us into trouble.

◆ Alternative Methods

⁷⁻²³⁸ **Alternatives to Roman DOP1.** DOP1, often spelled DOPI with letters, as in the *Encyclopedia*, has been the prominent method since before RKB – I have been playing it since the early to middle 1970s.

People who spell it DOPI may tie DO to the first original step, and PI to the second step, as if the characters used are just place-holders. That plan makes the meanings dependent on whether we are playing 3014 or 1430. This additional translation can only contribute to errors in finger bridge. Unfortunately, this is the way BWS 2001 was written. BWS 2017 corrects this error: still named DOPI, it's our Roman DOP1.

Whether spelled DOP1 or DOPI, the whole point of “dopey” is that double shows zero (D0) and pass shows one (P1). I add the word Roman to make it clear that 0 means 0 or 3, etc.

A dive into *Aces Scientific* (pp. 119+), provides Bobby Goldman’s description of their ace-asking steps: 0 or 3, 1 or 4, 2, 2 with a slam feature outside trump. While not up to RKB standards, this was quite advanced for its day. It had the advantage of being playable in all such situations, including Gerber. With interference over an ace-asking bid Goldman wrote in 1978: “Our method is called *Roman DOPI*.” It’s the Roman DOP1 described in this book.

The *Encyclopedia* notes PODI and DOPE, alternatives to DOPI and DEPO that flip the replies. Mike Diesel calls his PODI plan D1P0. There is a small technical difference in flipping the replies: a pass allows asker to double, with replier getting another chance over the double. Any technical advantage is surely eclipsed by using a different and less-popular alternative.

DEPO barrier. We turn on DEPO at 5 trump or higher, the most common barrier. Eddie Kantar turned it on at 6 trump or higher! Tim Hill likes one below 5 trump, assuring we never get forced to slam by a “2-with” reply to DOP1, but making the less-accurate DEPO more likely. BWS does not state a barrier, just says “at high enough levels.”

In my first bridge career, we played DOPE, rhyming with rope. I don’t know for sure, but I expect people changed to DEPO to avoid confusion with DOP1 (dopey).

⁸⁻²³⁹ **Methods other than crosswood & kickback.** See below.

⁹⁻²⁴⁰ **Two main styles for when kickback applies:** always, whenever it could possibly be; or never, unless it must be. We are in the latter camp, which works better resolving heart-spade issues.

¹⁰⁻²⁴² **Exclusion replies.** In 1998, Eddie Kantar’s EKB replies were 0, 1, 2. In 2008, he expanded them to 0, 1, 2, 2+, 3. A 2 reply is huge, so we might as well tack on the queen info and 3. (And a combined 0/3 response is horrible.)

In the past, I recommended (and sometimes still play) 0, 1, 1+, 2, 2+ replies to EKB, as over our preempt. However, that makes a 2 reply one step higher, which increases the chance that we cannot risk asking at all, if we need to find 2. After all, it’s possible to make a slam without the queen of trump. As always, most important is to have – and know – an agreement!

Methods Other than Crosswood & Kickback

The following table illustrates why we say the queen ask works better with kickback and crosswood!

Queen Ask – Details							
After RKB Ask		1 st Step Reply			2 nd Step Reply		
Trump Suit	RKB-Ask		Queen Ask	Stop Bids		Queen Ask	Stop Bids
♠	4 NT	5 ♣	5 ♦	5 ♠	5 ♦	5 ♥	5 ♠
♥	4 NT	5 ♣	5 ♦	5 ♥	5 ♦	5 ♠ ^{E2}	5 ♥
♥	4 ♠	4 NT	5 ♣	Pass, 5 ♥	5 ♣	5 ♦	5 ♥
♦	4 NT	5 ♣	5 ♥!	5 ♦	5 ♦	5 ♥!	Pass
♦	4 ♠	4 NT	5 ♣	Pass, 5 ♦	5 ♣	5 ♥!	5 ♦
♦	4 ♥	4 ♠	5 ♣	4 NT, 5 ♦	4NT	5 ♣	Pass, 5 ♦
♦	4 ♣	4 ♦	4 ♥	4 NT, 5 ♦	4 ♥	4 ♠	4 NT, 5 ♦
♣	4 NT	5 ♣	5 ♦!	Pass	5 ♦	5 ♥!	5 NT
♣	4 ♠	4 NT	5 ♦!	Pass, 5 ♣	5 ♣	5 ♦!	Pass, 5NT
♣	4 ♥	4 ♠	4NT ^{E1}	4 ♠	4NT	5 ♦!	Pass, 5 ♣
♣	4 ♦	4 ♥	4 ♠	4 ♥	4 ♠	4 NT ^{E1}	5 ♣

“Stop Bids” are how asker can sign off after the given step reply. Shaded rows work worse than 4 NT with spades trump. E1 refers to the exception on page 232, and E2 to the exception below. An exclamation point (!) indicates a reply above five of our trump suit.

When Hearts Are Trump

Without kickback – warning: If hearts are trump, and we ask with 4 NT holding only one keycard, partner could respond 5 ♠. That would commit us to a bad slam, missing two keycards. Holding the ♥ Q is no protection, when partner holds extra length.

Rule: Do not ask with 4 NT in hearts, when holding only one keycard.

Curiously, it may be safe to bid 4 NT when holding no keycards, such as with a long suit opposite a huge balanced hand: bid the slam (or ask for the trump queen) opposite a 4 reply, but sign off opposite 3 keycards – assuming partner lets us sign off!

Exception: When hearts are trump, 4 NT is the RKB ask, and the reply is 5 ♦:

- 5 ♥ is a sign-off.
- The queen ask is 5 ♠, which commits the partnership to at least 5 NT (the “no” reply) – not standard, but quite sensible.
- There is no grand slam picture jump available – 6 trump is not a jump.

Don’t like this? Then see “Delayed kickback” on page 236, or there is Kantar’s solution:

5 ♥ as the queen ask. When hearts are trump, and 4 NT is the 1430 RKB ask, Kantar played that 5 ♥ is the queen ask over 5 ♦ (0 or 3): holding zero, pass; holding three, answer. (He did not play kickback.)

My theory: this plan opened the can. The “override the signoff” worms crawled out, to be gobbled up by folks who cannot tell zero from three or one from four!

When a Minor Suit Is Trump

Sign off in 5 NT. Our crosswood plan allows asker to sign off in 4 NT, 5 NT, or 5 of the minor. There is no need for an old-fashioned puppet to 5 NT, when a minor suit is trump.

Redwood: When a minor suit is trump, kickback is known as *redwood*, because the RKB ask is always a red suit. This is the same as crosswood for clubs, but usually different for diamonds.

Using 4 ♥ as the RKB ask for diamonds would prevent us from playing in 4 ♥, which we have done several times. Bumping the ask up to 4 ♠ when we have bid hearts may fix that problem, but the reduced space for replies then becomes a problem (as when asking for hearts with 4 NT). Crosswood is superior.

When starting up with a new, strong partner, it’s tempting to agree on kickback for all suits, and move on. I certainly have done it. Crosswood slots into various tools in this book, and it’s better in the long run.

Minorwood: Four of the minor trump suit can be used as the RKB ask, known as *minorwood*. People have various rule sets to cope with the main issue, when the bid is asking and when it is natural. There may be cases where there would be no minorwood, but with the other minor nailed down, crosswood would be in effect. Steve Willner and Alex Ogan played these rules:

1. The suit must be bid and raised (not 1 ♣ – 4 ♣).
2. A natural notrump bid pre-raises a minor.
3. We may compete to four of a minor naturally.
4. Minorwood may not be bid by a limited hand.

The *Encyclopedia of Bridge* says, “A bid of one higher than game in the trump suit (5 ♦ for clubs, 5 ♥ for diamonds) guarantees all the key cards and asks about kings.”

Kantar devoted over 100 pages to minor-suit auctions in his book. His approach appears beyond all but quite serious partnerships.

Setting Trump for RKB

The full system is complete, except the key part. What suit is trump?

- A. If the bidder had an opportunity to set trump with a forcing bid, and failed to do so, a potential RKB ask is not an RKB ask.
- a. 1 ♠ – 2 ♥
3 ♣ – 4 NT [quantitative: 3 ♠ would set trump]
- B. When a minor suit is bid and raised, including a preference, that minor is trump, and the other minor cannot be trump for asking purposes. 4 NT would usually be a quantitative slam invitation.
- C. If a major suit is bid and raised, that major is trump for asking purposes, and a minor suit cannot be trump for asking purposes, even if previously raised. Similarly, the other major cannot become trump. It may be possible to actually play in the other major, a minor suit, or notrump.
- D. A suit is presumed to have been raised, if a probable eight-card fit exists in the suit. Example auction:
- b. 1 ♣ – 1 ♠
1 NT – 2 ♦ [one-way NMF]
2 NT – 3 ♠ [forcing, 6+ spades]
3 NT – 4 NT [RKB ♠: 6-2 fit]
- E. A natural notrump bid implicitly raises partner's lone minor suit:
- c. 1 ♣ – 3 NT
4 ♦ [RKB ♣: 3 NT raised clubs]
- d. 1 ♠ – 2 ♥
2 NT – 3 ♦
4 ♣ [RKB ♦: 2 NT implicitly raised ♦]
- When an opponent overcalls, a subsequent natural notrump bid shows a stopper but does not implicitly raise partner's minor. For example, opener may have a singleton diamond for 2 NT here:
- e. 1 ♠ – (Pass) – 2 ♦ – (2 ♥); 2 NT

For more exceptions, see “Diamonds and Then Clubs” on page 249.

Here is a neat example of an implicit raise of responder’s clubs:

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

Opener

♠ A K 6 3 2

♥ A Q 6

♦ A K 8

♣ Q 3

Responder

♠ 8

♥ K 9

♦ 10 7

♣ A K J 9 8 5 4 2

Our Auction 1:

2 ♣

3 NT [implicit raise]

4 ♥ [0 or 3]

5 ♦ [♣ Q and ♦ K]

3 ♣

4 ♦ [RKB ♣ (crosswood)]

4 ♠ [queen ask]

7 NT [1♠+2♥+2♦+8♣=13]

Our Auction 2:

2 NT

3 NT

etc.

3 ♠ [puppet to 3 NT for minors]

4 ♦ [RKB ♣ (crosswood)]

F. Responder’s suit becomes trump if raised, or if they bid it twice.

G. A weak two bid becomes trump if responder bids 2 NT. First, two related examples:

f. 2 ♠ – 4 NT [natural, quantitative]

g. 2 ♠ – 4 ♣ [poor man’s keycard: 0, 1, 1+, 2, 2+]

So after responder’s 2 NT:

h. 2 ♠ – 2 NT
3 Any – 4 NT [RKB ♠, normal replies]

i. 2 ♥ – 2 NT
3 Any – 4 ♠ [RKB ♥, normal replies]

j. 2 ♦ – 2 NT
3 Any – 4 ♣ [RKB ♦, normal replies]

H. A suit bid naturally by responder over partner’s preempt becomes trump, superseding the preempt.

- I. For purposes of EKB only, if no trump suit has been agreed, and the last bid was a suit, that suit is trump.
- J. After a one-level response, opener's jump rebid sets trump, unless responder immediately rebids their suit, which then becomes trump. (If this is also a misfit, notrump is a likely destination.) Opener can take it back with yet another bid of their suit.
- K. Select a plan in each of the next two sections.

Overcall of Our Major Suit Opening – Immediate 4 NT

- Default: if a cue-bid is available to set trump below game, 4 NT is quantitative. Otherwise, RKB is on for the opening major suit.
- In the first round of bidding, 4 NT is always Blackwood for aces. If a cue-bid is available, we can then use RKB. [Mike Ma]
- If the overcall is a preemptive jump, 4 NT is RKB for the opening major suit. Otherwise, 4 NT is quantitative.

Many players would assume this, and anything else gets messy, so why not play it? (Kickback is off – just don't ask in hearts without at least two keycards in hand.)

1. ♠ K 9 7 3 2 ♥ 6 ♦ K Q 9 ♣ A K J 2

1 ♠ – (3 ♥) – ?

Without immediate RKB, we would cue-bid 4 ♥, all set to ask for keycards. If LHO bids 5 ♥, no keycards for lunch today 😞

Because we may need to get both unbid suits into play, we need:

Rule: *Negative doubles apply through four spades [or higher].*

- If the overcall is at 3 ♥ or higher, 4 NT is RKB for the opening major suit (even if a weak two-bid). Otherwise, 4 NT is quantitative. [David Caprera]
 - BWS: 4 NT is RKB for the opening major suit, after any overcall.
- And a variation on *any of the above plans*:
- 4 NT shows unbid suits, instead of quantitative. [Hamish Brown]

Diamonds and Then Clubs

Having bid one diamond, opener's 2 ♣ or 3 ♣ cancels the implicit raise of diamonds by responder's notrump bid. Responder must raise to set trump.

h. 1 ♦ – 2 NT
3 ♣ [cancels diamonds: a raise (3 ♦ or 4 ♣) is required to set trump]

i. 1 ♦ – 3 NT
4 ♣ [Decision!]

○ After { 1 ♦ – 3 NT }, 4 ♣ is a natural force; 5 ♣ asks for aces.

Marty Bergen and other experts would play this way. This continues the plan above, where clubs cancels the implicit raise of diamonds. The jump to 5 ♣, super Gerber (page 252), is no bargain. Andrew Hanes and I do not play super Gerber; we keep the implicit raise:

□ After { 1 ♦ – 3 NT }, 4 ♣ is RKB ♦; 5 ♣ is natural.

The following combination plan could be a memory issue and more:

○ After { 1 ♦ – 3 NT }, 4 ♣ is a natural force; 4 ♥ is RKB ♦.

j. Bergen's column, July 2016 *Bridge Bulletin*:

Partner	Opponent	Us	Opponent
1 ♠	2 ♥	3 ♦	Pass
3 NT	Pass	4 ♣	

Whichever plan we picked without interference, we can use the same one here. This may create some consternation with the combination plan: we assigned RKB to 4 ♥, which erases the cue-bid. Had the major suits been reversed, we would still need to erase the cue-bid at 4 ♠ (opener's suit cannot be RKB).

Backstory

See my Bridge Winners post, "An Opponent Jumps Over Our Major Suit Opening" and related comments by Michael Rosenberg in another post, in the References. See also Marty Bergen's "RKCB: Handle with care" article in the Dec 2015 *Bridge Bulletin*.

Roman Keycard Blackwood Summary

- A. Basics: When a spade fit is agreed or implied, 4 NT is the RKB ask. With no fit, 4 NT is natural; Gerber (jump to 4 ♣ over notrump) and super Gerber (jump to 5 ♣ over 3 NT) ask for aces. Roman DoP1 & RoP1, with plain DEPO if they bid 5 trumps or higher. 4 NT opening asks for specific aces.
- B. Kickback (4 ♠ is the RKB ask) whenever hearts are trump.
- C. Crosswood: the RKB ask, when a minor fit is agreed or implied, is four of the other minor. Exception: If competition prevents asking with the other minor, or if diamonds are set as trump by a 4 ♦ bid, then the cheaper major that has not been shown by either partner (or 4 NT if both have been shown) becomes the RKB ask.

Asker's *jump* to 5 NT is "pick a slam." When a minor is trump, asker's simple notrump bid is natural and to play, except when it is the only possible queen ask below game.

- D. Holding all the keycards, asker must ask for kings: five of the RKB-ask strain, with cheapest king replies. Between the reply and 6 NT, a non-trump bid is the second-king ask: holding that king, bid 7 ♣; otherwise, bid an intervening king, or sign off in the cheaper of notrump and trump. Replier should not bid beyond 6 trump to show a king unless 6 NT would be safe.
- E. The queen ask is the next available non-trump suit bid, but is 4 NT when the reply was 4 ♠ with clubs trump – the queen ask has priority. (Otherwise, 4 NT is to play.) Select the first applicable reply:
- Lacking the trump queen (or extra length), always bid the cheaper of notrump and the trump suit.
 - Grand slam picture jump*: With the queen and a source of tricks (or three side kings and undisclosed extras), *jump* to 6 trump, which demands a grand slam, if all keycards are held.
 - With the queen, bid the cheapest side king, if any.
 - With the queen but no side king, bid the higher of notrump or trump.

- F. Holding a useful void in reply to the RKB ask:
 Even: with an even number of keycards (not zero unless a 2 ♣ opening or a jump shift), bid step 5, the RKB-ask strain.
 Odd: with an odd number of keycards, bid the void suit above step 5, but below 6 trumps; bid 6 trumps with a higher void (unlikely).
 After a void reply, there can be no king ask. The next bid below 6 trump, if any, confirms all the keycards and asks for the trump queen.
- G. EKB is a jump into a void suit above the RKB ask, with 0, 1, 2, 2+, 3 replies, excluding the ace of the void suit. If available, the king ask is the cheaper of the void and the suit above trumps, skipping the queen ask, if any. When no trump suit has been agreed, the suit last bid (or shown) is trump.
- H. Directly over our preempt through 4 ♣, we ask for keycards with 4 ♣ [4 ♦ over clubs], with replies: 0, 1, 1+, 2, 2+.
- I. After a 2 NT opening bid or equivalent, responder's 3 ♠ bid is a puppet to 3 NT. Responder's 4 ♣ or 4 ♦ is then crosswood, asking about the other minor. (See page 203 for more.)
- J. After a 1 NT opening, responder's 3 ♦ bid is forcing to game, with at least 5-5 minors. Opener often bids a double-stopper, or 3 NT to play (responder may remove to a 3-card major). Opener's 5 of a minor is a sign-off; 4 of a minor sets trump, and the next step asks for keycards.
- K. If they preempt over our major-suit opening, we apply our choice in "Overcall of Our Major Suit Opening – Immediate 4 NT" on page 248.
- L. A natural notrump bid implicitly raises partner's minor suit, but a diamond-bidder's non-jump club bid cancels this – no problem at 2 ♣ or 3 ♣. After { 1 ♦ – 3 NT }, we apply the decision we made in "Diamonds and Then Clubs" on page 249.
- M. Over 2 NT, responder's 3 ♦ followed by 3 ♠ shows 5-5 majors with slam interest. Opener's 4 ♣ is RKB ♥ and 4 ♦ is RKB ♠.

Super Gerber. 4 ♣ is not a jump over 3 NT, so it's not Gerber (but see the special case on page 216). A *jump* to 5 ♣ is super Gerber for aces, with the same replies, a level higher. There is no king ask after super Gerber. It's possible to play super Gerber over bids other than 3 NT, but don't. Among other risks, it could be confused with EKB.

Conclusion. Technically superior methods can supersede Gerber completely, but on rare occasion, super Gerber can be useful, e.g.,

(3 ♠) – 3 NT – (Pass) – 5 ♣

Backstory

John Gerber introduced this convention to North America in 1938. It was published in Europe by Dr. William Konigsberger and Wim Nye in 1936.

After asking for kings, I used to think that 6 ♣ was Gerber for number of queens! We probably extrapolated, when we learned Gerber in our teens. 6 ♣ might be the final contract, so it should not be used to ask for anything.

After more than a decade since starting to play crosswood, I used Gerber for the first time in 2023 – twice – with a club suit headed by K-Q-J. Gerber does have advantages. When partner opens in notrump, Gerber can reveal less to the opponents than setting up for and using crosswood. However, if we are not looking at the king and queen of our long suit, Gerber is a bad bargain.

An online scan of at least two decades of the Bridge Bulletin turned up suggestions for use of super Gerber only directly over a natural 3 NT.

♦ Alternative Methods

¹²⁻²⁵² **After a quantitative 4 NT.** An intuitive method is to treat a quantitative 4 NT as “optional Blackwood,” and show the number of aces when accepting. Experience has shown this to be an inferior method. It's more important to find a fit and play a stronger contract.

Tom Breur wrote: “as far as I know almost all top pairs now play some sort of ‘optional RKCB,’ especially when slam is being bid in competition. They then give up the first step to say ‘I have a minimum in context.’”

¹³⁻²⁵² **Gerber variations.** Goldman, Hardy and the *Encyclopedia* all have variations on Gerber, if the reader wants to go down that rabbit hole.

¹⁴⁻²⁵² **Gerber for kings.** Historically, asking for kings only promised three aces. Before RKB, missing an ace, we might need to know about kings to decide.

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Two-Suited Overcalls

The next few topics describe how to intervene when an opponent opens the bidding in a suit. A highlight, “Doubler Has 3-Card Support,” is coming, and we need a foundation for that.

Michaels, Bailey & Unusual Notrump

Two-suited overcalls are a great place to start. They mean we do not need to overcall twice to show our shape, perhaps with the opponents fighting all the way. Two-suiters are a major offensive threat, since they often take more tricks than their high cards would indicate. Tournament bridge partnerships commonly play these two-suited overcalls, promising at least five cards in each suit:

Unusual notrump: a jump to 2 NT over any opening bid shows the two lowest unbid suits. \diamond^o

Michaels cue-bid: over a major suit, the cue-bid shows the other major and either minor; over the opening bid of a minor suit, the cue-bid at two of opener’s suit shows both majors.

Some use these bids wildly, but I suggest they be reserved for hands where our side may actually declare the hand. After we make such a bid, declaring a hand against us will be easier. Consider these hands, after our right-hand opponent (RHO) opens 1 \diamond :

1. \spadesuit Q J 8 4 2 \heartsuit A J 9 7 3 \diamond 8 4 \clubsuit 8 [7 losers]
2. \spadesuit K Q J 8 2 \heartsuit A J 9 7 3 \diamond 8 4 \clubsuit 8 [6 losers]
3. \spadesuit K Q J 8 2 \heartsuit A K J 9 3 \diamond 8 4 \clubsuit 8 [5 losers]
4. \spadesuit K Q J 8 2 \heartsuit A K J 9 3 \diamond A 4 \clubsuit 8 [4 losers]

Losing trick count only applies when an eight-card fit has been found, so the counts above are preliminary. A normal opening bid in a major suit often has seven losers; clearly, two-suiters have extra playing strength. With a good fit, we raise as high as we can!

Mike Lawrence recommends a minimum of eight working HCP nonvulnerable, 10 when vulnerable, for a Michaels bid over a minor-suit opening; partner can get out at the two level. Vulnerable, or when we might have to play at the three level, we should have more

length, strength, and/or texture to our suits. Hand [1] would be a minimum nonvulnerable Michaels cue-bid of 2 ♣ or 2 ♦. With hands [2-4], we would take a Michaels cue-bid at any vulnerability. ♦¹

RHO opens one of our suits. When opener on our right bids one of our long suits, we strain to overcall in our second suit. Our high cards should be well-placed, and partner (with a fit) should be able to ruff RHO's suit after LHO. There is no special bid for this situation.

Two-Suiter Issues

Strength. It's generally more important to find the correct strain than to find the perfect level. Accordingly, we have a single, wide range of strength for a two-suited bid:

Rule: Make a two-suited bid with any hand that is strong enough.

Length. Some pairs make direct two-suited overcalls on 5-4 or even 4-4, but we'll leave them to fend for themselves. Those hands can be handled with a takeout double, a simple overcall, or passed.

Rule: A direct two-suited overcall of a suit opening bid promises at least five cards in each of two suits.

This is particularly important, when playing the single range: sorting out the strength will be tough enough, even with 5-5 promised.

5-5 and longer hands really need a two-suited bid. Never make a takeout double of a single suit with such a hand, however strong!

Coverage for two-suiters. ♦² Our methods handle the ambiguity of our Michaels cue-bid over a major suit. From a coverage perspective, this is the *good* case: all three possible two-suiters (of new suits) are covered. A jump to 2 NT shows both minors, and Michaels shows either of the two major-minor hands.

When the opening bid is one of a minor, a Michaels cue-bid shows both majors, excellent when it comes up, but not so good for coverage. The unusual 2 NT covers hearts and the other minor.

5. ♠ A J 9 7 3 ♥ 8 ♦ 8 4 ♣ K Q J 8 2

With spades and the other minor, over a minor suit opening (1 ♦ here), we must overcall in one suit and hope to get a chance to bid

the other. Overcalling in the minor suit can be effective, particularly when the major suit is ordinary and the minor suit would be a better opening lead, as with hand [5].

Bailey cue-bid: Over the opening bid of a minor suit, the Bailey cue-bid can replace Michaels; it shows spades and another suit. This addresses the coverage issue for Michaels, but, as with Michaels over a major suit, we do not immediately know the second suit.

Michaels Cue-Bid in a Major Suit

Overcaller's Michaels cue-bid in opener's major suit shows the other major and an unknown minor. Our continuations are:

Adv1	OC1	Advances of Michaels over Major (Major+Minor)	
M		Bid known major at an appropriate level, based on fit.	
2 NT		Invitational or better, asks for the minor.	
3 ♣		Weak hand, pass or correct.	
	Pass	[3 ♣] Minor is clubs.	
	3 ♣	[over 2 NT] Minor is clubs.	
	3 ♦	Minor is diamonds.	
	3 ♥	Strong hand, minor is clubs.	
	3 ♠	Strong hand, minor is diamonds.	
3 ♦		Limit raise or better in overcaller's major.	
Dble		[of RHO's raise] Limit raise or better in the known major.	

Common
Continuations

○ Michaels Cue-Bid in a Minor Suit

Overcaller's Michaels cue-bid in opener's minor suit shows both major suits. Our continuations are:

Adv1	Advances of Michaels over Minor (Both Majors)	
M	Bid either major at an appropriate level, based on fit.	
2 NT	Natural game invitation, non-forcing.	
3 ♣	Limit raise or better in hearts.	
3 ♦	Limit raise or better spades.	
Dble	[of RHO's raise] Limit raise or better in a major.	

□ Bailey Cue-Bid in a Minor Suit

Overcaller's Bailey cue-bid in opener's minor suit shows spades and either hearts or the other minor. Our continuations are:

Adv1	OC1	Advances of Bailey over Minor (Spades & Lower)
2 ♠		[over 2 ♣] Pass or correct to 2 ♥.
2 ♥		Pass or correct to 2 ♠ (may play better than the minor).
2 ♠		To play, may have been bid in desperation.
2 NT		Invitational or better, asks for the other suit.
	3 om	Non-forcing.
	3 ♥	Non-forcing.
	Cue	Strong with the minor suit.
	3 ♠	Strong with hearts.
3 ♣		[over 2 ♠] Pass or correct to 3 ♥, without fear of 3 level.
3 ♠		[over 2 ♣] Pass or correct to 3 ♥, without fear of 3 level.
3 ♥		Pass or correct to 3 ♠, without fear of 3 level.
♠		Bid spades at an appropriate level, based on fit.
Cue		Limit raise or better in spades.
Dble		[of RHO's raise] Limit raise or better in spades.

Pass or correct situations. If this is our long second suit, we usually pass, but we may raise or cue-bid with a strong hand.

Without a fit, overcaller usually makes the cheaper correction, so that advancer may pass or correct. Cue-bidder bypasses the cheaper correction, bidding spades or the unbid (long) suit, to show a strong hand without the suit bid by advancer.

Over a Bailey cue-bid, all immediate side-suit bids by advancer are pass-or-correct, regardless of level. (Over Michaels, we cannot afford that, because we need 3 ♠ to show a limit raise or better.)

After Michaels or Bailey, we play in one of cue-bidder's suits. The Michaels cue-bidder has promised at least 5-5 distribution, including all unbid major suits. We don't play in the fourth suit, except...

Opponent Doubles: advancer's new suit is to play. Advancer may redouble to ask for cue-bidder's unknown suit.

Other Cases when a cue-bid is Michaels or Bailey: Be consistent, and play Bailey (or not) across all of them, such as:

(1 ♠) – Pass – (1 NT) – 2 ♠

Unusual Notrump

When partner bids the unusual 2 NT, we know both of partner's suits. Here are somewhat standard advances:

Adv1	OC2	Advances of Unusual 2 NT
Known suit		Bid at an appropriate level, based on fit – weak.
Pass of double		No preference - you pick.
Fourth suit		Very good major suit of 6+ cards, invitational.
Double		Penalty.
3 NT		Natural, to play.
Cue-bid		Game or slam try.
	Cheap known	Worst (weak) hand.
	Other known	Not worst (better) hand.
	3 NT	Stopper

Play in the fourth suit after unusual notrump only. Since we know both of overcaller's suits, advancer may bid a strong fourth suit (the unbid major) in an invitational hand.

Stopper over cue-bid. After a cue-bid, it's sensible to bid 3 NT with a stopper in that suit, whether or not we put a priority on the bid.

A Double by the Two-Suited Bidder

With extra length, the cue-bidder may choose to bid again.

A double is reserved for a hand with substantial high card strength, but no more length than originally promised. The hope is to find partner with three or four cards in one of our suits.

However, if partner knows both our suits and has a misfit for both, they may pass, converting our double for penalties.

6. (1 ♣) – 2 ♣ – (3 ♣) – Pass; Pass – ?

♠ K Q J 9 3 ♡ A K 10 6 2 ♢ A 4 ♣ 2

When 2 ♣ is Michaels (majors), double with hand [6] – partner may pass. Playing Bailey, our red suit is not known; partner should bid and not make assumptions about which red suit we hold. Safer would be to bid the second suit, and not put partner to the test.

The Opponents Bid Two Suits at the One Level

(1 ♠) – Pass – (1 ♥) – ?

This is called the *sandwich* position, between two active opponents, both with unlimited values. With only one two-suiter unbid, the unusual 2 NT shows 5-5 in those suits.

An overcall in responder's suit (2 ♥) is natural. The ACBL requires this natural, standard treatment to be alerted.

Cue-bid of opener's suit (2 ♠) – decide this with partner:

- ❑ Standard: “Natural in either suit, if opponents have bid two suits” (SAYC, BWS, and confirmed by 63% on a poll).
- Michaels: 5-5 (or such) in the unbid suits, possibly landing below 2 NT. Some players assume this is standard (poll 27%).
- Lower-longer cue-bid: The two unbid suits, with the lower-ranking longer and at least five cards. (Double shows higher longer, 4-4, or 5-5.)
- ❑ High-five (higher-longer) cue-bid: The two unbid suits, with the higher-ranking at least five cards. (Double shows exactly four cards in the major with four or more in the minor.)

Lower-longer vs. high-five. Both methods work fine when opener's minor is clubs or when we double. However, our cue-bid over opener's diamonds forces us to the three level to play in clubs. With lower-longer, that's our primary suit; maybe we only do that with a 6-bagger. With high-five, clubs is only a secondary target for the 2 ♠ cue-bid, for when partner has four clubs or a singleton in our major.

Sandwich 1 NT. By a passed hand, 1 NT is a 2-suit takeout. ♠⁴

7. ♠ A J 9 7 3 ♥ 8 ♦ 8 4 ♣ K Q J 8 2

8. ♠ K J 7 6 3 ♥ 8 ♦ 8 4 ♣ K J 9 8 2

Pass – (1 ♠) – Pass – (1 ♥)

We won't have hand [7], or we would have opened. 2 NT seems too high on hand [8], so we bid 1 NT, showing shape more than values.

Leaping Michaels

Leaping Michaels uses bids at the four level to show strong two-suited hands, after an opponent has opened the bidding, and *partner has no more than passed*. It works well in all seats. It may be employed in these situations, \diamond^5 when an opponent:

- Opens a natural, weak 2 \diamond , 2 \heartsuit , 2 \spadesuit , or 3 \clubsuit , whether or not it promises a side suit, or over a 2 NT response.
- Opens a natural, intermediate (e.g., Precision) 2 \clubsuit .
- Opens 1 \heartsuit or 1 \spadesuit , and is raised to 2 \heartsuit or 2 \spadesuit .
- Opens 1 \clubsuit or 2 \clubsuit natural, and is raised to 3 \clubsuit .

The Leaping Michaels Bids

The leaping Michaels bids are intended as *forcing to game*, but it's reasonable to hope for a useful card from partner. The bids show two suits of at least five cards each, and are always made at the four level:

Cue-bid. A four-level cue-bid shows two suits of the same rank: either both majors or both minors, whichever applies. For example, after RHO opens 2 \heartsuit , bid 4 \heartsuit holding hand [9]:

9. \spadesuit A 3 \heartsuit - \diamond K Q J 10 7 3 \clubsuit A K J 10 5

Four of a minor. Four of a minor suit shows that minor, plus an unbid major. For example, after a weak 2 \heartsuit opening, bid 4 \clubsuit with:

10. \spadesuit K Q 10 7 3 \heartsuit 9 \diamond A 3 \clubsuit A K J 10 5

Continuations \diamond^6

Advancer usually places the contract in one of partner's suits. We cannot play in advancer's suit; unless agreed otherwise, advancer's bid of a new suit is a slam try in support of one of partner's suits.

When the opponent has bid a minor suit, and the overcaller bids four of the other minor, the major will not be known.

- 4 \diamond , if available, asks overcaller to name the major suit.
- Otherwise, 4 \heartsuit is pass-or-correct, possibly with slam interest in spades (and heart tolerance).
- 4 \spadesuit asks opener to pass or correct to five of the minor, possibly with slam interest in hearts (and spade tolerance).

The Rest of the System

The takeout double is used with a three-suited hand, or a strong one- or one-and-a-half-suiter.

Rule: *Never double a single suit for takeout with a two-suiter.*

Overcall a preempt with a moderate one- or two-suiter.

11. ♠ A 3 ♥ K 7 ♦ K Q 10 7 4 3 ♣ Q 5 3

12. ♠ A 3 ♥ – ♦ K J 10 7 4 3 ♣ A J 10 5 3

After RHO opens 2♥ or 2♠, bid 3♦ holding hand [11 or 12].

Three-level cue-bid. This used with a fistful of tricks but not necessarily points. It asks partner to bid 3 NT with a stopper. ^{◆7}
Lacking a stopper, advancer should bid 4♣ (pass or correct), or perhaps a long, intervening major suit. Should 3 NT not be bid, cue-bidder's new suit is non-forcing.

13. ♠ K 4 ♥ A 7 6 ♦ 2 ♣ A K Q J 9 6 2

Over RHO's weak 2♦, bid 3♦ with hand [13]. Raise 3♥, convert 3♠ to 4♣, pass 4♣. (If the preempt was higher than 2♠, we either double or bid our suit with such a hand.)

Preemptive four of a major. A jump to 4♥ or 4♠ is natural, an attempt to make game on distribution, typically with the high card strength of a normal opening bid.

14. ♠ – ♥ A K 10 9 6 5 3 ♦ K 7 3 2 ♣ Q 9

Over a weak 2♠, jump 4♥ on hand [14]. Advancer should seldom try for slam. *Discuss this plan with partner – it's not standard.*

Jump to 4 NT. This means whatever it would, had the opponents never bid. For us, that means 4 NT asks for specific aces.

More basic investigations. We'll resume this topic in "Over Their Weak Two-Bid" on page 282, after we talk about one-bids in detail.

Backstory

Michaels is the first topic in the first chapter of Mike Lawrence's book, *Takeout Doubles*. Here is the extent of what he says about his plan:

I admit that partner may not get to find out how strong you are, but you gain a lot anyway since you can put bidding pressure on the opponents. Anytime your partner has a fit, you can jerk the bidding to the three or four level in a hurry and leave the opponents guessing.

Improved continuations after a Michaels cue-bid came from Jeff Meckstroth via Al Muggia. Lawrence described the two-suited bidder's double.

The responses to the Bailey cue-bid presented here are mine, designed in the context of our Meckstroth advances to the Michaels cue-bid of a major suit.

My article "Two-Suited Overcalls" presents long-time proponent Michael Angelo Ravera's methods. He uses Bailey to refer to both the cue-bid of a minor and of a major. Combined with unusual notrump, he calls the whole thing BUNT. Ravera credits Evan Bailey and his partner Ed Barlow. Ravera's decades-old advances of a BUNT bid differ from our more modern methods.

Jeff Tang and Richard Pavlicek described unusual notrump. Pavlicek had optional features that he removed from his current version in 2015, when he added the priority to bid 3 NT with a stopper over a cue-bid.

Lower-longer was invented by GLM Curtis Cheek. That name and the others are mine. High-five is more accurate, but higher-longer contrasts better.

Some form of leaping Michaels has been in my repertoire since at least 2001, originally developed from hearing the name; Gary and I have had the same agreements since 2014 or earlier. The 2020 update of my "Leaping and Non-Leaping Michaels" article has been totally superseded by this chapter – the non-leaping methods are in a note below.

Gary brought the preemptive four of a major to our partnership. GLM Lloyd Arvedon also plays this way.

◆ Alternative Methods

⁰⁻²⁵⁷ **Unusual notrump always minors.** Some pairs play that a jump 2 NT overcall always shows both minors. This is fine, when it applies, but surely the two lowest unbid suits are more likely, in general. Furthermore, essentially ignoring opener's minor suit means that, instead of three possible two-suiters to show, we now have all six. This is not a worthy alternative to showing the two lowest, but some play it that way.

Suppose an opponent opens a minor suit that shows any balanced hand within range, but could be long in the suit, perhaps a Precision 1 \diamond or a short club. The odds are not as high as over a “better minor,” that our two-suiter will not include that minor suit. Showing the two lowest unbid suits still seems better.

¹⁻²⁵⁸ **Two-suiter range.** According to my poll on Bridge Winners, the so-called “mini-max” split range – only hands weaker or stronger than a normal opening bid – is the way of the past: single range 73%, split range 24%, etc.

²⁻²⁵⁸ **Other systems.** Lots of other methods are out there. See my article, “Two-Suited Overcalls,” which covers Bailey, Rossi, Ghestem, top-and-bottom cue-bids, and more. Rossi requires giving up the cheapest jump overcall to have a third 2-suited overcall. Ghestem, which is quite popular in Europe, instead uses 3 \clubsuit for this purpose; this can get the auction too high. Either can suffer from a forgetful weak jump overcall. “Reverse Rossi” may be the technically best approach; in practice, Bailey should be more reliable.

Lower-longer vs. high-five cue-bid. High-five focuses on the length of the major suit. When we double, we can play either suit at the two level, over a 1 \diamond opening as well as over 1 \clubsuit . With a mediocre 5-card major over diamonds, it is wiser to pass (hoping to back in later), rather than making a high-five cue-bid. At least when we do cue-bid, partner knows that doubleton support provides a bolt hole.

15. \spadesuit J 10 \heartsuit A K 7 6 5 \diamond A 9 7 5 \clubsuit Q 5

(1 \clubsuit) – Pass – (1 \spadesuit) – ?

On hand [15], either lower-longer or high-five should work. Swap our red suit holdings, and we are still fine, as the 2 \clubsuit cue-bid always works.

16. \spadesuit A 7 6 4 3 \heartsuit A 2 \diamond 8 4 \clubsuit A 8 7 6

(1 \diamond) – Pass – (1 \heartsuit) – ?

On hand [16], a lower-longer double is fairly safe. A high-five cue-bid could have us playing 3 \clubsuit with these ratty suits. We have two imperfect choices, pass and hope to back in later, or double as if 4-4. Swap our black suit holdings, and lower-longer gives us no decent plan, while a high-five double is fairly safe. Advantage, high-five.

Playing either cue-bid, it’s better to have some extra strength to double on only 4-4. Playing neither, we double on 4-4, 5=4, 4=5, etc.

With the high-five cue-bid, the double feels more traditional/familiar: implying exactly four cards in the major and letting us out at two clubs.

⁴⁻²⁶² **Sandwich 1 NT.** Some pairs play this 1 NT overcall by an unpassed hand for the two unbid suits, but we retain it as a natural, strong, balanced overcall.

⁵⁻²⁶³ **Non-leaping Michaels.** This extension of leaping Michaels gives up minor-suit overcalls over weak 3-bids, to permit bidding strong two-suiters using the same methods. It may be applied when an opponent:

- opens a natural weak bid of 3 \diamond , 3 \heartsuit , or 3 \spadesuit .
- opens 1 \diamond , 1 \heartsuit , or 1 \spadesuit and is raised preemptively to 3 \diamond , 3 \heartsuit , or 3 \spadesuit .
- opens a weak 2 \diamond , 2 \heartsuit , or 2 \spadesuit and is raised to 3 \diamond , 3 \heartsuit , or 3 \spadesuit .

It's one thing to agree to play non-leaping Michaels, and it's another to remember to not overcall a three-bid with four of a long minor suit. I have never played non-leaping Michaels.

When non-leaping Michaels applies, we won't have a natural overcall in a minor below game. We will need to bid 3 NT with a stopper, jump to game, double, or pass. It makes sense to treat the jump to game as an attempt to make game on distribution, and to double with stronger hands.

⁶⁻²⁶³ **Advanced Continuations.** The 4 \clubsuit and 4 \diamond leaping-Michaels bids can be inverted to deal with the mess when the opponent has bid clubs. Basically, this means that *over both clubs and diamonds*, we play:

- 4 \clubsuit The unbid minor and a major.
 Advancer's 4 \diamond asks for the major. *Not to play in diamonds!*
- 4 \diamond Both majors.

A common theme is to use the cheapest off-suit or 4 NT to show a good raise in the major (or higher-ranking) suit, which might permit overcaller to ask for keycards. The next off-suit or 4 NT shows a good raise in the lower-ranking suit. These meanings could be reversed or otherwise optimized.

An alternative is to prioritize keycarding. Once both suits are known, it makes sense to play kickback for a single major suit: 4 NT asks for keycards when spades are trump, and 4 \spadesuit asks for keycards when hearts are trump. Kit Woolsey plays the cheapest artificial bid as RKB; the other artificial bid is an unspecified slam try (often for a minor).

⁷⁻²⁶⁴ **Regular Michaels.** Some experts, including GLM Disa Eythorsdottir, play that over a natural 2 \clubsuit or 2 \diamond opening – or perhaps any weak two bid – the three-level cue-bid is regular Michaels, not good enough to leap. These folks are willing to give up the asking cue-bid on example hand [13].

Common Interventions over One of a Suit

The Overcall in a Suit

When contemplating an overcall at the one level, the vulnerability matters a great deal. We expect partner to raise with support and some values. When vulnerable, overcaller should have something like an opening hand, since we don't want to get hammered up there.

Nonvulnerable, an overcall could be based on as few as eight points, with a good suit. A one-level overcall is usually based on a 5-card or longer suit.

1. ♠ K Q J 7 ♥ J 2 ♦ Q 9 6 2 ♣ A 10 7

With an opening hand that lacks support for an unbid suit, the overcall could be a chunky 4-card suit. Bid 1 ♠ over 1 ♦ on hand [1].

For a two-level overcall, a 6-card suit is best, and partner might choose to raise on honor-doubleton. While a chunky 5-card suit is common, we need a good reason for it. The upper bound for an overcall is 17 HCP – or more! With the right shape, overcaller may follow up with a takeout double.

2. ♠ A Q J 3 2 ♥ 4 ♦ K J 3 ♣ Q J 7 4

Don't make a takeout double, holding a 5-card major that we could overcall at the one level, unless we are strong enough to bid the suit later. With hand [2], bid 1 ♠ over 1 ♥, planning to double 2 ♥ for takeout.

3. ♠ J 7 5 3 2 ♥ 4 ♦ A Q 3 ♣ A Q J 4

On hand [3], follow the same plan, starting with 1 ♠ over 1 ♥. With a lesser hand, still overcall, but don't re-enter the auction.

4. ♠ 4 ♥ J 7 5 3 2 ♦ A Q 3 ♣ A Q J 4

After a 1 ♠ opening bid, the holder of a modest heart suit can have a tough decision. Make a takeout double on hand [4].

5. ♠ 4 ♥ A Q J 3 2 ♦ K J 3 ♣ Q J 7 4

But don't lose a decent heart suit in a decent hand; overcall 2 ♥ on hand [5].

6. ♠ – ♥ K Q 9 7 4 ♦ A K 10 3 ♣ A K 9 7

7. ♠ – ♥ K Q 9 7 4 ♦ K 10 7 3 ♣ A J 9 7

Avoid making the *secondary* double with a void. Double a 1 ♠ opening with hands such as [6 & 7], despite holding five decent hearts.

As mentioned earlier, we strain to overcall with length in opener's suit. Our overcall implies a lack of interest in partner's suits – we can override that with a later double.

Advancing an Overcall \diamond^8

Advancing Partner's Overcall		
Adv1	Major suit overcall	Minor suit overcall
Pass	Not enough for one of the other actions.	
1 NT	A free bid of 1 NT promises 8 to 10 HCP; this one could be 10 to 11 with a singleton in the overcall suit.	
2 NT	<input type="checkbox"/> Natural invitation, or <input type="radio"/> our best raise (4-card limit raise or better); but natural on { (1 ♠) – 2 ♥ – (P) – 2 NT }	Natural invitation.
Raise	<i>Support with support.</i> We have no slow-down raise, so the raise has a wide range, about 5 to 9 HCP.	
Jump raise	<input type="checkbox"/> mixed (4-card), or <input type="radio"/> weak.	<input type="checkbox"/> mixed (4-card), or <input type="radio"/> weak.
Cue Opener	<input type="checkbox"/> LR+ (3+ cards), or <input type="radio"/> LR+ (exactly 3 cards).	Limit raise or better.
Jump Cue	<input type="checkbox"/> an invitational splinter (shortness, 4-card support). <input type="radio"/> a mixed (4-card constructive) raise; for example: (1 ♣) – 1 ♥ – (Pass) – 3 ♣ ♠ Q 10 3 ♥ Q 9 7 4 ♦ A 10 8 3 ♣ 9 7	
New Suit	Bidding a new suit is <i>forcing</i> – advancer's only forcing action that does not promise support. This all fits, as an overcall discourages us from bidding a new suit.	
JS	A jump shift is invitational and fit-showing.	
Double	If RHO <i>raises</i> , a <i>responsive</i> double shows unbid suits. Since overcaller implied no interest in them, we should be 5-5 or have at least invitational values.	

In the chart, all the recommended (□) features or all the alternative (○) features play well together. Use care with mix & match.

If RHO bids a new suit over the overcall, we still cue-bid *opener's* suit as a raise. Since responder's suit could be junk, our bid of that suit is natural (and alertable). \diamond^9

The Snapdragon Double

This special double can be a real winner. On our convention card we write "A-B-C-X, no jumps." This means LHO opens the bidding in one suit, partner overcalls in another suit, and RHO bids a third suit – all bids without jumps. The snapdragon double occurs on auctions in this range: \diamond^{10}

A. (1 ♣) – 1 \diamond – (1 \heartsuit) – Double

B. (1 \spadesuit) – 2 \heartsuit – (3 \diamond) – Double

The double shows the fourth suit, constructive values, and tolerance for the second suit (partner's).

8. \spadesuit A J 7 5 2 \heartsuit J 7 4 \diamond K 3 \clubsuit 9 8 4

In auction [A], the double shows constructive values. Holding hand [8], our double gets our values across cheaply and safely.

9. \spadesuit 9 4 \heartsuit J 7 4 \diamond A 10 \clubsuit A J 10 9 7 2

At the three level, the double tends to be based on 6-3, somewhat like a fit-showing non-jump, perhaps hand [9] on auction [B]. Partner might convert the double to penalties with a misfit for clubs. Note the poor quality of the 3-card heart support – we don't want a heart lead.

10. (1 \heartsuit) – 2 \diamond – (3 \clubsuit) – Double

\spadesuit K J 10 9 7 2 \heartsuit 9 4 \diamond J 7 4 \clubsuit A 10

While example [9] is contrived, example [10] is right on the money. We don't want to get hammered at 3 \spadesuit , when we could have played 3 \diamond , but we need to show that suit!

The 1 NT Overcall

With a balanced hand of about 16 to 18 HCP that includes a stopper in opener's suit, we overcall 1 NT.

- ❑ “Systems on,” sometimes called “front of card,” is commonly played over 1 NT. These systems are both more familiar and more powerful.
- Systems off, with a cue-bid as Stayman, lets advancer sign off in a minor suit at the two level. However, the only invitational sequences start with 2 NT: new suits are weak at the two level and forcing at the three level. There is also an increased chance of wrong-siding the contract.

◆ Alternative Methods

⁸⁻²⁶⁹ **Transfer advances.** See my article, “Transfer Advances of Our Overcall,” for an introduction to methods played by many experts.

⁹⁻²⁷⁰ **A-B-C-Q.** RHO's new suit over partner's overcall provides a potential second cue-bid. When the overcall is 1 \diamond , it's standard for the opponent (responder) to bid a single 4-card major, and reserve the negative double for both majors or possibly 4-3. However, that's not what we would do.

Over an opponent's 1 \diamond overcall, our “Free Bid at One of a Major” (page 115) promises at least a 5-card suit. When the opponents respond our way (they are other believers in “The Death of the Doomsday Scenario” by Mel Colchamiro), playing a natural overcall in responder's major makes little sense. We could play that the cheaper cue-bid shows 3-card support, and the higher cue-bid, 4+ cards.

Most pairs respond in a major suit with four small, but fewer will do that as a free bid, even when a 4-card suit is permitted. Nevertheless, the author suspects that the cost of switching both cue-bids to being raises might be high, since we'll need to remember it, and also to remember that the cue-bid in responder's suit is still natural when partner has passed (instead of overcalling). The potential gain is not an ability to bid more hands, but a fine distinction between 3- and 4-card LR+ hands.

¹⁰⁻²⁷⁰ **Snapdragon at the one level.** Mike Lawrence gives a half-hearted recommendation of snapdragon in *Double!* He recommends that it be played only at the one level, where a penalty double is not needed. Many years ago, I proposed A-B-C-X, no jumps, and we have never regretted it.

The Typical Takeout Double

The typical takeout double of an opening bid contains at least 3-card support for all three unbid suits. Advancer acts accordingly.

Advancer's cue-bid is at least invitational to game, often with doubt as to strain, such as two four-card majors.

Advancer Plans to Draw Opener's Trump

Advancer passes only when planning to draw trump and collect a penalty. Doubler must lead a trump – borrow one, if necessary!

- a. ♠ K Q J 10 8 ♥ A 7 2 ♦ 4 2 ♣ 8 7 6

Hand [a] is a good pass of a takeout double of 1 ♠.

Typical Advances

The top priority for advancer is to bid a major suit.

- b. ♠ 9 7 3 ♥ Q 9 7 4 2 ♦ A 6 3 ♣ 7 4

- c. ♠ 9 7 3 2 ♥ 9 7 4 2 ♦ 10 3 2 ♣ J 7

- d. ♠ 9 7 3 2 ♥ 9 7 4 2 ♦ Q J 10 9 ♣ 7

With hands [b–d], advancer bids 2 ♥ over the takeout double of 1 ♠. If advancer does not have a major suit, then notrump is next:

○ **Standard: A 1 NT advance shows a stopper and some points.**

□ **A 1 NT advance shows the same values as a free bid of 1 NT:**
a stopper and about 8 to 10 HCP. ♦¹¹

- e. ♠ K 9 3 ♥ Q 7 4 ♦ K 10 3 2 ♣ 7 4 3

Advance 1 NT with hand [e] over a double of 1 ♠.

- f. ♠ 9 7 3 2 ♥ Q 7 4 ♦ K 3 ♣ J 7 4 3

Advancer's third choice is a minor suit, 2 ♣ over spades on hand [f].

Lacking both a stopper and an unbid 4-card suit, advancer should bid a cheap 3-card suit.

Higher suit of equals. Since we might wish (or be forced) to bid again, we usually choose the *higher* suit of equal length and rank.

Important: Advancing a takeout double is fundamentally different from responding to an opening bid or overcall. Doubler is not forced to act again, and usually must pass a non-jump advance, even if an opponent bids. Therefore, advancer bids the higher of equal suits, being prepared to compete (or rebid, if doubler does act) in the lower suit next.

g. ♠ 9 7 3 2 ♥ Q 7 4 ♦ 9 3 2 ♣ J 7 4

When advancer has to bid a three-card suit, a minor suit is less encouraging than a major. On hand [g], clubs and diamonds are suits of equal rank and length. Over the takeout double of 1 ♠, 2 ♣ is acceptable (the jack and cheaper), but 2 ♦ can work out much better.

Advancer Has Encouraging Values

Advancer should make a jump shift with a working 9 to 11 points and at least a four-card suit. We discount honors in opener's suit and add a point for each card over four in our suit.

h. ♠ 9 7 3 ♥ 9 7 4 2 ♦ A K J 3 ♣ K 7

i. ♠ 9 7 3 ♥ Q 9 7 4 ♦ A K 9 3 ♣ J 7

j. ♠ 9 7 3 ♥ Q 9 7 4 2 ♦ A Q 9 ♣ 7 4

k. ♠ 9 7 3 ♥ Q J 9 7 4 2 ♦ A 9 ♣ 7 4

When partner doubles 1 ♠, jump to 3 ♥ on any of hands [h to k]. A jump advance to the two level can be a tad weaker than to the three level. Consider 4 ♥ on hand [k]!

After a jump advance. A jump advance is not forcing; doubler's raise below game (if available) is *invitational*; doubler's new suit is forcing, and doubler's cue-bid is forcing to game.

Advancer's notrump bids. From above, we know that a 1 NT advance shows about 8 to 10 HCP, with a stopper. Advancer's jump to 2 NT shows about 11 to 12 HCP. 3 NT shows a good 13 or more, or perhaps less with a good, long suit we expect to run.

Advancer's Free Bid. If RHO raises opener to the two level, advancer should bid with any decent excuse. If we pass, partner will usually pass as well; a free bid releases doubler to compete. Since a free bid

shows some values, it is no longer necessary to jump with a marginal hand. When partner doubles 1♥, and RHO raises to 2♥, bid 2♠ with either of these hands:

l. ♠ 9 7 6 3 2 ♥ 7 4 2 ♦ 9 3 ♣ A 7 4

m. ♠ K 7 3 2 ♥ 7 4 2 ♦ Q 3 ♣ K 10 4 3

Doubler Has 4-Card Support

Advancer may have no values at all for a non-jump forced bid in a suit; with a normal hand, doubler must pass. Any action, even if the opponents bid, shows extra values. ♦¹²

With at least 4-card support, doubler may raise advancer's suit in these cases:

- Holding 16 or more support points, doubler raises to the appropriate level. ♦¹³
- If advancer has taken a free bid, doubler may compete in advancer's suit.

Rule: *Doubler's actions other than a raise start at 18 HCP!*

Advancer's Responsive Double

When RHO raises opener over partner's takeout double, advancer's double is takeout, asking partner to pick one of the two suits with the same rank. ♦¹⁴ For a typical original double, partner has at least 3-card support for all three unbid suits; this responsive double by advancer promises 4-4, and hopes to land in the better fit. If one suit were 5-cards, we would just bid it.

n. ♠ Q 9 7 2 ♥ Q 7 4 3 ♦ K 3 2 ♣ 7 4

(1 m) – Double – (2 m) – ?

Double with hand [n], when a minor suit is opened, doubled and raised. The should get us into the correct major.

(1♥) – Double – (2♥) – ?

When the opponents are bidding a major suit, just bid the other major on [n]. Lacking a major to bid, we would double with 4-4 minors.

♦ Alternative Methods

¹¹⁻²⁷² **1 NT with a bad hand.** Mike Lawrence says to advance 1 NT over a double of 1 ♠ with as few as four HCP, perhaps:

♠ Q 9 7 2 ♡ Q 7 4 ♦ 9 3 2 ♣ J 7 4

It's not that he likes 1 NT here, it's just that anything else is worse, to him. Don't worry, 1 NT can be plenty bad, and easy to double. The typical takeout double is looking to play in an unbid suit, not in notrump; doubler's ideal holding in opener's suit is a singleton. As advancer, our potential stoppers will be poorly placed in front of opener. Playing our way, we bid 2 ♦, prepared to bid 3 ♣ over a cue-bid by partner.

¹²⁻²⁷⁴ **Raise with four:** Some pairs play that doubler's raise shows 4-card support, but not extra strength. I used to play this way with Phyllis Rye, and it worked fine. This helps in the mix-it-up of matchpoint pairs, but doubler will need to jump raise to show extra values with 4-card support.

¹³⁻²⁷⁴ **Equal-level conversion (ELC):** Playing this method, if the takeout doubler removes the advance in the lowest ranking unbid suit to the next unbid suit, it shows five cards in that suit and four in the highest unbid suit. This removal promises neither real support for advancer's suit nor extra values. This is most often employed after the double of a major suit, where removing a 2 ♣ advance to 2 ♦ shows five or more diamonds and four cards in the unbid major. It could also be used with four spades and five or more hearts, over clubs. ELC is the third topic in the first chapter of Mike Lawrence's *Takeout Doubles*.

¹⁴⁻²⁷⁴ **Two places to play.** Some pairs agree to play that this responsive double of RHO's raise shows at least two places to play, not two suits of the same rank.

Example – “The Bidding Box” (1), June 2016 *Bulletin*:

(1 ♣) – Double – (3 ♣) – Double

♠ J 3 ♡ K Q 9 4 ♦ A K 8 4 2 ♣ 7 6

The second “double was forward-going and noncommittal regarding strain.” This complements the cue-bid of 4 ♣, which asks partner to pick a major.

Takeout Double with a Strong Hand

For our purposes, a *strong hand* usually contains at least 18 HCP. Unless doubler has 4-card support for advancer's major, game is only likely over a simple advance when doubler has a strong hand.

Directly over an opening bid, our action with a strong hand might be:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Two-suited bid | With two suits of at least five cards. |
| 3 NT | With a long, running suit and a sure stopper in at least opener's suit. |
| Jump cue-bid | In opener's <i>major</i> suit, with a long, running suit, to ask for a stopper in opener's suit, a <i>Western cue-bid</i> . (The jump cue-bid in opener's minor suit should be natural, preemptive, and alertable.) |
| Overcall | Sometimes it's correct to overcall with a strong hand: with a two-suiter, but no corresponding two-suited bid available; or when shortness in an unbid major suit makes a double risky. |
| Takeout double | Unlimited strength and:
A. A balanced hand with a stopper, too strong to overcall 1 NT;
B. At least 3-card support for all three unbid suits – normal takeout double shape; or
C. A <i>good, one-suited hand</i> (GOSH). |
| Trap pass | With no better action, usually long in opener's suit. |

Having finally said all that I plan to about the other strong hands, at last it's time for the meat of the issue, the takeout double.

Doubler Is Too Strong for a 1 NT Overcall

With a balanced hand that includes a stopper in opener's suit, we may be too strong to overcall 1 NT, so we double.

After any advance, we simply bid notrump at an appropriate level. Doubler no longer promises 3-card support for unbid suits. Advancer continues as if opener had overcalled in notrump.

With a strong, balanced hand with no stopper, options are imperfect: pass; overcall a chunky 4-card suit; or double and cue-bid next.

Doubler Has a Good, One-Suited Hand (GOSH)

With a GOSH, after any advance, we usually bid our long, strong suit at an appropriate level. We no longer promise any support for other suits, but we may have a 4-card side suit not named by advancer.

On a rare occasion, doubler may have a super-GOSH, so strong that slam is possible opposite a simple advance to the takeout double. With such a hand, doubler's plan is to cue-bid next, and then to *jump* \diamond^{15} into the suit – usually to game or higher.

1. ♠ – ♥ A K Q J 9 7 4 ♦ A 3 ♣ A Q J 7

With hand [1], after doubling 1 ♠, merely jumping to 4 ♥ over a simple 2 ♦ advance could miss a slam. It's reasonable to cue-bid on such a powerful hand, *so long as we jump next*, forcing to game. (We'll see that a non-jump is fit-showing, in our very modern methods.) Bidding this way shows a hand with at least 11 playing tricks, at most 2 losers. Opposite the ♣ K, we want to be in slam. With lesser hand [2], don't cue-bid, just rebid 4 ♥:

2. ♠ – ♥ A K Q 10 9 7 4 ♦ A 3 ♣ A J 9 7

Doubler Has 4-Card Support

As we know, it takes at least 16 support points and 4-card support to raise a simple advance one level.

With a stronger hand that includes 4-card support for advancer's major suit, we normally bid the suit at an appropriately higher level. With a super-raise – we might have a slam opposite a simple advance – we cue-bid, and then *jump* \diamond^{16} raise to game or higher.

3. ♠ – ♥ K Q 10 7 4 ♦ A K Q 10 ♣ A K 9 7

1 ♠	Dble	Pass	2 ♥
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	3 ♥
Pass	5 ♥		

After we double 1 ♠ and catch a 2 ♥ advance, we cue-bid 2 ♠ and jump in hearts on hand [3].

This sequence asks advancer to bid slam with one winner, in this case, either ♥ J and ♣ Q, or ♥ A. On some other deal, any non-spade king would suffice.

Doubler Has 3-Card Support

The whole start of this chapter leads up to this section. This is good stuff!

With only 3-card support in a strong hand, we never raise. ♦¹⁷

a. ♠ 9 8 7 3 ♥ 8 6 3 2 ♦ K 3 ♣ A J 2

Suppose 1 ♠ is doubled, and we advance 2 ♥ on hand [a]. When opener's raise to 3 ♥ promises 4-card support, bidding 4 ♥ should be automatic. However, should doubler have only 3-card support, even 3 ♥ may be a poor contract.

Two of opener's suit is available: The two-level cue-bid of opener's suit implies exactly 3-card support for advancer's suit, in a strong hand. Doubler may later cancel that implication with a jump or notrump bid, but such a hand is unusual. Advancer assumes doubler has 3-card support. Consider this auction:

1 ♠	Dble	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	?

Weak Advancer's repeat of the original suit over the cue-bid is weak and does not promise extra length. A new, lower-ranking suit is also weak. Suppose we hold stinker [b]:

b. ♠ 9 7 3 2 ♥ Q 7 4 ♦ 9 3 2 ♣ J 7 4

Diamonds may be a 3-3 fit, so suggest an alternative with 3 ♣. With more diamonds than clubs, rebid 3 ♦.

Invitational Advancer's top priority over the cue bid is to bid 2 NT with a stopper and some values, as that may produce game in 3 NT. Hand [c] is a minimum for 2 NT:

c. ♠ Q 9 7 3 ♥ Q 7 4 ♦ 9 3 2 ♣ J 7 4

If available (perhaps a minor suit was opened), a jump to three of advancer's suit shows five cards and some points.

Stronger Advancer's jump to game shows some points and a suit of six or more cards. If doubler happened to be slamming, they bid their suit. Advancer's cue-bid is forcing to game.

Any new suit that bypasses advancer's first suit is natural and forcing: four or more cards, if that makes sense, or a value in the suit.

4. "The Bidding Box" (7), March 2023 *Bulletin*:

Both vulnerable.

South deals and opens 2 \diamond .

West

\spadesuit A Q J 5 3

\heartsuit Q J 6

\diamondsuit Q

\clubsuit A Q 10 5

East

\spadesuit 4

\heartsuit K 8 7 3

\diamondsuit 10 9 2

\clubsuit K 9 6 3 2

We get it right:

Double [South's 2 \diamond]

2 \heartsuit

3 \diamond [three hearts or huge]

4 \clubsuit [longer clubs, values]

5 \clubsuit [found it!]

Pass

Our aggressive 3 \diamond bid could be a huge hand (slam interest), but usually provides 3-card heart support with interest in game – according to our methods. East has two fine cards and can afford to show the club length. With a weaker hand, East would try to play in 3 \heartsuit ; then if West pushes on with 3 \spadesuit , East can offer 4 \clubsuit .

Responder's second, lower suit *at the same level*, as with hand [b] would show equal length, not additional strength. That is not going on here. 4 \clubsuit shows values – both partners know we can hide in 3 \heartsuit .

Opener has rebid two or three of the opening suit: The two-level cue-bid is no longer available, so a *second double* shows a strong hand with exactly 3-card support. At the three level, 19+ points are required, and advancer has no invitational actions.

Doubler's Cue-Bid-and-Bid

Most of the time, doubler's cue-bid provides 3-card support. \diamond^3
Playing this way, non-jump bids made by doubler after the cue-bid

are *fit-showing*: at least five cards in a hand suitable for playing at least one more of advancer's suit. The final contract might be in advancer's first or second suit, in notrump, or in doubler's primary suit. Advancer might choose to pass that primary suit, for example:

b. ♠ 9 8 7 3 2 ♥ 7 4 ♦ 9 7 3 ♣ J 5 2

1 ♠	Dble	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	3 ♣
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	Pass

Advancer's 3 ♣ shows equal lengths in the minors, trying for the better fit. It does not show any values. A 3 ♥ contract sure looks safer than four of a minor.

After a minor-suit advance: When advancer has bid a major suit, the cue-bid showing 3-card support works well. However, when the advance is in a minor suit, 3 NT may be the best contract. Doubler's cue-bid should not deny 4-card support, when a smattering of useful values will produce game in some other strain.

5. ♠ - ♥ K Q 9 7 4 ♦ A K 10 3 ♣ A K 9 7

RHO opens 1 ♠ and we hold exceptional hand [5]. As mentioned earlier, we double for takeout. If we overcall with these anemic hearts, we may play there in a 5-1 fit, with game or even slam making in either minor suit.

Partner advances 2 ♦. It's somewhat encouraging that partner did not scrape up a 1 NT bid. It must be right to try for game in hearts. But bidding hearts would show a GOSH – pard might again pass us in a 5-1 fit. We cue-bid 2 ♠.

Advancer's first responsibility, over the cue-bid, is to bid 2 NT with a few points that include a stopper. Doubler might have hand [6 or 7]:

6. ♠ 9 2 ♥ K 7 4 ♦ A K 3 ♣ A K J 9 7 [pass 2 NT or try 3 ♣]

7. ♠ 9 2 ♥ A Q 4 ♦ A K 3 ♣ A K Q 9 7 [raise to 3NT]

If advancer bids 2 NT over 0=5=4=4 hand [5], some or all of partner's meager values are wasted. It should be best to sign off in 3 ♦. Advancer may figure out that the reason for bidding this way is a heart suit with spade shortness.

If advancer instead bids 3 \diamond , we bid 3 \heartsuit on hand [5] saying, my hand can support a 4 \diamond contract, but we may have game in hearts – without heart support, please go back to 4 \diamond . (We also bid 3 \heartsuit over advancer’s 3 \clubsuit ; refusing hearts, advancer bids 4 \clubsuit , pick a minor.)

8. \spadesuit 6 \heartsuit A K 9 8 6 2 \diamond A Q J 4 \clubsuit A 3

1 \spadesuit Dble Pass 2 \diamond

Pass 2 \spadesuit Pass 3 \clubsuit

Pass 3 \heartsuit

RHO opens in spades, and we double. If partner advances in clubs, we will bid hearts, treating the hand as a GOSH. When partner bids 2 \diamond , we get to explore with a cue-bid followed by a fit-showing 3 \heartsuit over advancer’s second bid. Here are some hands for advancer:

c. \spadesuit 9 8 7 3 2 \heartsuit 7 4 \diamond 9 7 3 \clubsuit J 5 2 [pass this stinker]

d. \spadesuit 9 7 3 2 \heartsuit 4 \diamond 10 9 7 3 \clubsuit J 5 4 2 [4 \clubsuit , pick a minor]

e. \spadesuit 9 7 3 2 \heartsuit 10 7 4 \diamond K 7 3 \clubsuit 9 5 2 [raise to 4 \heartsuit]

f. \spadesuit 9 8 7 3 2 \heartsuit Q 4 \diamond 9 7 3 \clubsuit J 5 2 [raise to 4 \heartsuit]

Not perfection, but we reliably reach a decent strain. These concepts extend Lawrence’s methods and are well worth playing.

Backstory

Andrew Robson and Oliver Segal call the good, one-suited hand a GOSH.

\diamond Alternative Methods

¹⁵⁻²⁷⁷ **Jump after cue-bid.** The requirement to jump after a cue-bid with the rare super-GOSH is mine, and is not required by others. It’s great to make the primary message of the cue-bid “I have a strong hand with exactly 3-card support” – but then we need to jump with a super-GOSH.

¹⁶⁻²⁷⁷ **The 3-card raise.** Experts on Bridge Winners do not double and then raise with 3-card support, nor, IIRC, did Eddie Kantar. Mike Lawrence avoids the 3-card raise; BWS permits it. Discuss these methods with partner.

¹⁷⁻²⁷⁸ **Doubler’s cue-bid guarantees 3-card support:** Some pairs on Bridge Winners insist on 3-card support for doubler’s cue-bid. I would not recommend this at IMPs, but at matchpoints its simplicity may appeal – just tough it out if we get one of the rare huge hands.

Over Their Weak Two-Bid

Powerful tools over their weak two-bid are described in “Leaping Michaels” on page 263, including the direct cue-bid (asking for a stopper or possibly weak Michaels) and the preemptive jump to four of a major. This section picks up where that left off, presenting more pedestrian investigations.

If our suit is higher than the opening suit, we can make a jump overcall below game with a GOSH. With that strength and a lesser suit, we can double and bid the suit. (Over a one-bid, we do not have a strong jump overcall to enable this distinction.) For example, over a 2 ♠ opening:

9. ♠ A Q J 9 4 ♥ 7 4 ♦ A 3 ♣ A K 9 8

With hand [9], we double the weak 2 ♠ and plan to bid spades.

Lebensohl

We play lebensohl over our double of a weak two bid, as described by Lawrence and many others.

10. ♠ K J 3 ♥ A K J 6 5 ♦ 4 ♣ A Q 8 3 [double; over 2♠, bid 3D]

On hand [10], we double the weak 2 ♠. When partner advances 2 ♥, have space for a 3 ♦ cue-bid – implying 3-card support (unless we then jump to show a super-GOSH). 3 ♥ over 2 ♥ would imply fewer than three spades for us.

Backstory

Example [9] is from Lawrence's *Takeout Doubles*, page 238. His section on lebensohl starts on page 249. Ron Andersen's book is a primary reference on lebensohl, and there are lots of hits online.

Example [10] is by Jerry Helms, who recommends bidding 3 ♥ over 2 ♥, not having our modern 3-card-support implication for a 3 ♦ cue-bid.

2 ♥	Dble	Pass	2 ♠
Pass	3 NT	Pass	?

Karen Walker provided this example. If only interested in notrump, there was no reason for partner to double. With five spades, we should correct to 4 ♠.

Over Their One Notrump Opening

Many systems are out there to mess with an opponent's 1 NT opening; here are some favorites. Since our priority is to contest the partscore, partnerships often make these two-suited bids on 5-4 shape. Here is our general plan when trouble develops:

Responder doubles: Advancer's pass or bid of a suit is an offer to play – a long suit, if new. Advancer's redouble says *run!*

Responder bids. Advancer's double says *bid out your hand!*

Meckwell

We play this system aggressively and over any balanced hand range for the 1 NT opening.

Int1	Adv1	Int2	Meckwell over 1 NT	
Dble	Clubs, or diamonds, or hearts and spades, or the rare good hand with spades, ○ or other good hand.			
	Pass	Values for a solid opening bid.		
	2 ♣	The expected action.		
		Pass	Clubs.	
		2 ♦	Diamonds.	
		2 ♥	Both majors.	
		2 ♠	Play here.	
		3 ♣	Invitational in hearts.	
		3 ♦	Invitational in spades.	
		2 ♠	Good hand with spades.	
	Other suit	Long suit – probably best to play here.		
2 m	The bid minor and a major.			
	2 m + 1	Next step asks for major (pass 2 ♥ with ♥).		
	Other suit	Long suit – probably best to play here.		
2 M	Natural, long suit.			
2 NT	Both minors. ○ or a strong hand with both majors.			
	3 m	Better minor – play here.		

Next opponent redoubles 1 NT. Advancer's bid is to play. Pass says to bid out the hand. Optional exception:

○ 2 ♣ is pass or correct, with equal length in the majors.

Two of a minor is doubled. Advancer's bid shows a long suit (to play), pass picks the minor, and redouble asks for the major.

Cue-bid. With Meckwell, we mostly intend to contest the partscore or mess up their game auction, but advancer's 2 NT is a cue-bid, showing interest in game.

Redouble. *Our* redouble is takeout (to run).

Simplified Multi-Landy

Multi-Landy combines these conventions:

Landy 2 ♣ = both majors (2 ♦ asks overcaller to pick).

Multi 2 ♦ = a 6-card major suit.

Cappelletti 2 ♥ or 2 ♠ = 5+ cards in the major, and 4+ in a minor.

Unusual NT 2 NT = both minors (not in Oakley's book).

Woolsey Double = 6-card minor; a 4-card major and a longer minor; a strong major; or a strong balanced hand.

The combination of the first three or four is reverse Cappelletti. Over 1 NT, multi 2 ♦ became legal in most ACBL games in 2015.

Simplified Woolsey double: a 4-card major and a longer minor against a strong notrump, and penalty against a weak notrump.

☐ A strong 1 NT opening promises at least 15 HCP (good 14).

○ A strong 1 NT opening promises at least 14 HCP (good 13).

1 NT is redoubled. Advancer's bid is to play. If our double is penalty, pass is to play; otherwise, pass asks doubler to bid their minor.

2 ♣ is doubled. Advancer's pass or 2 ♦ shows a long suit and wants to play there. Two of a major says to play there. Redouble asks overcaller to pick a major.

2 ♦ is doubled. Advancer's pass or new suit is to play. Redouble asks for the major suit.

Two of a major is doubled. Advancer's pass or new suit is to play. Redouble asks for the minor suit. (2 NT asks, with values.)

2 NT is doubled. Advancer's pass or suit bid is to play. Redouble asks overcaller to pick the minor.

Int1	Adv1	Int2	Simplified Multi-Landy over 1 NT
Double	[optional, when 1 NT is weak] Penalty. (Natural runouts.)		
Double	[1 NT is strong] 5+ card minor & 4-card major.		
	Pass	Solid opening bid, can stand minor suit lead.	
	2 ♣	Pass or correct to diamonds.	
	2 ♦	Asks for the 4-card major.	
	2 ♥ / 2 ♠	To play (long suit).	
2 ♣	Both majors.		
	Pass	Long clubs.	
	2 ♦	You pick (implies equal length).	
	2 ♥ / 2 ♠	To play. (Higher is preemptive.)	
	2 NT	Natural invitation.	
	3 ♣	Invitational in hearts.	
	3 ♦	Invitational in spades.	
2 ♦	6+ card major suit, includes 6-4 hands.		
	2 ♥	Pass or correct to 2 ♠.	
	2 ♠	Shows short spades, pass or correct to 3 ♥.	
2♥/2♠	Natural, 5 cards, with a 4+ card minor suit.		
	2 NT	Shows values, asks for the minor suit.	
	3 ♣	Pass or correct to 3 ♦.	
2 NT	Both minors.		
	3 m	Better minor – play here.	

Backstory

Meckwell, developed by multiple world champions Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell, has an impeccable pedigree. Meckstroth still plays it. We don't encounter many opponents who play weak notrumps, so we play Meckwell all the time, not just against strong notrumps:

Good penalties are possible when an opponent opens 1 NT. However, when I double 1 NT for penalties, LHO finds a place to hide. Sometimes LHO has five spades, and we cannot sort out whether to double them or bid on – most of those times, we let them play 2 ♠ undoubled. Playing Meckwell, when we have a good hand behind opener without shape to show, we just pass and hope to go plus – without telling them where the points are – a fine matchpoint plan.

Although we play it all the time, the listed Meckwell plan was designed for a strong 1 NT opening. Jeff Tang has the two options to our plan and a weak 1 NT plan, based on a 2009 Meckwell WBF convention card.

Multi-Landy. I love Landy: 2 \diamond gets us to the correct major, when responder has equal length. Landy also confounds the Stayman-double typically played over our 2 \clubsuit . For more about multi-Landy, see David Oakley's book.

Robert Todd recommends two of a major to play, over partner's double. The author added Meckstroth-inspired invitations over partner's 2 \clubsuit .

Pete-zel. Brozel is an ancestor of DONT (Disturb Opponents NoTrump). Such methods have been and remain quite popular.

Action	DONT	Brozel	Pete-zel
Double	Single-suited hand	Single-suited penalty	Single-suited hand
2 \clubsuit	\clubsuit and a higher suit	\clubsuit and \heartsuit	\clubsuit and a major
2 \diamond	\diamond and a higher suit	\diamond and \heartsuit	\diamond and \heartsuit
2 \heartsuit	\heartsuit and \spadesuit	\heartsuit and \spadesuit	\heartsuit and \spadesuit
2 \spadesuit	\spadesuit (good hand)	\spadesuit and a minor	\spadesuit and \diamond
2 NT		\clubsuit and \diamond	\clubsuit and \diamond

Marty Bergen recommended aggressive use of DONT, while Brozel was historically used with good hands. Played aggressively, my modified Brozel, dubbed Pete-zel by Jim Negro back in the 90s, is superior to DONT. (Rahul Chandra commented on BBO that his partnership had come up with the same plan – good ideas often grow in multiple places.) Using any of these methods, the double is used with a single-suited hand. The two-suited overcalls differ:

- In DONT, a bid in a suit shows that suit and a higher ranking suit; 2 \spadesuit is natural.
- Brozel suit bids revolve around the heart suit.
- In Pete-zel, the meaning of the ambiguous 2 \spadesuit bid of Brozel is narrowed, and the cheaper 2 \clubsuit bid is expanded, reducing the likelihood and risks of being driven to the three level.

Bennett is recommended by Billy Miller, for the situation when an opponent's 1 NT opening is passed around to *our passed hand*:

Double	Singleton or void in spades, e.g., 1=4=4=4.
2 \clubsuit	Singleton or void in hearts, e.g., 4=1=4=4.
2 \diamond	Both majors.
2 \heartsuit	4+ hearts and 5+ minor.
2 \spadesuit	4+ spades and 5+ minor.

Precision One Club & One Diamond Openings

The strong, artificial, and forcing 1 ♣ opening of Precision and similar bidding systems gets all the attention. When we sit down to play against a Precision pair, it is well to have a defense ready. However, it can be more important to be ready for 1 ♦, the most common Precision opening.

Not Mathe over 1 ♣

Not Mathe provides these advantages: (1) It is relatively simple. (2) Double, which tends to help the opponents, is used only with a strong hand; it allows us to explore for game. (3) We can bid all suits naturally at any level – bid early and often. (4) We cannot show all two-suiters, but we have the ones that most pairs with standard opponents have: majors (Michaels) and minors (Unusual Notrump). (5) The level of the 1 NT and 2 NT bids is high enough to discourage us from making frivolous two-suited bids that will help the opponents declare the hand.

- 1 NT Majors: at least 5 spades and 5 hearts. Any major suit bid is to play. 2 ♣ or 2 ♦ is to play, with a long suit. 3 ♣ shows game interest in hearts; 3 ♦ shows game interest in spades.
- 2 NT Minors: at least 5 clubs and 5 diamonds.
- Suit Kit Woolsey says, “The best defense is to bid as high as you dare as quickly as possible – and maybe even higher.”
- Dble One of three strong hand types: (A) a balanced hand with at least a good 17 HCP, (B) a powerful one-suiter, or (C) a powerful two-suiter.

Over the 1 ♦ Opening

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

Dble A typical takeout double promises support for both majors, but might have a doubleton club. Advancer should prefer 1 NT more than usual, perhaps with \diamond J-x-x or \diamond 10-8-x-x, rather than bidding clubs. However, don't double frivolously, as it can help responder.

○ Optional equal-level conversion: if doubler removes clubs to diamonds, they show a five-card suit, but no extra values, perhaps as little as:

\spadesuit A J 4 3 \heartsuit K J 2 \diamond K J T 6 2 \clubsuit 7

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

2 \diamond Natural; use clubs as the cue-bid.

2 \heartsuit Michaels (non-forcing).

3 \diamond Michaels (strong).

The Standard Modern Precision 1 \diamond opener's 2 \clubsuit rebid promises at least eight cards in the minors, but it could be 5-3 either way (or 4-4). If we leave that one alone, they could land in a 3-3 fit.

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

Backstory

Billy Miller provided the name "Not Mathe" for Peter Weichsel's defense to the Precision 1 \clubsuit opening. For more background and alternatives, see also my article, "Disrupting Precision Minor Suit Openings."

Balancing

Balancing is backing into, or reopening the bidding, when we are in the pass-out seat. We are going to talk specifically about balancing after opener's one-bid has been passed around to us.

We act when we expect to improve our score. When our fear that the opponents will improve their score exceeds our expectation, we pass. Here are a number of factors to consider:

Length in their suit. With shortness in opener's suit, we want to act. With length in opener's suit, we usually need opening bid strength in order to consider acting. Even then, holding four or more cards in opener's suit, we often pass; three cards are an indication to pass.

Partner would probably have acted when holding both values and shortness in opener's suit. With length in opener's suit, but less than opening strength, we have these likely cases:

- Partner has shortness, but is weak. This hand probably belongs to the opponents – they may even have game in another suit – we should pass.
- Partner has length. If we also have length, almost surely, we want to play right here. If we declare, the opener will either cash out their suit (responder discards) or responder will ruff our honors there. We should pass.

Unbid major suits. Length and strength in unbid major suits, especially spades, increases our chance to buy the contract. Shortness and weakness in a major means the opponents may have a fine home there – but they can only get there, if we bid.

High card points. The Buttinski rule applies – seldom reopen on fewer than 8 HCP. Suppose partner has an opening hand, but could not act. We need 8 HCP to have a fair chance in a partscore battle, and to be safe if partner makes a serious try for game. Remember to discount secondary honors in opener's suit, which are less useful.

Bidding in the Balancing Seat – Borrow a King

Some things we just have to know, and we'll talk about them in a bit. Other things we can figure out, using these rules:

Rule: Before balancing, borrow a king from partner.

Rule: Before acting over partner's balancing bid, subtract the queen we loaned to partner, except when raising an overcall.

Say what? It's a zero-sum game, but we know where the high cards are. Especially when it comes to playing notrump, we get at least a point on the loan to partner!

To act in the balancing seat, we need close to an opening bid, including the borrowed king. Consider some hands for this auction:

(1 ♡) – Pass – (Pass) – ?

1. ♠ A J 4 3 ♡ 6 2 ♦ K 10 6 2 ♣ 7 6 5

Hand [1] is a minimum reopening double. With our borrowed king, say ♣ K, this is close to an opening bid. This hand fits the three requirements nicely: short in opener's suit, 8 HCP, and the unbid major is covered. (A 4-card 1 ♠ bid should provide a chunkier suit.)

2. ♠ A J 4 3 ♡ Q 2 ♦ J 10 6 2 ♣ 7 6 5

Pass with hand [2], since the ♡ Q is likely wasted on offense.

3. ♠ A K J 3 ♡ 7 6 5 ♦ J 10 6 2 ♣ 3 2

Hand [3] is a minimum 1 ♠ bid, 12 HCP with the borrowed king, despite holding three hearts. Don't be surprised if the opponents play better in clubs.

4. ♠ A K J 3 ♡ 10 9 6 2 ♦ 4 2 ♣ 10 6 5

Pass with hand [4] – too many hearts, and only four spades. It won't help us to push the opponents into their minor suit instead of their 5-1 hearts!

5. ♠ A 3 ♡ 10 9 6 2 ♦ K J 10 4 2 ♣ 6 5

Don't consider bidding on hand [5] – short spades and long hearts.

6. ♠ A J 8 4 3 ♡ 6 2 ♦ K 10 6 ♣ 7 6 5

Hand [6] is a fine reopening 1 ♠ overcall. With our borrowed king, this is close to an opening bid. This hand fits the three requirements nicely: short in opener's suit, 8 HCP, and the unbid major is covered.

7. ♠ A Q 8 4 3 ♥ A 2 ♦ K 10 6 ♣ J 5 4

Hand [7] is a better but quite normal reopening 1 ♠ overcall.

A Decent Hand with a Good Suit

Double and bid a suit. Bidding a GOSH is as usual, counting the borrowed king.

8. ♠ A Q 10 8 4 2 ♥ A K 8 ♦ 5 ♣ Q 10 4

The extra king gives us the minimum 18 HCP normally required to double and bid our good spade suit on hand [8].

Jump in a suit. The reopening jump overcall shows a good suit, usually at least six cards, and solid opening bid values (14 to 16 points, including distribution). At the three level (below opener's suit), more length and/or strength are required. We reopen 2 ♠ on hand [9] after an opening in any other suit. *Not a weak jump overcall!*

9. ♠ A Q 8 6 4 2 ♥ A K 8 ♦ 5 ♣ 6 5 4

This reopening jump nicely fills the gap between a good 1 ♠ overcall, such as hand [7] and a double-and-bid hand [8].

The jump overcall at the three level requires a better hand. As in direct seat, we may avoid the takeout double for tactical reasons:

10. ♠ 5 ♥ A K 8 ♦ Q 10 4 ♣ A Q 10 8 4 2

If a 1 ♠ opening is passed around to us on hand [10] – or a somewhat better hand – reopening with 3 ♣ is more sensible than doubling; if we double now, our next chance may come over 3 ♠ or 4 ♠.

Special Bids

Western cue. A jump to three of opener's suit asks advancer to bid 3 NT with a stopper, the Western cue-bid.

Michaels. A reopening cue-bid is Michaels. ♦¹⁸

Two lowest suits. We don't have a bid for this. Think about it – if we have minor suits, they have a major – and perhaps a game. Pass!

Double jump overcall. I recommend not using the double jump to three of a suit higher than opener's. Lawrence has a suggestion for it, but it's another bid to remember.

A Notrumpy Hand

Difficulties can arise when reopening with balanced hands of opening strength that include a stopper in opener's suit. These are the actions involved, listed with increasing strength, in standard methods:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| A. 1 NT | = small hand |
| B. Double and bid notrump | = medium hand |
| C. 2 NT | = large hand |
| D. Double and jump in notrump | = huge hand |

With cases [A] and [C], we make our bid – done. Not so with [B] and [D], where we must give all three opponents a chance between our double and bidding notrump. It makes sense to bid notrump directly more often, and use the double less often.

A large hand [C]. Let's start by nailing down the 2 NT bid, with its standard range of 19 to 21 HCP. With the borrowed king, this is equivalent to opening 2 ♣ and rebidding 2 NT. Our range is slightly wider than we would ordinarily employ for a jump 2 NT bid. (Some writers say 19 to 21, others 19 to 20, 20 to 21, or 18 to 19. Wider means we double on fewer hands.)

11. ♠ A Q 3 ♥ A Q 5 ♦ K J 10 4 2 ♣ A 2

Jump to 2 NT on hand [11] when opener's 1 ♥ or 1 ♠ is passed around to us. *Not the unusual notrump!*

A huge hand [D] would double, planning to jump in notrump. Such a hand is exceedingly rare, so we can accept some difficulties here.

A medium hand [B], a strong notrump, would double, planning to bid notrump next. *Aye, there's the rub:* how high will that be?

12. ♠ A Q 3 ♥ K J 5 ♦ K 10 6 2 ♣ A 4 2

Over 1 ♣, we'll probably get to bid 1 NT. Over 1 ♠, it's probably 2 NT, so we should want 17 HCP, such as hand [12]. With the borrowed king, 20 HCP is top of range to double and bid 1 NT, directly over an opening bid. If partner is broke, we'll appreciate it.

13. ♠ A Q 3 ♥ K J 5 ♦ K 10 6 2 ♣ 9 4 2

A **small hand [A]**, such as hand [13], bids a weak 1 NT over 1 ♥. Over a minor suit, this shows about 12 to 14 (plus a king is 15 to 17) HCP.

Over a major suit, we need to include hands up to 16 HCP or more:

14. ♠ A Q 3 ♥ K J 5 ♦ K Q 10 2 ♣ 9 4 2

Weak Notrump Details. We have two sequences, [A] and [B], to describe all the notrumpy hands that we want to bid, up to 18 HCP. Mike Lawrence defines these approximate ranges for the reopening 1 NT, depending on opener's bid:

1 ♣ passed around	12 to 14 points
1 ♦ passed around	12 to 14½ points
1 ♥ passed around	12 to 15½ points
1 ♠ passed around	12 to 16½ points

For safety when we double and bid notrump [B], we need those wide ranges when reopening 1 NT over a major suit – we cannot afford to pass 12- and 13-point hands, either. We'll see that a variation of Stayman can help.

Advancing a Balancing Double or an Overcall in a Suit

Summary

Reopening actions are mostly typical doubles and overcalls, but based on borrowing a king. Advancer subtracts a loaned queen, *except when raising an overcall in a suit*.

Advancing in Notrump

Whether partner has reopened with a double or an overcall, our advance in notrump takes into account the loaned queen:

- 1 NT 10 to 12 actual HCP (about 8 to 10 effective HCP, having subtracted the loaned queen).
- 2 NT 13 to 14 actual HCP (11 to 12 HCP without the loaned queen).
- 3 NT 15+ HCP (13+ without the loaned queen).

These bids definitely come up. Having passed with strength, we usually have length in opener's suit.

See why we need to be so strong for these bids, and to have at least 8 HCP to reopen? We cannot afford to get overboard on a misfit auction; we don't mess around in notrump.

Advancing a Reopening Double

A jump advance to a reopening takeout double shows 10 to 12 support points, staking a claim to that partscore. Within the loaned-queen theory, this is aggressive (8 to 10 net), and we need to be. Note that, since advancer might have overcalled with a good suit in such a hand, this jump is likely to be based on a bad suit.

Passing a redouble. Since advancer is likely to have length and strength in opener's suit:

***Rule:** If opener redoubles our reopening double, advancer's pass shows intent to set this contract – doubler should normally pass.*

This means advancer must bid over the redouble, when not holding a penalty pass hand. *Be sure to discuss this with partner!*

Advancing a Reopening Overcall in a Suit

Ignore the loaned queen when we have a fit for the overcall. It's crucial for advancer to *support with support*. The range for a simple raise is wide, a good 7 to a bad 11 support points. As always, our cue-bid shows a limit raise or better.

A change of suit denies support and is a non-forcing attempt to improve the strain. This carries some risk, as we are unlikely to have a good suit, and we may have no good fit. The FSJ is also available.

If we have a good hand but have no fit, no suit we are willing to bid, and no stopper, we have to pass the overcall. This may work out fine.

Advancing a Reopening Jump Overcall

Advancer passes with any misfit, or lacking interest in game. We expect to play in the jump overcall suit or notrump. As advancer, we won't have a good suit in a good hand, so our new suit bid is a natural force, but does not promise a real suit. 2 NT and 3 NT are

natural, with a stopper. When overcaller's suit is a minor, then 3 NT will be the main target, and advancer's new suit shows a stopper.

16. ♠ A Q 8 6 4 2 ♥ A K 8 ♦ 5 ♣ 6 5 4

Hand [16] was played in a matchpoint pairs game. 4 ♠ is the target unless advancer bids notrump. Notice that we have six losers, ideal for a game try, assuming advancer has support. We would also make this bid with five losers, perhaps hand [17]:

17. ♠ A Q 9 8 6 4 2 ♥ A K 8 ♦ 5 ♣ 5 4

○ **Game try advance:** With support, advancer should consider two of either major, 2 ♠ on hand [16] or [17], as an immediate nondescript game try: raise with two winners, jump to game with three winners, and bid a secondary value (K or Q) with two other winners. *Be sure to discuss this with partner!*

On the real deal [16], advancer held:

♠ 9 7 3 ♥ J 10 ♦ K 9 8 6 2 ♣ K Q 8

Applying our methods, advancer has only one sure cover card, but could still raise with the positional advantage of the three main honors, plus the doubleton. Overcaller passes with six losers.

Advancing a Reopening 1 NT

1 NT is not a safe reopening bid, with the strength behind us. If opener doubles 1 NT, we play our usual methods: redouble to run up the line, and pass forces a redouble (to pass or run into a single suit).

○ Plan A – Systems Off

To allow advancer to play in two of a minor at will, we play *systems off*: 2-bids are to play (cue-bid is Stayman, at least invitational), 2 NT is natural, and 3-bids are natural and forcing. However, advancer often declares, with the opening lead across overcaller's strength.

□ Plan B – Systems On

To put the strong hand on lead, we play *systems on*. We can only play in two of a minor if 1 NT is doubled, but we get range Stayman.

Details for Plans A and B

The advances depend on overcaller's range. Over a minor suit the range is 12 to 14 HCP. We use our usual methods in this situation.

Over a major, the range is 12 to 16 HCP. When the opening bid was in a major suit, doubling and bidding notrump with 15 or 16 HCP is unpalatable, since that usually means bidding 2 NT next. We could use help sorting this out – if it ever came up!

Think about it: range Stayman can only apply when LHO deals and the major suit opening bid is passed around to us.

❑ **As above, no changes.**

○ **Range Stayman with 10 HCP over a major (Plan B only).**

Range Stayman (2 ♣) requires 10 HCP or better – no garbage or crawling, please! To force to game, overcaller bids 2 NT. Since we know where the strength lies, we might do that with a good or any 14 HCP, for a total of at least 24.

With a weaker hand, overcaller responds at the two-level, showing or denying the unbid major.

Oc2	A2	Range Stayman: (1 M) – P – (P) – 1 NT; (P) – 2 ♣
2 ♦	12 to 13+ HCP, denies 4 cards in the other (unbid) major.	
	2 oM	5-card suit.*
2 M	12 to 13+ HCP, 4-4 minors (use with care at 2 ♠).*	
2 oM	12 to 13+ HCP, 4+ cards in the other (unbid) major	
2 NT	GF, all hands with at least a good 14 HCP. 2 NT systems on!	

* Gray sections are optional.

A transfer by advancer does not promise any points, but overcaller may super-accept with a fitting 15 HCP. Range Stayman would right-side the hand on an invitation, if overcaller rebids 2 NT.

Heavy invites. We want range Stayman to be a heavy invitation, to maximize our chance of a positive score when game is not bid. Our strength should provide a decent play for 2 NT.

While the author played range Stayman in the past, it seldom came up. The author has not tested this version; sorry I bothered.

Backstory

In the old days, a reopening bid of 1 NT merely showed a balanced hand with some points – not even a stopper in the enemy suit – as partner is likely to have one, having passed with values. For example, in 5 *Weeks* (17th Day), Alfred Sheinwold says that a double promises at least 11 HCP, and to reopen with a suit or 1 NT with 8 to 10 HCP. Modern methods have swept that away.

Borrowing a king was mentioned on *Bridge Winners*. It made sense to me, so I ran with it. Marshall Miles recommended borrowing a queen. Lawrence recommended (in 2012) doubling a king light, but did not say “borrow.” Robert Todd says to borrow “usually about 3 points” from partner.

At a regional in upstate New York, I asked Chris Compton, one of the top ten all-time masterpoint holders, about borrowed-king theory. He corrected king to queen twice. He continued to say that it was a zero-sum game, so advancer does have to adjust for the loan. That being understood, since we know where the cards are, we want to bid 3 NT with 23 or 24 combined points.

This I condensed into “borrow a king – loan a queen,” and adjusted this material accordingly. Continuing with the borrowed king allows us to peg our ranges to the typical 15-17 for 1 NT, etc. This useful framework breaks down with “borrow a queen” unless we play a balanced hand ladder with 1 NT = 14 to 16 and 2 NT = 19 to 20 HCP. (I searched online and found a convention card for Compton, playing 14-16 and 19-20 when nonvulnerable.) Bottom line, if borrowed king theory does not help you, just use the actual points:

Action	Balancing over an opening bid
Overcall	8 to 14 HCP or more. Advancer raises normally.
Jump Overcall	Good 6+ card suit, opening hand, better at three level.
Double	8 HCP, unlimited (new suit: good 6+ card suit and 15+ HCP).
1 NT	12 to 14 HCP (over a minor) or 12 to 16 HCP (over a major).
2 NT	19 to 21 HCP.

What we have here is based on my expansion of borrowed king theory, filled in from Mike Lawrence’s *Balancing*. His second edition covers many more auctions than just a one-bid passed around. Continue for a comparison of my methods to Lawrence’s, which “loan a queen” has brought closer together.

This *Range Stayman* started with the plan that Brian Duran and I played years ago. Billy Miller describes such a plan; he likes the lone maximum bid of 2 NT, because often that’s all advancer wants to know – why tell the opponents more? After pondering this for a day, I concluded Miller is more right than he knew: we should have systems on, not just a re-Stayman, over 2 NT.

Robert Todd applies his range Stayman after any suit bid; maximum opener makes jump responses showing minors as well as majors; and 2 NT can be a mid-range bid. While initially attractive, this plan seems inferior on reflection.

Mark Bartusek noted “Many years ago in *The Bridge World* magazine there was a study reported which analyzed a lot of World Championship hands where 4th seat balanced with 1NT. The study concluded that balancing with only 11 HCPs was a long-term losing action.”

◆ Alternative Methods

¹⁸⁻²⁹¹ **Reopening cue-bid.** Michaels has won out over the former meaning: void takeout with opening-bid strength. We just double with that hand now and hope partner does not pass. If we play Bailey, we could play that here.

Comparison. Lawrence and I mostly agree on the reopening actions:

Reopening Action	Matthews	Lawrence
Overall	8 ¹ to 14 or more.	6 ¹ to 14 or more.
Double	8 to unlimited.	6 ² to unlimited.
1 NT	12 to 14 to 16.	
Jump 2-bid	14 to 16 SP, 5–6 losers.	14 to 16 SP.
Jump 3-bid (below)	Probably stronger.	
Cue-bid	Michaels.	
Jump 2 NT	19 to 21 HCP, balanced.	19 to 20 HCP, balanced.
Jump cue-bid	Western.	
Four level	Leaping Michaels.	

¹ Common sense required.

² Perfect 4–4–4–1 shape for less than 8 HCP.

Lawrence gives this essential advice:

Fight like crazy throughout the one and two levels. If partner makes a takeout double, try really hard to show a fit if your RHO bids something.

If you have already made a bid, continue to contest at the two level, but go to the three level with caution.

So far, we mostly agree. We also agree that advancer’s pass of opener’s redouble should be for penalties – with a weak hand, advancer picks a suit.

Unfortunately, I disagree with Lawrence’s meaning for some of advancer’s bids, especially in notrump, as inconsistent with loaned-queen theory:

Advance	Matthews	Lawrence
1 NT	10 to 12 HCP.	7+ to 11- HCP.
2 NT	13 to 14 HCP.	12 to 14 HCP.
3 NT	15+ HCP.	15+ HCP.
After a one-level reopening overcall:		
New suit	Misfit, NF. ³	
Jump shift	Fit-showing.	N/A.
Jump raise	Mixed (or weak).	4-Card limit raise. ⁴
Cue-bid	Limit raise or better. ⁴	3-Card LR or good hand without a stopper. ⁴

³ The two level requires an overcall-quality suit – therefore shows little else.

⁴ Lawrence’s limit raise methods are consistent with his recommendations over normal overcalls; we, of course, play a cue-bid as LR+. We may have to pass the overcall with a good hand lacking a fit or a stopper. This is not necessarily a bad thing.

Lawrence also recommends equal-level conversion after a takeout double, a fine idea when the partnership is already playing that way.

8. Appendix

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Two Notrump as 5-Card-Major Stayman

Playing 3 ♣ as 5-card major Stayman enables an easy lead-directing double. To avoid that, some experts now play 2 NT as 5-card-major Stayman. To retain our capabilities, these responses to 1 NT change:

2 ♠ No 4-card major and either:

- *Invitational*, either balanced or with a 6+ card minor; or
- *Clubs* (six or more), either weak or (if we might not play in notrump) game-forcing.

3 ♣ *Diamonds* (six or more), either weak or (if we might not play notrump) game-forcing.

2 NT Forcing to game, a balanced hand with zero or one 4-card major. Our 5-card-major Stayman discovers major-suit fits, but opener never tells 4-card major-suit holdings to the opponents.

5-Card-Major Stayman (2 NT)

The response of 2 NT shows at least game values, a balanced hand, and:

- one 4-card major suit; or
- no 4-card major (but one or two 3-card majors).

By only using the three (or four) responses, opener does not leak any information about 4-card majors in the declaring hand:

O2	R2	1 NT - 2 NT: 5-Card-Major Stayman	
3 ♣	No 5-card major.		
	3 ♦	Unassigned.*	
	3 ♥	Four <i>spades</i> .	O3: 3 NT, 4 M = play. Other = control-bid for slam in M.
	3 ♠	Four <i>hearts</i> .	
	3 NT	Play here.	
3 ♦	Unassigned.*		
3 ♥	Five hearts.		R2: 3 NT, 4 M = play. 4 NT = inv. Other = control-bid for slam in M.
3 ♠	Five spades.		
No other responses are defined.			

* It's fine to leave these bids idle. \diamond^2

Unless we find a fit in opener's 5-card major, we have better tools to explore for slam after a 2 ♣ Stayman response.

It's nice when this method finds a 5-3 major-suit fit. More importantly, opener's major-suit holdings are concealed, when opener does not have a 5-card major. We can achieve this, because responder should never have both majors: regular Stayman is sufficient when responder does have both majors, as we don't much care whether opener's major is four or five cards.

Transfer to Diamonds (3 ♣)

Responder's 3 ♣ denies a 4-card major suit. It is a transfer to diamonds with a weak or game-forcing hand. $\underline{\diamond}^3$ Responder promises at least six diamonds, but no points. Opener always bids 3 \diamond , and responder then chooses:

R2	O3	1 NT - 3 ♣ [\diamond weak or strong]; 3 \diamond	
Pass	All weak hands.		
3 \heartsuit , 3 \spadesuit	Singleton or void in bid suit.		
	3 NT	Double stopper opposite shortness.	
	4 ♣	Great fit - RKB \diamond (crosswood).	
	4 \diamond	Bad fit - suggests playing here.	
	3 \spadesuit , 4 \heartsuit	5- or chunky 4-card suit (offer to play).	
	5 \diamond	Hope I can make it.	
3 NT	[a] Mild slam try in diamonds.	[b] Club shortness.	
4 ♣	RKB diamonds (crosswood).		

Size Ask (2 \spadesuit) - Clubs or Invite (Balanced or Minor)

Responder's 2 \spadesuit size or range ask denies holding a 4-card major suit. Except when balanced, it promises a 6-card or longer minor suit.

These are the possible hand types:

- A balanced game invitation - we play 2 NT or 3 NT.
- Invitational with diamonds - we usually play 3 \diamond or 3 NT.
- Weak hand with clubs - we play 3 ♣.
- An invitational hand with clubs - we play 3 ♣ or 3 NT.
- A game-forcing hand with clubs - we play 3 NT or work toward 6 ♣.

O2	R2	O3	1 NT - 2 ♠ [Size Ask]
2 NT	Opener has a minimum hand.		
	Pass	Balanced invitation.	
	3 ♣	Clubs, weak or invitational.	
		Pass	Opener must pass.
	3 ♦	Diamonds, invitational.	
		Pass	Opener usually passes.
		3 NT	Game try.
3 ♣	Opener has a maximum hand.		
	Pass	Clubs, weak.	
	3 NT	All invitational hands, no exceptions.	
	3 ♦	Clubs, singleton or void in ♦ (as 3♥/3♠ below).	
When responder has a game force in clubs, over 2 NT or 3 ♣:			
	3 ♥, 3 ♠	Singleton or void in bid suit.	
		3 NT	Double stopper opposite shortness.
		4 ♣	Bad fit - suggests playing here.
		4 ♦	Great fit - RKB ♣ (crosswood).
		3 ♠, 4 ♥	5- or chunky 4-card suit.
		5 ♣	Hope I can make it.
	3 NT	To play.	
	4 ♣	Slam try in clubs, no showable shortness.	
	4 ♦	RKB ♣ (crosswood).	

No longer must responder bid Stayman and expose opener's major-suit holdings, just to invite game in notrump (as when we played 2 ♠ as a pure transfer to clubs).

Key Features

- 2 NT is 5-card-major Stayman with at most one 4-card major, inhibiting a lead-directing double and limiting information leaked to the opponents.
- 3 ♣ for diamonds, weak or strong.
- 2 ♠ size ask, invitational (balanced or a long minor); or clubs, weak or strong.

Backstory

We found out about the 2 NT version of 5-card-major Stayman in 2023, but have yet to play it. The 3 ♣ version is described on page 190.

♦ Alternative Methods

²⁻³⁰³ Unassigned Slots

Responder's 3 ♦ bid (after 3 ♣ denies a 5-card major). This can show (4-1)=4=4 shape. Opener's 3 ♥ asks, and responder bids or shows the *long* major: 3 ♠ for spades (we don't want to bid a singleton spade), and 3 NT for hearts. Opener plays 3 NT, bids four of the major, or suggests a minor suit.

Opener's 3 ♦ response to 2 NT (5-card major Stayman). We don't want to leak information to the opponents. One suggestion was to use this for 5-4 in the minors, but we don't open 1 NT with 2-2 majors. "1 NT is the new Flannery," attributed to Billy Miller, inspires playing 3 ♦ as 4=5 majors. Nature abhors a vacuum, so I expect this slot to get filled.

³⁻³⁰⁴ **3 ♣ transfer to diamonds.** We exclude the invitational hand, so that opener can be restricted from breaking the transfer. That way, opener won't prevent strong responder from showing a singleton or void in a major suit. When Stewart Rubenstein gave me the outline for this plan, 3 ♣ was used with invitational or better hands. The given method is superior, but both methods are better than having no strength limitation at all.

Tools for Some Competitive Situations

Suit-Lead Transfers

Suit-lead transfers apply when partner's major suit opening or overcall has been doubled for takeout. We give up the free bid of 1 NT, but we get better opening leads and raises. If we pass, partner gets another chance, and so should we. General principles:

- An immediate jump to 2 NT is always our best raise of opener's or overcaller's major suit.
- Our jump raise is always mixed.

Our One of a Major – Doubled for Takeout

Responder's redouble is standard: 10+ HCP, at most 3-card support, but we promise at least 2-card support for opener's major.

A delayed double shows 10+ HCP with a singleton in opener's major.

When they double our major-suit opening, we play transfers at 1 NT through the suit below opener's major. These bids deny the strength to redouble and they request the opening lead, but the suit may not be long. Opener rebids naturally; passing 1 NT, completing the transfer, or bidding two of the major with extra length, are all weak. With extra values, opener may make a natural rebid in a new suit.

	1 ♥ – (Double) – ?	1 ♠ – (Double) – ?	
Rdbl	10+ HCP, 2- or 3-card support.		Rdbl
1 ♠	Spades, one-round force.	–	–
1 NT	Transfer to clubs.		1 NT
2 ♣	Transfer to diamonds.		2 ♣
2 ♦	2-3 winner raise.	Transfer to hearts.	2 ♦
2 ♥	0-1 winner raise.	2-3 winner raise.	2 ♥
2 ♠	Fit-showing, invitational.	0-1 winner raise.	2 ♠
2NT	Best raise, LR+, 4-card support.		2 NT
3 ♣	Fit-showing jump, invitational.		3 ♣
3 ♦	Fit-showing jump, invitational.		3 ♦
3 ♥	Mixed raise.	Fit-showing, invitational.	3 ♥
–	–	Mixed raise.	3 ♠

Drury does not apply here; we can redouble and raise instead.

Examples:

1 ♠ - (Double) - ?

1. ♠ J 3 ♥ 9 7 6 ♦ 10 6 5 ♣ A Q 10 8 2

2. ♠ J 8 3 ♥ 9 7 6 3 ♦ 10 6 5 2 ♣ A 8

Bid 1 NT, a transfer asking for a club lead, on both hands [1] and [2].
Opener may pass! If opener bids 2 ♣ on hand [1], we pass; on hand [2], responder takes 2 ♣ back to 2 ♠.

3. ♠ K 4 3 ♥ 9 7 6 3 ♦ 10 6 5 2 ♣ 9 8

On hand [3], we bid 2 ♠, a junk raise.

4. ♠ K J 3 ♥ 9 7 6 3 ♦ 10 6 5 2 ♣ A 8

On hand [4], we bid 2 ♥, a good raise to 2 ♠, wanting a spade lead.

Negative Double of Our Major-Suit Overcall

(1 m) - 1 ♥ - (Double) - ?		(1 x) - 1 ♠ - (Double) - ?	
Rdbl	<i>Competitive</i> , doubleton A/K/Q support.		Rdbl
1 ♠	Spades, one-round force.	-	-
1 NT	Transfer to the suit above.		1 NT
2 ♣	If opener's suit, 3-card limit raise or better.		2 ♣
2 ♦	2-3 winner raise.	Transfer / 3-card LR+.	2 ♦
2 ♥	0-1 winner raise.	2-3 winner raise.	2 ♥
2 ♠	Fit-showing, inv.	0-1 winner raise.	2 ♠
2 NT	Best raise, LR+, 4-card support.		2 NT
3 ♣	Fit-showing jump, invitational.		3 ♣
3 ♦	○ If opener's suit, invitational splinter.		3 ♦
3 ♥	Mixed raise.	Fit-showing, inv.	3 ♥
-	-	Mixed raise.	3 ♠

Curly Cue

Curly cue applies when responder bids a suit at the *one level* over partner's takeout double. We change our advances to take advantage of having two cue-bids available. Here is the situation:

(1 A) – Dbl – (1 B) – ?

Cue bids. A cue bid of either suit shows *at least* the values for a standard jump response. Each cue bid shows a specific unbid suit.

Same rank: If suits A and B are the same rank (both majors, or both minors), then the cheaper cue bid shows the lower unbid suit, and the other cue bid shows the higher unbid suit, for example:

(1 ♣) – Dbl – (1 ♦) – 2 ♣ [=hearts, cheaper for lower]

(1 ♥) – Dbl – (1 ♠) – 2 ♠ [=diamonds, other for higher]

Here's the curl: When A is a minor and B is a major, then the cheaper cue shows the major, and the other cue bid shows the minor.

1. ♠ J 10 6 3 2 ♥ 6 3 ♦ K 10 6 ♣ A 8 3

(1 ♣) – Dbl – (1 ♥) – 2 ♣ [=spades, cheaper for major]

2. ♠ K 6 ♥ Q J 3 2 ♦ 10 8 6 3 ♣ A 6 2

(1 ♦) – Dbl – (1 ♠) – 2 ♦ [=hearts, can get out at 2 ♥!]

3. ♠ K 6 ♥ 3 2 ♦ 10 8 6 3 ♣ A Q 10 6 2

(1 ♦) – Dbl – (1 ♠) – 2 ♠ [=clubs, other for minor]

Notrump bids (8 to 10, etc.) and double (penalty) are unchanged.

Other bids are based on the law of total tricks. Assume that doubler has 4-card support, and bid according to the law:

Bid to the number of tricks equal to our total number of trumps.

4. ♠ J 10 6 3 2 ♥ 6 3 ♦ 10 6 5 ♣ A 8 3

(1 ♣) – Dbl – (1 ♥) – 2 ♠ [3 ♠ not vul, compare to [1]]

5. ♠ – ♥ K 10 6 5 ♦ J 8 7 4 ♣ 9 8 7 3 2

(1 ♣) – Dbl – (1 ♠) – 2 ♥ [3 ♥ overbid, not vul]

Shark over 1 NT Forcing

- **Standard: double of 1 NT forcing is takeout for unbid suits.**
- **Shark: double of 1 NT forcing shows four cards in the unbid major and a longer minor suit.**

Michaels over Jacoby 2 NT

- **Standard: double of Jacoby 2 NT is takeout for unbid suits.**
- **Michaels: double of Jacoby 2 NT shows 5+ cards in both the unbid major and a minor suit.**

Two-suiters are a primary threat from a partnership with a minority of the HCP. Major/minor Michaels and 3 NT for minors is a good plan. Suits with good fillers are highly recommended at this level. Yes, three of the major would clearly be Michaels; but with that, we cannot escape to three of a minor – or to three hearts, over spades.

Backstory

Al Muggia and I play suit-lead transfers methods; he got them from Jeff Meckstroth. We get to show a suit, ask for a lead as part of a raise, and take inferences on hands [3] and [4]. The two ways to two of the major have been rephrased in terms of winners, for this book. We also play Meckstroth's curly cue.

GLM Mark 'Shark' Aquino included his double of 1 NT forcing with his comments on this book – I named it after him! He says his partnerships have no firm agreements on continuations. I would add 2 ♣, pass or correct, as an advance.

The literature does not discuss the double of a Jacoby 2 NT response. As I wrote (and rewrote) about interference over Jacoby 2 NT, it became obvious that a double should show a two-suiter, 5–5 or longer: Michaels and unusual 3 NT. *You read it here first!* – and last! – we are done!

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Pete Matthews Jr is an ACBL Diamond Life Master and a regional contender; the height of success for him is winning a top-flight regional event overall, which happens occasionally. For six decades of playing bridge, Pete has been fascinated by the study of bidding systems and tools.

Look inside for these tools & more:

- Enhanced Michaels, Bailey, and Unusual Notrump
- Serious (or non-serious) 3 NT and Italian controls
- Ambiguous major after invitational jump to 3 \diamond
- Fragment spiral over opener's raise
- 3 \clubsuit is the essential invitational jump shift
- Crosswood for keycards in a minor
- 2- to 3-winner raise & nondescript game try
- Fit-showing jump shift default or in competition
- NLMH5 bids over standard/Swedish Jacoby 2 NT
- Takeout doubler's cue-bid implies 3-card support
- Modern 1 NT & 2 NT systems
- Weakest call in traffic is our forced-to bid
- Grand slam picture jump after the queen ask
- Mixed jump raise in any suit
- Heavy invites – light accepts
- 3-6 jump reverse
- Don't buy a problem