

The Foundation System

Major Suit Bidding

THEORY

The higher the bidding level, the less room there is for exchanging information. Thus, a bid at the three level should have a very narrow range (e.g., 10-11), while a bid at the two level can have a somewhat wider range (e.g., 6-9), since partner can make an invitational bid at the three level to see whether you are minimum or maximum. Similarly, bids at the one level have the widest range of all (e.g. 11-21 for an opening bid or 5-28 for a one-level response).

OPENING BID REQUIREMENTS

An opening bid of 1H or 1S requires a 5+card suit (i.e., a suit of at least five cards) and 12-21 HCP. A typical minimum hand will have a losing trick count (LTC) = 7, while a maximum hand will normally have LTC = 5, except that a strong distributional two- or three-suited hand can be opened at the one-level with LTC = 4. Stronger hands will be opened with 2C, while weaker hands will either pass or be opened with a weak two bid. Hands with 11 HCP can be opened if the LTC = 7 or less; the HCP requirement can even be relaxed to 9 or 10 with a freak two-suiter (65 or 74). Hands with LTC = 9 should **never** be opened with 1H or 1S. (The only LTC = 9 hand which should ever be opened is a 4333 hand with three bare aces; this can be opened with 1C or 1D.) In third seat, a hand with LTC = 8 can be opened for lead-directing purposes, knowing there is no possibility of game your way once partner has passed.

The choice of which suit to open when holding two 5+card suits requires Opener to consider what his rebid will be over each of the most likely responses from partner. In most cases the higher-ranking suit will be opened. This is always true with 55s with two possible exceptions: (a) If the higher-ranking suit is very weak (Jxxxx or worse), you can treat it as a 4-card suit and open the lower-ranking suit. (b) With 5 spades and 5 clubs and a strong hand, you can open 1C and hope to be able to bid spades twice later to show the fifth card; with a minimum opener, the opponents are likely to intervene, foiling the plan to bid spades twice, so it is best to open 1S. With 65s, you can open the lower-ranking 6-card suit if you can expect to be able to bid the 5-card suit twice, but with a minimum hand you may choose to open the higher-ranking 5-card suit and treat the hand as a 55.

NOTE: All auctions shown in this chapter assume that the opponents are silent; a pass is assumed to be inserted between each bid. Thus 1S/2S actually represents 1S/P/2S.

RESPONDING TO A 1H OR 1S OPENING

The Foundation System is compatible with the two bidding styles most popular with modern tournament players: *Standard American* and *Two Over One Game Forcing* (usually just abbreviated as *2/1 Game Forcing* or just *2/1*. These two styles differ mainly in the way they handle the responses to a 1H or 1S opening bid:

Standard American: A response of 1NT is not forcing and usually denies 3-card support. A response of 2C or 2D is forcing for one round, requires a minimum of 10 HCP

and will frequently be based on a 4-card suit (but a response of 2H over a 1S opening guarantees a 5-card suit). Weak hands with a 6+card suit and less than 10 HCP are shown by either (a) a jump response in the weak suit; or (b) a two-over-one response followed by rebidding the weak suit on the next round; depending on partnership agreement about the meaning of the jump response.

2/1 Game Forcing: A response of 1NT is forcing for one round and does not therefore deny 3-card support, which may be shown on the next round. A response of 2C or 2D (or 2H over a 1S opening) is forcing to game, and is expected to show a 5+card suit (although not absolutely guaranteed for a 2C or 2D response). Weak hands with a 6+card minor and less than 10 HCP are shown by either (a) a jump response in the weak suit; or (b) a 1NT response followed by bidding the weak suit on the next round; depending on partnership agreement about the meaning of the jump response.

The Foundation System strikes a balance between these two styles: A response of 1NT is forcing for one round and does not therefore deny 3-card support, which may be shown on the next round. A response of 2C or 2D (or 2H over a 1S opening) is forcing for one round, requires a minimum of a **good** 10 HCP and is expected to show a 5+card suit (although not absolutely guaranteed for a 2C or 2D response). Weak hands with a 6+card suit are shown by a jump response in the weak suit. This compromise position ensures that only minor adjustments will be required for a Foundation System player to pair up with either *Standard American* or *2/1 Game Forcing* practitioners.

RAISING A 5-CARD MAJOR OPENING

The Normal Raise (7-9 HCP): This is a direct raise; e.g., 1S/2S, and shows 3+card support. Opener will pass with LTC = 7, invite game with LTC = 6, or bid game directly with LTC = 5 or less. To invite with a balanced 1-suiter, Opener can bid 2NT or raise to 3S; with an unbalanced hand he will usually choose to bid a second suit. This bid is forcing one round, and is usually a 4+card suit, but could be made in a 3-card suit with something like 7321 shape. Since Opener is showing six losers, Responder needs to cover three of those losers to reduce the partnership's loser count to three.

Any ace in Responder's hand is sure to cover one of Opener's losers (except in the rare case where Opener is void in that suit). When Opener's game try shows a balanced hand, any king in Responder's hand can also be assumed to cover a loser. The queen of Opener's suit is a sure cover card, as is the queen of Opener's second suit (since it will always be a 3+card suit). These are called "hard" values, almost sure to be useful. When Opener has shown two suits, any king in one of the other two suits, as well as queens of any suit Opener has not bid and all jacks are of uncertain value as cover cards. These are called "soft" values. Opener's invitation assumes that Responder's raise shows two cover cards, so Responder is expected to bid game with three cover cards and to return to Opener's major at the 3-level with two cover cards. If Responder has two "hard" cover cards in addition to a "soft" king or queen, his best strategy is to bid the suit containing such a "soft" value if he can do so while staying below three of Opener's major. Opener can then bid game if he thinks the "soft" value will be useful.

Short suits (voids, singletons, and doubletons) are also "soft" values of a different type. When opposite Opener's second suit, they will cover a loser unless Opener has AKQ(x) or KQx(x) of that suit, and Opener should not make a game try in such a suit since with AKQ he knows there is no loser and with KQx he knows Responder will always be

counting the ace if he holds it. A shortage in a side suit is more difficult to evaluate. The doubleton in Ax, Kx, Qx or xx only contributes a ruffing value opposite a 3+card side suit, and these are likely only when Opener has 5431 or 5332 shape. A singleton or void in a side suit is much more useful, and can be golden if in a suit bid by an opponent. A side suit singleton or void can definitely be treated as a cover card, and will frequently be worth two cover cards if holding 4-card support for Opener's suit.

The Minimum Raise (5-6 HCP): This uses the Forcing 1NT mechanism; e.g. 1S/1NT/2C/2S. 3-4 card support is normal, but if opener's rebid is higher ranking than the 5+ card minor you were hoping to bid, the minimum raise could be based on only 2-card support. Opener will always pass 2S in this sequence, since if he were strong enough to try for game opposite 5-6 HCP his rebid over 1NT would have been a jump. If opener **has** jumped over 1NT, then 3S shows the Minimum Raise. After a 1H opening, a 1S response followed by Responder's rebid of 2H is also a Minimum Raise.

If you are not playing the Forcing 1NT, the Minimum Raise is not available; you can make a normal raise (see above) with 5HCP and 4-card support or 6 HCP and 3-card support.

Opener's game tries after the Minimum Raise use the same structure described above for the Normal Raise, but Opener needs to be one loser stronger here, since Responder will usually have only 1-2 cover cards for a Minimum Raise, compared with 2-3 cover cards for the Normal Raise.

The Indirect Limit Raise (10-11 HCP): This uses the Forcing NT mechanism; e.g., 1S/1NT/2C/3S. It normally shows 3-card support, but might be chosen with 4-card support and 4333 shape. You can also make an Indirect Limit Raise of hearts by bidding 1S and then raising hearts on the next round: 1H/1S/2H/3H. Opener will pass an Indirect Limit Raise with LTC = 7 and accept with LTC = 6 or better. He will not normally make a slam try, since with LTC = 5 or better he would have jumped over Responder's first bid.

The Direct Limit Raise (10-11 HCP): This raise to the 3-level (1S/3S or 1H/3H) has the same HCP requirement as the 3-card limit raise, but is a point or two stronger in playing strength because of the extra trump. Opener will pass with LTC = 7, accept with LTC = 6, and with LTC = 5 or better will make a slam try or bid slam directly or trot out an ace-asking convention such as Blackwood or Roman Keycard Blackwood.

Slam tries after either type of Limit Raise (Direct or Indirect) use the same structure described above for the Normal Raise. If Responder is not encouraged by the slam try, he can sign off in game. Opener will either pass, or make an additional slam try bid bidding a side suit ace. If Responder chooses to accept a slam try, he may be able to bid slam directly, or after checking for aces via Blackwood or Roman Keycard Blackwood. If Responder is encouraged but still uncertain, the focus of attention shifts to controls. Any side suit bid by Responder shows the ace of that suit and denies the ace of any side suit he has bypassed. The partnership then continues bidding aces up the line. In such cue-bidding auctions, any bid in a suit where the ace has previously been shown or denied shows the king of that suit.

The 3-Card Forcing Raise (13+ HCP): This uses the Forcing 1NT mechanism:

Responder

starts by bidding 1NT, and then raises Opener's major to the 4-level on the next round.

If not playing the Forcing 1NT, with 13+HCP and 3-card support you can always bid a 4+card minor and then raise Opener's major to the 4-level (or continue to bid new suits before ultimately supporting Opener), but with 3-card support and no 4-card minor (3433 shape after a 1S opener) you may be forced to use the Jacoby 2NT response (see below) despite having only 3-card support.

The 4-Card Forcing Raise (13+ HCP): This uses the Jacoby 2NT structure; e.g., 1S/2NT. Responder should prefer to bid a good 5-card side suit if he holds one, so his hand will usually be relatively balanced, although he could be 4441 or 5431 (with 5 trumps or a weak 5-card side suit) if he is too strong for a splinter raise (see below). If Opener has a singleton or void, he is required to bid it at the 3-level, except that with a good 5-card side suit, he should prefer to bid the side suit at the 4-level instead of showing his singleton or void at the 3-level. Lacking either a singleton, void, or good 5-card side suit, Opener rebids 4S with LTC = 7, or 3S with LTC = 6 or better, or 3NT with 15+HCP and a solid suit headed by AKQ.

The Splinter Raise (13-15 HCP): This uses a double jump in a new suit; e.g., 1S/4C or 1H/3S, to show a singleton or void in the new suit and 4+card support. As with the Forcing Raise, Responder should prefer to bid a good 5-card side suit if he holds one, so his shape is likely to be 4441, 5431, 5440 or 5530 (with 5 trumps or a weak 5-card side suit). Opener will sign off at 4S or proceed toward slam depending upon his holding in Responder's short suit.

The 12 HCP Raise: The perceptive reader will have noted a small gap in the major suit raise structure described above. The limit raises have a maximum of 11 HCP, while the forcing and splinter raises have a 13 HCP minimum. What does Responder do with a 12 HCP raise? With a good 5-card side suit, there is no problem, since he can always bid the new suit and then raise appropriately on the next round after reevaluating based on Opener's rebid. Lacking a good 5-card side suit, the solution is to use the Forcing 1NT response or bid a 4-card minor and then rebid 4S on the next round unless reevaluation after Opener's rebid reveals a new flaw.

BIDDING A NEW SUIT OVER OPENER'S MAJOR

If possible, Responder will always prefer to raise Opener's major using one of the sequences described above, so bidding a new suit at the 2-level shows either a lack of 3+card support, or a hand of game-invitational strength or better, with or without support for Opener's major. There are three types of new suit bids to consider:

1H/1S: This shows 4+ spades and 6+ HCP and denies 3+card support for hearts unless an Indirect Limit Raise follows, or a 12 HCP raise is shown by a raise to the 3-level or 4-level on the next round. If Opener now rebids 1NT or 2H, the only forcing rebid by Responder is a jump in a new suit; all other rebids (including Pass!) are merely attempts to find a playable partscore contract. Opener will raise spades with 4-card support. The raise to 2S shows either LTC = 7 or LTC = 6 with minimum HCP (12-14). The raise to 3S shows either LTC = 5 or LTC = 6 with intermediate HCP (15-17). The raise to 4S

shows either LTC = 4 or LTC = 5 with 18+ HCP. After the raise to 2S, Responder may make a game try using the same structure described under the Normal Raise; Opener will accept with LTC = 6 or with LTC = 7 and a singleton, void, or fitting honor in Responder's second suit. Opener can, of course, also pass the buck by bidding the fourth suit (showing a 3-card suit or perhaps Ax or Kx) or by rebidding 3H (showing a 6-card suit); Responder should now bid game with a fitting honor in hearts or a useful holding in the fourth suit. When Opener raises to 3S or 4S, any new suit bid by Responder is a slam try, again following the structure described under the Normal Raise.

If Opener rebids a new suit over the 1S response, a rebid of 2H by Responder is a drop-dead bid, showing either 2-card support with a weak hand or the Minimum Raise. A rebid of 2S by Responder is also discouraging, showing a 5+card suit and denying 3-card support, while a jump rebid to 3S is invitational, with a 6+card suit. A raise of Opener's new suit is encouraging but not forcing. 2NT and 3NT rebids by Responder show a stopper in the fourth suit; 2NT is discouraging since it denies the strength to bid 3NT, denies heart support, and also denies a decent 5+card spade suit. A bid of the fourth suit by Responder is forcing to game, inviting Opener to show 3-card support, rebid a 6-card heart suit, or otherwise settle in 3NT; **this bid is alertable**, since unless it is a prelude to a slam try, it tends to deny a stopper in the fourth suit (which would have been shown via a NT bid).

1H or 1S/2C or 2D: This shows at least game-invitational strength (a good 10+ HCP), and guarantees a 5+card suit unless Responder's next bid is an Indirect Limit Raise or a 12 HCP raise. Should Responder bid a new suit on the next round, the auction is forcing to game. The main targets are game in NT or Opener's major or slam in any playable denomination, with any partscore, or a game in Responder's minor as a last resort. Opener should rebid any decent 6-card major, raise Responder's minor with Qxx or better support and 14+ HCP, bid a second suit, or bid 2NT or 3NT. Opener's 2NT rebid shows a minimum 11-13 HCP, denies a 6+card suit, denies 3+card support for Responder's minor, and is not forcing; Responder can pass, or show 3-card support for the major (not forcing). Unless Responder has already limited his hand by an original pass, he must make another bid over any suit rebid by Opener. When Opener raises Responder's minor, Responder's options are to show 3+card support for Opener's major (forcing, and indicating a possible slam because of the double fit), to bid 3NT directly, or to bid a second suit (perhaps only 3 cards), inviting Opener to bid 3NT with a stopper in the fourth suit. If Opener indeed bids 3NT here and Responder bids again, his second suit bid was a ace-showing cue-bid and a slam try.

When playing 2/1 Game Forcing, most of the above structure still applies. Opener's 2NT rebid still shows a discouraging minimum; the auction is forcing to game, but can now stop in Responder's minor at the 4-level. When Responder has passed originally, his 2/1 response still guarantees a rebid, but the auction is no longer forcing to game.

1H or 1S/3C or 3D (The Weak Jump Shift): This shows a (usually aceless) hand with 5-9 HCP and a 6+card suit which is unlikely to be useful unless that suit is trumps. The bid is not forcing and will usually be passed. Opener should rebid his major only with an independent suit; Responder will not have support. With 3+card support, Opener can raise preemptively to make it difficult for the opponents to find their presumed fit in the other major. Opener will occasionally be able to bid 3NT with a **minimum** of Axx support (AQx or Axxx is better) and stoppers in the unbid suits; that level of support is

necessary to ensure that Responder's suit is runnable.

BIDDING 1NT OVER OPENER'S MAJOR The Forcing 1NT response to a 1H or 1S opening is a lot like a utility infielder in baseball: it must fill several roles. Several of those roles have already been described: the start of a Minimum Raise, the Indirect Limit Raise, the 3-Card Forcing Raise, and the 12 HCP Raise. In addition, the Forcing 1NT response covers all hands without 3+card support for Opener's major which are not suitable for a 2C, 2D, 3C, or 3D response, or for a 1S response (over a 1H opening). This includes all balanced hands with 2-card support, all 1444 hands (over a 1S opening), and all unbalanced hands with a lower-ranking 5+card suit which lack 3+card support, are too weak (5-9 HCP) for a 2/1 response, and have such poor suit quality (e.g., Jxxxxx) that they are unsuitable for a Weak Jump Shift.

If playing 2/1 Game Forcing, the 1NT response has still more work to do. In addition to the hand types described above, it must handle those invitational-strength hands with 10-12 HCP which are not strong enough to force to game.

OPENER'S REBID OVER THE FORCING 1NT

With a strong hand (LTC = 5 or better), Opener will either jump in a second 4+card suit (or rebid 2S after opening 1H), rebid his major at the 3-level or 4-level, or rebid 2NT, usually showing 5332 shape with 17-18 HCP. A 3NT rebid could be similar, with 19-20 HCP, but is more likely to show a 16+ HCP 6332 hand with a suit headed by the AKQ. His new suit jump, as well as the reverse to 2S after a 1H opening, is forcing one round, and could be based on a doubly-stopped 3-card suit such as AKx, in an effort to induce Responder to bid 3NT with some sort of stopper in each unbid suit. Responder can raise this suit with 4+card support, but will do so only with a hand unsuitable for game in NT or Opener's major. With weaker hands (LTC = 6 or 7), Opener will rebid a 6+card suit at the 2-level, rebid a lower-ranking 4+card suit, or rebid his cheapest 3-card minor. None of these bids is forcing, but over a 2-level minor suit rebid, Responder will tend to return to Opener's major with a weak doubleton in support, rather than pass and play in what could be a 43 minor suit fit (but might in fact be a 44 fit). Missing an occasional 44 minor fit in favor of a 52 major fit is the price Forcing 1NT players pay for the additional flexibility provided by the Forcing 1NT.

When playing Standard American without the Forcing 1NT, Opener never is forced to rebid a 3-card minor. With a minimum balanced hand, he is free to pass 1NT, so Responder is free to pass a 2-level rebid in a new suit. On the other hand, Standard American gives up all of the various 3-card raises we have described, and minor suit slams are harder to reach because a 2/1 response is often made with a 4-card suit instead of virtually guaranteeing a 5+card suit.