

Bidding in a Major Suit

We learned that a 1NT opening bid requires at least a balanced 15-17 HCP hand. What if we don't have a balanced hand? Holding an unbalanced Medium (15-17) hand or any Minimum to Big Hand (18+) one can only safely bid at the 1-level. We have already given the rationale for focusing on Major suit contracts and how to find a NT contract, so its time to learn how to find a Major suit contract.

In the early days the advantage of a contract in a Major was recognized but in those times it was common to make an opening bid relying on a 4-Card Major suit hoping to find partner with 4 in the same suit. This presented many a problem so modern bidding insists that to open in a Major one should have 5-Cards in that suit. And we defined Minimum hands for a purpose. Traditionally 13 HCP was required to Open the bidding – but that was in the 4-Card Major days. Giving ourselves an extra point for the 5th card in the suit we meet the old 13 HCP requirement if we open with 12HCP and a 5-Card Major. Remember we earlier spoke of distribution points. In the 5-card major scheme we are going to use we give ourselves 1 extra point for each card in a suit that makes a (Major) suit longer than the traditional length of 4. The magic-8 is the reason for our extension of the guidelines. Experience had suggested that combination of 8 trump cards (one more than the majority of 7) held by the offense gave a greater assurance of succeeding in 'making' a game contract.

The Magic-8 [In the days of the 4-card Major openings it was not uncommon to find oneself in a 4-level "game" contract having only a combined total of 7 trump cards. What that meant was the opponents held 6 trump and the odd that one of them held the same number (4) of trump as the Declarer was high. The advantage of naming the trump suit disappears. Thus an emphasis was put on insuring that if one was to be in a higher level suit contract that the declaring side should have that Magical extra trump card – the magic eighth card made success in major suit contract more assured. With only 5 trump cards the likelihood of one opponent having the same number of trump as the Declarer was greatly diminished.]

Consider the following hand: ♠AQ64 ♥KJ974 ♦QT6 ♣7

We can count 12 HCP and pick out a 5-Card Major (♥). In SAYC we meet the (old Goren 13 HCP) criteria (13+ PP) for opening a hand at the 1 level; so our opening bid would be 1♥. It says I have at least 12+HCP and 5♥'s.

Now consider this hand: ♠AKJ94 ♥KQJ ♦6 ♣QT7

We count 16 HCP and pick out a 5-Card Major (♠). We can't open this in NT, it is unbalanced hand, so we are 'forced' to open it with 1♠.

In both cases we send a similar message to our partner (the opponents are legally listening in). The message: Partner I have at least 12 HCP and at least 5 cards suit in suit I mentioned). Do you have anything to tell me?

Responding to an Opening of 1-of-a-Major

If you don't have at least a Minimum response hand (> 5 HCP) The answer is NO → **Pass**. Meaning I don't have enough HCP for us to venture above the 1-level.

If you have more than 5 HCP you can attempt to pack as much information into one bid (bidding space is a precious commodity – we usually want to use as little of it a necessary). So now with more than 5 HCP you have a choice defined by both how many cards you have in partner's suit *and then* by how many HCP you have, **in that order**)

Suggestion: Rather than put one's entire focus on their own hand one should get into the habit of interpreting all the bids (especially partner's) and attempt to make a mental picture of the holding being described by the bid. That's what the opening bid is doing: minimum of 12HCP shaped something like **xx-xxxxx-xxx-xxx** or **xxx-xxxxx-xx-xxx**

With 3-Card support:

6-9 HCP Bid 2 of Partner's suit This actually tells Partner a lot about your hand. Minimum support in both HCP (6-9) and number of trump, 3! It is called a **Simple Raise**. Partnership has the magic-8 which means we found a suit we can call trump!

10+ HCP With this many points you can respond at the 2-level. But it makes little sense if it isn't going anywhere. If you now bid a Minor at the 2-level you are likely showing either a legitimate 5-Card suit or you are doing what we call temporizing, to show 10+HCP. We'll get to all this in a moment! But, most importantly a 2-level response is, if you are not responding in Partner's Opening suit., ALWAYS showing 10+ HCP.

Without 3-Card support:

6-9 HCP: if you have 4+Spades you should bid 1♠ in response to a 1♥ Opening. Why? Partner just might have 4♠'s to go with his 5♥'s. And you have stayed at the 1-level.

6-9 HCP: Bid 1NT!! if you haven't already noticed NT bids are always used to show point count ranges. Pay attention to this notion!

Another Kind of Distribution Points

We earlier told you that points for extra length could be added to your evaluation of the strength of your hand. If you anticipate that your hand will be the Dummy you can possibly increase the value of your hand by counting shortness, sometimes referred to as Dummy points. We hadn't mentioned this in the context of bids centered around NT contracts because shortness is a detriment in NT contracts. **We don't apply shortness points to NT hands.**

Another caveat! You cannot count both shortness and length points. Shortness points are generally more valuable when used properly, i.e. in the Dummy – the hand holding the fewer (and generally weaker) trump cards. This is the hand where using trumps to gain extra tricks is advantageous.

Another caveat! Shortness points are more appropriate for the Dummy

Another caveat! Points for shortness should not be included until the Magic-8 fit is confirmed.

How many points? It's debatable. For beginners we suggest a more conservative rendering:

Doubleton (2 cards in one suit) = 1 Point

Singleton (1 card in a suit) = 2 Points

Void (no cards in a suit) = 3 Points notice a void has almost the same value as an Ace.

So you found a 'fit'...

Your Partner has opened 1♥ and you hold ♠A64 ♥KJ97 ♦JT6 ♣7 What do you bid?

2♥ says you have 6-9 HCP and 3+Card support. With this hand you have 4-Card support!

Once a fit has been found both Partners should regroup. Regroup means re-evaluate. Likely the opener, who has the longer, and likely the stronger Trump Cards, will have already included whatever length points he might have and will stay with his length points. In our example only the Dummy, so far, is aware of the fit and he can immediately re-evaluate. He still has only 9 HCP but he can now add 2 points for the singleton ♣. One of his trump will very likely eliminate one of his partners losing ♣'s. (That is the reason behind adding shortness points for Dummy – It makes the possibility of using a Trump card from the Dummy to gain a trick a better likelihood.) WE will demonstrate later that Trumping with a card from the hand with the longer Trump holding never, ever, gains a Trick. And that's why we chose the suit as trump.

With Dummy points added Responder's hand now evaluates to 11 PP (Playing Points) and

deserves a better bid than 2♥ which would indicate only 6-9 HCP. There is a special bid when a Responder has 4-Card support and a Medium response hand (10-12PP). It is called a **limit raise** because the bid limits the point count associated with the response to (10-12PP). You should bid 3♥; that's how to show the **limit raise**. If Opener has only 12 PP there isn't quite enough to reach game(25/26+), and he can Pass. But if Opener holds 14PP, knowing you have the extra Trump card can make the decision to raise the contract to 4♥ easier. Thus the jump to 3♥ is called an invitational bid – inviting partner to bid game if near or above the point range for a minimum opening hand.

Another Kind of 'fit'..

Your Partner has opened 1♥ and you held ♠A64 ♥KJ9 ♦QT65 ♣7 What do you bid?

Re-evaluation puts this hand at 12 PP, in the same range as the previous example, but it only has 3-Card support; it doesn't fit the requirements for a **limit raise**. How can the Responder show this Medium response hand without lying about the 4th♥? If Responder's first bid were to be 2♦ it would show the medium hand (changing suit and bidding at 2-level guarantees 10+PP), but would also suggest a 5-Card ♦ suit. A little bit of a lie! But when Partner rebids (a requirement and likely with either 2NT or 3♦) the responder can now show belated support for ♥'s by bidding 3♥. It is the same bid he would have given the first time if he had had 4♥'s. Comparing the two cases we see that using the two different ways of reaching 3♥ allows each to be more descriptive of the hand distribution.

Limit raise shows: 10-12PP and 4+Card support.

Bidding 2 of a Minor followed by rebidding Opener's suit shows: 10+PP and 3-Card support. It's called temporizing.

And.... although we are admonished to never lie to our partners; we see that this *little* lie allows us to effectively differentiate the hands – important information. The extra ♥ in the limit raise case might mean going successfully to Game, whereas in the second case it might be disastrous.

Next, your Partner has opened 1♥ and you hold ♠AT64 ♥KJ9 ♦Q65 ♣7 Re-evaluation once again gives this hand 12 PP; but now a 2♦ bid would be a *bigger* lie. Do you see a more truthful description of this hand. If you said start with 1♠; you're right on. Now the bidding sequence could go like this: 1♥ -- P – 1♠ P; 1NT – P – 2♥ – P; ? waiting until the second bid to show support shows 10+ HCP no matter that it is at the 2-level in this case and 3 in the previous. Why? Holding a Minimum response hand (6-9 HCP) deserves only a single bid by Responder: 1♥ – P – 2♥ or 1♥ – P – 1NT.

A second bid by Responder generally shows at least a Medium (10+PP) response hand. There is one exception. Example: 1♥ – P – 1NT – P; 2♣ – P – 2♥ – P; ?. When Opener bids two suits but shows Medium two-suited Opener and Responder shows minimum response hand but bids twice he is only showing preference for opener's first suit. Example: Your Partner has opened 1♠ and you hold ♠A9 ♥K6432 ♦QT532 ♣T. Your response, as we know, is 1NT → 6-9 HCP & no 3-card support. Opener rebids 2♣. You really don't have a legitimate rebid but can't leave Partner in 2♣. Partnership likely has 4 and no more than 5♣'s. You bid 2♣ showing preference for partner's first suit where **you know** there is a 7-Card fit. Partner shouldn't get excited, after all your 1N response has already limited your hand to <10 HCP.

We have pretty much covered most response cases when Game is apparently not 'in the cards'. We have not discussed rebids by the opener. But first..

Temporizing

To temporize means to delay or protract. In Bridge there are a number of places to temporize, it means you don't yet want to give a definitive signal/answer. In what we just covered when you have the conditions to give a limit raise there is no need to delay giving partner that information. In the other case you use a delayed indication of support in order to show your greater points and lesser length support.

An example: Your Partner has opened 1♥ and you hold ♠AT654 ♥KJ9 ♦QT5 ♣J5. 1♥ – P – 2♣ – P; 2♦ – P – 3♥ – P; Opener now knows you have 10+ HCP and only 3-Card support; the 2♣ bid was a temporizing bid, you couldn't have bid at 2-level with <10 HCP.

How Does the Opener Show Hand Type When the 1-level Is Used to Open 3 Types?

We know how to show a Balanced Medium Hand: 1NT. How about an unbalanced Medium hand? We bid 1-of-a-suit. How does Partner know if our 1-of-a-suit is showing a minimum or medium hand?

We need to first re-look at how we show that our 1♥ or 1♠ opener is a Minimum opener. Answer: A minimum openers rebid is generally 1NT, occasionally we are forced to rebid 2NT as in the first example in *Another Kind of 'fit'* above. Also a non-jump second bid by opener is generally just a 'decent' second suit, bid in hopes of finding a fit in a suit that Responder couldn't bid – there is no promise of additional strength. It is in these cases that the Responder should take the contract 'back' to the openers first suit. The first suit is generally longer than second suit. Thus Opening 1-of-a-Major followed by a rebid of or a non-jump NT bid or of 1-of-a-lower ranking suit indicates a minimum opening hand. Example: 1♠ – P – 1NT – P; 2♥ – P... We can tell that opener has a minimum opener is that the Responder can choose the 1st suit without increase the level of the bid. For a Responder to bid 2♥ after an Opening of 1♠ requires a 5-Card ♥ suit and 10+PP¹. The Responder may have a 5-Card ♥ suit and <10PP or a 4-Card ♥ suit. In both these situations the Responder can't show his ♥'s; So in our bidding sequence the Opener is just showing a 4-Card ♥ suit to go with his 5♠'s... just in case. A NT rebid shows a balanced hand; a 5♠-4♥ hand is not a balanced hand. There are two ways to show a Medium un-balanced opening hand(16-19HCP). We do it with Reverses or Jump-Shifts.

Reverses

Reverses are generally used to show 16-18 HCP hands. What is a Reverse? Answer: When the rank of the second suit is higher than that of the first suit. In our previous discussion the openers 2nd suit was lower ranking so for Responder to choose the 1st suit the level was not increased. A Reverse example: 1♠ – P – 1NT – P; 2♥. ♥'s are higher ranking than ♣'s. thus the 2♥ bid constitutes a reverse and shows a 16+ HCP hand; ♥'s should be shorter or equal in length to ♣'s. The way to recognize a reverse is this: Recall that the Responder, when opener shows a two suited hand, is suppose to take the strain back to the openers original suit; when this requires the bidder to go to the next higher level – the Opener's second bid is a reverse. In this example, for the Responder to put the strain back to ♣'s he is force to bid at the 3 level, a higher level than her partners rebid of 2♥. Compare this to a case when the mention of ♣ and ♥ are interchanged: 1♥ – P – 1NT – P; 2♣. For the opener's partner to return to the first suit, ♥, he can stay on the same level as openers 2♣ re-bid – it is not a reverse. What permits the reverse is the greater than minimum strength of the openers hand. Forcing partner to bid at a higher level is not as dangerous when the revers-er has a better than minimum hand. It is expected that the first suit is longer than the second, but it can be of equal length. Reverses are absolutely forcing for 1 round.

Note that the point range for reverses is off from our definition of Medium hands. This is due to issues concerning perceived strength requirements imposed by the level jump. It is not a problem at the upper end (18-19 HCP); but 15 HCP hands need to be scrutinized. A 'good 15' should be treated as a 16 HCP hand; and a 'bad 15' as a 14 HCP hand. So we say sometimes it's OK to reverse with a very good 15.

Bigger than Reverse Hands – Jump Shifts

For 18-19 HCP another, different technique, the jump-shift, can be utilized. The technique is somewhat self-explanatory in its name. The opening bidder is required to skip to a level above what it would be if a 'normal' bid would be made; and the strain must be different, essentially the introduction of a new strain. Example: 1♥ – P – 1♠ – P; 3♦ – P. If the opener wanted to simply mention ♦'s as a second suit the 2 level was open to be used; but the bidder chose to skip the 2-level and go to 3♦. This is the classic jump-shift used to show hands are not strong enough to be

1 We call it the dime store bid. 2♥ after partner opens 1♠ requires 5 & 10 – what old timers called the dime store.

