

Bidding in a Major Suit

We've learned that a 1NT opening bid requires at least a balanced 15-17 HCP hand. What if we don't have a balanced hand? What if we hold 12 or more HCP? Holding an unbalanced Medium hand or any Minimum to Big Hand one can only safely bid at the 1-level (safely because the higher our HCP the fewer HCP available for partner). We have already given the rationale for focusing on Major suit contracts and how to start towards a NT contract, so its now time to learn how to find the desirable Major suit contract.

As we said 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 with a 4-Card Major suit, hoping to find partner with 4 in the same suit. This presented many a problem so modern bidding and SAYC insists that to open in a Major one should have 5-Cards in that suit. And we have defined the Minimum hands just to this purpose. Traditionally 13 HCP was required to Open the bidding – but that was in the days of 4-Card Majors. Giving ourselves an extra point for the 5th card in the suit we meet the old 13 point requirement if we open with 12HCP hand and with a 5-Card Major. Remember we earlier spoke of distribution points. With a 6-card major and the 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, so we only need 11 HCP to go with our 6-card Major to open it. The magic-8 is the reason for our extension of the original guidelines. So with 11HCP we can open in a Major suit if we hold 6 cards in that suit. 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' any suit contract.

The Magic-8 [Again 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(still a majority). What that meant was the opponents held 6 trump and the odds that one of them held the same number (4) of trump as the Declarer was high. When this occurs the advantage in being able to name the trump suit begins to dissolve. 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 5 trump cards in one offensive hand the likelihood of one opponent having the same number of trump as that hand is greatly diminished which is another reason to insist on 5-card openings.]

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+ PP¹) 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. Partner should anticipate you to have a minimum (12-14) opening hand UFN.

Now consider these hands: ♠AKJ94 ♥KQJ ♦6 ♣QT7 or ♠AKJ94 ♥KQJ ♦6 ♣AT7

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 hand 2 we have 19 HCP What do we bid? Ans: 1♠

In all these 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? Note: Opener shows 5-card Major & has shown the lower end of his HCP count (12 HCP).

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

If you don't have at least a Minimum response hand (i.e. > 5 HCP) The answer is "I Can't Respond" → **Pass**. Meaning: I don't have enough HCP for us to venture above the 1-level, even if you have more than 14HCP.

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

1 PP → Playing Points are the sum of your HCP and your distribution points.

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 a bid. That's what the opening Major suit bid is doing: minimum of 12HCP shaped something like **xx-xxxxx-xxx-xxx** or **xxx-xxxxx-xx-xxx** or **xxx-xxxxx-x-xxxx**

With 3-Card support and:

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 (maybe 4)! It is called a **Simple Raise**. Partnership has the magic-8 which means you have found a suit to call trump! Responder has limited hand to 6-10 HCP.

With 3-Card support and:

10-12 HCP We could show partner our medium hand by delaying our show of support, first bidding something at the 2-level and then showing support on our rebid. This was how we used to differentiate our minimum and medium response hands. **Not anymore** as we will see.

With 4-Card support and:

10-12HCP With this many points and the extra trump card your side is very close to having sufficient resources to make game in a major suit. Recall the *rule*, **the rule of 23** says never bid above 2NT without assurance that your side has 23 HCP. Partner's open promises 12 HCP and your 10-12 puts you at 22+, the extra trump allows you to extend the 22 to 23 and bid at the 3-level to show partner that you hold 10-12 HCP and 4 trump cards. What if you have 4-card support and 6-9 HCP? You still bid 2, as above. The jump to 3-level is called the **Limit Raise** → you have limited your HCP to the 10-12 HCP range.

Without 3-Card support:

6-12 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 their 5♥'s. And you have stayed at the 1-level – important if you have a minimum or even a medium response hand (Partner might have a minimum opener so game is not assured).

6-12 HCP < 4♠'s: Bid 1NT!! if you haven't already noticed NT bids are always used to show point count ranges. Pay attention to this notion and don't let your distribution allow you to avoid bidding NT, you are simply relaying your point count to your partner. Only opening 1NT requires a balanced distribution.

Two Over One (Game-Force)

How we respond to a Major suit opening is the primary difference between SAYC and its extension to 2 over 1 (2/1). In SAYC we are able to differentiate between a 6-9 and 10-12 point responding hand by temporizing at the 2-level but when we decide to use 2/1 any two level response to a Major suit open is a game-force response and in order to respond at the 2-level we must have 13+ points to add to the possible 12 points the opener might have and still be assured that the combined hands have 25 points for a game contract (either NT or a Major suit contract). Thus if one partner opens 1♠ the only possible non-jump 2-level bid available is 1NT which now indicates not 6-9 but 6-12 and therefore is forcing to allow for the 3-card 10-12 HCP raise. We must note that if the opening is 1♥, a 1♠ response (showing 4+♠'s) is still available and should not be skipped just to show the 2/1 response (you don't want to miss the opportunity to show the 4+♠ holding). If you have a 13+ point hand also holding 4+♠'s there will be other ways to get to game. In SAYC the 1NT response to a Major opening is passable, in the 2/1 extension it is forcing and since opponents do not know that Opener's rebid is indeed forced they must be notified. The way this is done is for Opener to announce '**Forcing**' when

Responder bids 1NT.

Why 2/1?

In SAYC if a responder has a game-going (i.e. 13+ PP) hand often too much bidding space is used up making forcing bids trying to keep the bidding going. Often 3NT, game and some slams contracts can be missed because information exchange is stifled by finding a forcing bid. The folks who devised the 2/1 system found that their scores improved after they switched from SAYC to 2/1. In short, 2/1 compacts the bidding, the 2-level, game-force response leaves the remaining 2-level, and the 3-level for the partnership to further describe their hands exploring where the final game-level contract should be; i.e. the best contract for the best score (Our Goal). Bottom-line, the proper game contract will hardly ever be missed using 2/1. However, just because the Responder doesn't have the 13+ game-force hand, doesn't mean that the partnership doesn't – After opening we only know that Opener has at least 12 but could have as much as 21. Let's for a moment return to the case where the Responder doesn't have a game force hand.

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 opening hand. If you anticipate that your hand will be the Dummy you can possibly increase the value of your hand by counting shortness, that is why we refer to shortness points 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 potential NT hands.**

Another caveat! In the same hand, you cannot count both shortness and length points. Shortness points are only important in suit contracts and generally more valuable when properly located, 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.

So, the caveat! Shortness points are more appropriate for the Dummy!

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

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 so 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 for an additional trick.) 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, it's already a potential trick, a five card suit will likely produce an extra trick. The anticipation of this is behind the lowering 13 to 12 for an Opening hand.

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

and deserves a better bid than 2♥ response which would indicate only 6-9 HCP. Recall the 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 we show the **limit raise**. Note: this is identical to the case shown above where the Responder had 10-12 HCP. If Opener has only 12 PP there isn't quite enough to reach game(25/26+), and he can Pass. But if Opener holds 13/14PP, 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 higher point range for a minimum (12-14) opening hand.

Another Kind of 'fit'..

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

Re-evaluation raises this hand from 10HCP to 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 1NT it would show a 6-12 HCP. But when Opener rebids (a 2/1 requirement; likely the rebid will be either 2♣, 2♦, or 2NT) the responder can now show belated support for ♥'s by bidding 2♥ or 3♥. It is the same bid that would have given the first time if they 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 and the rule of 23 has not been violated

- Limit raise shows: 10-12PP and 4+Card support.
- Bidding 1NT and then 3 of the Major shows 3-Card support with 10-12 HCP. It's called **temporizing**.

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. The bidding: 1♥ – P – 1♠ – P; 2♦ – P – ?

1. Your 1♠ shows 4+♠'s and 6+ HCP; and changing suits² forces partner to bid, you now have the opportunity to show partner the size, 6-9 or 10-12, of your hand and if there is a ♥ fit or not. If Opener has 4♠'s the bid is 2♠ to show 8-card ♠ fit.

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 must open with 1-of-a-suit. How does Partner know if our 1-of-a-suit is showing a minimum or medium hand? Likewise the only opening bid available for a hand with 18 or 19 HCP is 1-of-a-suit. How does Partner know if your opening is 12-14, 15-21 (unbalanced)?

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

² A new suit, i.e. changing suits by Responder is absolutely forcing on Opener! One exception: when Responder has already passed once. Example: P-P-P-1♥; P-? Here the bidder in question has already passed and is not obligated to bid again.

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 might take the contract 'back' to the opener's first suit. The first suit is generally longer than second suit. Thus Opening 1-of-a-Major followed by a rebid of the same suit or a non-jump NT bid and often 1-of-a-lower ranking suit indicates a minimum opening hand. Example: 1♠ – P – 1NT – P; 2♥ – P... We can tell that opener likely has a minimum opener because the Responder can choose the 1st suit without increase the level of the bid; i.e. to choose ♠'s responder simply bids 2♠. For a Responder to bid 2♥ after an Opening of 1♠ requires a 5-Card ♥ suit and 10+PP³. 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 Responder has an unbiddable 4♥ holding. A NT rebid shows a balanced hand; a 5♠-4♥ hand is not a balanced hand. So if Opener had a 16+ HCP hand that could not be opened with 1NT there two ways to show that Medium plus un-balanced opening hand(16-21HCP). We do it with Reverses or Jump-Shifts.

Reverses

Reverses are generally used to show 16-19 HCP hands. What is a Reverse? Answer: When the rank of the Opener's second suit is higher than that of the first suit. In the last discussion the opener's 2nd suit was lower ranking so for Responder to choose the 1st suit it could be done without an increase in the level. A Reverse for example is: 1♣ – P – 1NT – P; 2♥. ♥'s are higher ranking than ♣'s. thus the 2♥ bid constitutes a reverse and shows a 16+ HCP hand (with <16 Opener simply passes the 1NT); ♥'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, can take the strain back to the opener's 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 forced to bid at the 3 level, a higher level than opener's 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 opener's 2♣ re-bid – it is not a reverse. What permits the reverse is the greater than minimum strength of the opener's hand. Forcing partner to bid at a higher level is not as dangerous when the reverser 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; when your partner reverses you should not pass.

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. Some say that reverses show 17+ or even 18+. Why? If Responder has a bare 6 HCP forcing responder to bid at the 3-level with less than 17 HCP violates the rule of 23. But How else can we show that good unbalanced 16 HCP hand?

Bigger than Reverse Hands – Jump Shifts

For 18-21 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 that are not strong enough to be opened at the 2-level but stronger than even the Medium opener. It also includes hands that, due to shape, can't be opened at 1NT. We will later see opening at the 2-level has special meanings. The jump-shift doesn't have to be into a suit. A Jump-Shift can be into NT. e.g. 1♣ – P – 1♠ – P; 2NT. Most players consider Jump-Shift to be forcing for one round. Why doesn't 1♥ – P – 1♠ – P; 3♥ absolutely show 18-19 HCP? It could, this too is a special bid showing "six and sixteen plus". The plus means it could

³ We call it the dime store bid. 2♥ after partner opens 1♠ requires 5 & 10 – what old timers called the dime store.

be 18 but it is generally as important to show the extra (sixth) card and be a little ambiguous on the point count i.e. not jumping to 2NT). It also suggests no second suit. There are times when hand shape makes a jump to 2NT an impossibility, The opener must then decide if it is prudent to use the reverse to show a 16-17 HCP hand (rather than the standard 18-19. And partner needs to be aware – it is one of many things you should be discussing with new partners.

Bidding up-the-line down-the-line.

Bidding up-the-line by an opener is what we saw constituted a reverse so one must be cautious when bidding up-the-line. Bidding up-the-line has the opposite effect if it is the Responder who normally bids up-the-line, it conserves bidding space. Watch! We are holding this hand ♠AJ64 ♥KT98 ♦QT5 ♣J7 (11HCP) when our Partner opens 1♣. (We will see shortly that when Partner opens in a Minor we want to try to find a response in a Major.) Here we have a choice between equal length Majors and might be tempted into choosing ♠'s 'because it is stronger'. That is the wrong choice. When faced with equal length suits responder's should be bid up-the-line. The reason: If we chose ♠'s and our partner holds 4♥'s we might miss that ♥ fit because our partner might not rebid it, they must go to to a new level to bid it. Whereas, if we bid the ♥ and our partner doesn't have 4♥'s but has 4♠'s he doesn't have to go to the next level to rebid ♠'s. So when responding: Bid up-the-line – neglecting suit strength. Opener's bidding up- the line is a reverse showing a big hand. Not so for Responders.

As a Responder what does Bidding down-the-line signify? If I am suppose to bid up-the-line when I have two suits of equal length of 4: bidding down-the-line must signal suits of unequal length; of course I bid the longest first. So if I first mention ♠'s and then rebid ♥'s my partner should realize that I have 5♠'s and 4♥'s (because if I were 4-4 I would have bid ♥'s 1st); if I really had 5♠'s and 5♥'s; I could bid ♠'s first and then bid ♥'s twice. The first time I bid ♥'s after bidding ♠'s it shows 5♠'s and 4♥'s; the next time I bid ♥'s it shows one more ♥; thus 5♠'s and 5♥'s. There is a bidding rule: **Each Time you repeat a suit in a consecutive fashion you are showing 1 more in suit length – it's not forcing**. Compare these two bidding sequences:

- a) 1♠ – P – 1NT – P; ← the ♠ bidder is saying “ I have 12+ HCP and 5♠'s
 2♠ – P ← the ♠ bidder is saying “ I 6♠'s but not promising any extra strength
- b) 1♠ – P – 1NT – P; ← the ♠ bidder is saying “ I have 12+ HCP and 5♠'s
 3♠ – P ← the ♠ bidder is now saying “ I have 6♠'s and some extra strength, i.e. medium

The hands might have been something like this: a) ♠AKQ974 ♥K2 ♦T85 ♣T Opener
 ♠T3 ♥Q42 ♦J954 ♣KQ67 Responder

b) ♠AKQJ74 ♥AJ2 ♦K8 ♣T Opener
 ♠T3 ♥Q42 ♦J954 ♣KQ67 Responder

Another Rule to remember: *We should not rebid 5-card suits in order to show the 5th card – rebidding a suit should always show 6-card holdings*. Reason: Consider this bidding sequence 1♥ – P – 1♠ – P; 2♥ – P – ? What is Responder to do holding only a single ♥ and 6HCP? They pass!. If your rebid was with just 5, you are now in a 2-level contract where the opponents have more trump than you. They have 7 and you have 6 – not a good situation.

Recap: Rebids by Opener

- 1) Partner supported your suit at 2-level : ex: 1♠ - P – 2♠
 - 12-14(bad 15) Pass

- (good) 15-18 Bid 3 1♠ - P – 2♠ - P; 3♠
- 19+ Bid 4

2) Partner bid 1NT

- Minimum hand Pass
- Rebid suit with 6-cards and - minimum hand @ 2-level 16+ @ 3-level
- Jump-Shift with 18+

Not much more to it.

Rebids by Opener Listen to your partner, use Partner's bids as a clue as to what to do – if you realize that there is sufficient HCP for Game bid it else Pass unless Partner forces you to bid.