

Barry Crane System Notes

by Kerri Sanborn

The Barry Crane system may seem loose and free wheeling, and it is. But, within the framework which I will lay out, it is actually quite disciplined. What may seem a ludicrous action to a Roth-Stone player is actually systemic in Crane. Just as these solid players would consider it an error to make a vulnerable overcall with AQTxx and out, so it is an error in Crane not to bid.

To begin your orientation I'll give you a few of the basic philosophies which Barry and his partners used to advantage.

1. Get in early, say your piece, then get out of the bidding. This means that there is virtually no balancing. An auction that goes 1♠ - P - 2♠ - P - P - Double is a penalty double. If we had a takeout double, it would have happened on the first round of bidding. Likewise, if responder to the overcall has one bid to make, he gets it out of his system. It is wrong to raise 1♠ to 2♠ then later compete to 3♠ (except in rare cases).
2. When bidding decisions come up, we take a pessimistic view. If partner needs a key card or two, we don't play him for it. If you can't find out whether a slam will be a good one, don't bid it.
3. When there is a decision as to whether to double the opponents or push to the five level, take the sure profit. This applies in many other bidding situations too.
4. Never lose the setting trick.
5. On defense, give count frequently and suit preference signals freely.
6. In bidding it is most important to show distribution.
7. Open any 11 point hand containing a king. With good distributional hands open lighter.

Opening Bids - Majors

Open 5 card spade suits, 4 card hearts.

Example: Axxxx Ax x Axxxx 1♠
Example: Axxx Axxx Axx xx 1♥

If you open a 4 card heart suit you also have 4 spades or 4 or 5 diamonds.

Example: Axx Axxx Axxxx x 1♥
Example: Ax Axxx Axxx xxx 1♥
Example: Axxx Axxx xx Axx 1♣
Example: Axxx Axxx xxx Ax 1♥

With 1-4-4-4 open 1♥, rebid 2♦. Whenever you open 1♥ and follow with 2♣ it shows a five card heart holding. (exception: xx AKxx Ax AJxxx open 1♥ and over 1♠ bid 2♣ and following a preference, 2NT).

Opening Bids - Minors

The only situation where you may open a 3 card diamond suit is when your shape is 4-4-3-2 and hearts are worse than QTxx.

1♦ shows 4 except in the case above. 1♣ shows 3 or more, except one case AKxx xxxx xxx Ax. Rather than bid 3 small diamonds or unbidable heard suit, bid 1♣.

As a rule we open the suit under the singleton with 3 four card suits, but in these cases we can't:

Example: Axxx Axxx Axxx x 1♥
 Example: x xxxx Axxx AKxx 1♦

With two four card minors open 1♦ unless there is great discrepancy in the suits such as xx Qxx xxxx AKQJ.

Responding to Notrump Bids

Jacoby Transfers are used. Then responder should bid distribution.

Example: AQxxx xx Kxxx Jx 1NT-2♥-2♠-3♦
 Example: AQJxxx Kx xxx xx 1NT-2♥-2♠-3NT

Three of a minor is weak. Three of a major is a slam try. 2 spades is Minor Suit Stayman. There is a gadget for finding a fit at the two level with weak hands. You may bid Stayman and retreat to 2NT knowing that partner must pass. In order to invite, the auction starts 1NT-2NT. If opener now wishes to accept and has a 4 card major he now bids 3♣ Stayman. Responder bids 3♦ with any major and 3NT without one. Over 3♦, opener names his major and is thus able to investigate a fit. A possible auction or two

Example: 1NT-2♣-2♥-P xx Kxxx Kxxx xx
 Example: 1NT-2NT-3♣-3♦-3♠-3NT-4♥-P
 Example: 1NT-2NT-3♥ (5-card suit) -4♥-P

Opening Notrumps

15-17 HCP - no small doubletons. The minimum holding in a suit is Qx. If you cannot bid the hand any other way, you may deviate. Five card majors are OK.

Example: xx AKx Qxx AKxxx. If you open a club you can't rebid, so 1NT is correct.
 Example: AKxx xx Qxxx AKx. Open 1♦ intending to rebid 1♠.

A 2 NT rebid shows 18-19 HCP.

Example: AKxx Qxx Axx AJx 18 HCP Open 1♣, rebid 1♠, but
Example AKxx QJx Axx AJx 19 HCP Open 1♣, rebid 2♠.

With 20 HCP rebid 3 NT, but if you have a major to jump in, this takes precedence. With 21 or 22 HCP open 2NT. Distribution can be liberal.

2♣ followed by 2 NT = 23 - 24.
Opening 3 NT = 25 - 26.
Thus 2♣ then 3 NT = 27 - 28.

Over Major Openings

Jump raises are forcing and may have a singleton, so after jump raise 3NT asks for singleton. Limit raises in competition.

Since we do not play limit raises, we use 2♣ as a temporizing bid to show the point count to go to the two level. When followed by a simple preference, this shows a limit raise and says nothing about clubs. When followed by 2NT it shows 11-13 HCP. If opener rebids his suit it is non-forcing if responder has a limit raise and he should usually pass (1♠-2♣-2♠ = minimum). With no clear bid and an invitational hand, opener bids 2♦ to see what the 2♣ bid was all about. Some examples:

Should partner bid 1♠, bid 2♣ with:

QJx AKxxx xxx xx - rebid 2♠
xx AKxx Qxxx Kxx - rebid 2NT
Axxx Axxx Qxxx x - rebid 2♠

With all but the last example, you should pass a 2♠ rebid.

Jump Preferences

In majors they are forcing.

Example: 1♠ - 2♦ - 2♥ - 3♠ forcing Qxx Ax AKxxxx xx

Example: 1♠ - 2♦ - 2♥ - 4♠ QJx Ax AKxxxx Kx - monster!

After Minor Opener

1♣ or 1♦ and raise = 2 - 6 HCP
1♣ or 1♦ and jump raise = 7 - 9 HCP
jump preference = 10 - 12 HCP

In competition, this does not apply.

Responder's Suit Rebids

By responder - Jump rebids are forcing!

Example: 1♣-1♥-1♠-3♥ = Ax AKxxxx Kx xxx

A simple rebid of your suit invites

Example: 1♣-1♥-1♠-2♥ = xx KQT9xx A JTxx

With xx KQT9xx x JTxx make a weak jump response initially. This can show 8 HCP.

A raise of weak jump response is constructive, 2 NT is natural.

Opening 2 Bids

All are strong in first or second seats with 2♣ as either a notrump rebid or a club suit. In third and fourth seats 2♦, 2♥, and 2♠ are weak, and raises are constructive. After 2♥ or 2♠, 2NT shows no fit but both minors - asks opener for preference. New suits are non-forcing.

Responding to Strong 2 Bids

Over 2♣, 2♦ is negative. There is no double negative. Over 2♦, 2♥, or 2♠, 2 NT is negative.

A jump raise shows trump fit, but no first or second round controls.

Overcalls (1 - 17 HCP)

If partner is not a passed hand, you should be sounder than if he has passed, especially if you are bidding at the two level.

Example: AJT9 x T98xxx Jx is an acceptable 1♠ overcall in second seat,

but not good enough for 2♦. At matchpoints, overcall more freely for a lead. Jump raises by unpassed hand are equivalent of good limit raise. Cue bids are forcing. Jumps in new suits are 95% forcing. They show a good opening bid. Jump overcalls are preemptive.

Doubles

Negative doubles are played through 3♦. After 1♣ - 1♠ - Double, opener needs four hearts to bid them, as responder has not guaranteed four. 1♣ - 1♦ - Double shows 4-4 in the majors, but occasionally 4-5. 1♣ - 1♥ - Double usually denies four spades, but opener should bid a spade suit anyway. 1♣ - P - 1♦ - 1♠ - Double is negative.

Over Opponents Takeout Doubles

New suits are non-forcing and deny the strength to redouble. Jumps in a new suit are equivalent to weak two bid. After a major - Double - 2 NT is both minors. One of a major by responder following takeout double shows 5-card suit (e.g. 1♣ - Double - 1♠ = 5).

Opening Preempts

In first or second seat they are sound and follow the rule of 2 and 3. In minors they show 7 or 8 to AKQ, AKJ, AQJ, or AKQJ. With passing partner, they are random.

When They Preempt

Doubles by you are takeout thru 4♦, optional of 4♥, and penalty of 4♠.

Miscellaneous

Notrump Overcalls are 15 - 17 HCP. Over these, cue bids are Stayman. Transfers are off.

Unusual notrump shows the lower 2 unbid suits.

When They Open 1 NT

2♣ is random takeout bid, but with a gear towards the majors. If it denies a suit, it will usually be clubs. Responder should not pass without a 6-card club suit. Doubles are penalty and are made more liberally than in most systems, especially over weak notrumps.

Direct cue bids are strong. Responder's first obligation is to bid notrump with a stopper in opponent's suit. 1♠ - 2♠ could be xx Ax AKQxxxx Ax. If the auction goes 1♠ - 2♠ - P - 3♣ - P - 3♦ is not forcing. If the opening bid is a minor in forcing club system, the cue bid is natural.

Conventional Calls

New minor forcing except by a passed hand.

1♣ 1♠
1NT 2♦
2NT is minimum with 2 spades

1♣ 1♠
1NT 2♦
3NT is maximum with 2 spades

1♣ 1♠
1NT 2♦
2♥ shows 4 hearts and 2 spades

The weak 6-4 bid is used when the minor could not have been bid at the one level

1♦ 1♥
1♠ 3♣ = weak with 4♥ and 6♣

1♣ 1♥
1♠ 3♦ = forcing because we bid up the line with 4-6.

Weak jump responses, as described earlier, up to 8 HCP, may be 5-card suit.

Double jump shifts show 7-4. This should be a reasonable hand as you are raising the level so high

1♣ 1♥
3♠ = AQxx x x AKxxxxx

Splinters in the most obvious situations. That is when you jump in opponent's suit directly.

1♥ - 1♠ - 3♠ = Splinter
1♣ - 1♥ - P - 3♣ = Clubs!!

Limit 2NT in Competition

Unusual over Unusual NT's

1♥ or 1♠ - 2NT - 3♣ = limit raise
1♥ or 1♠ - 2NT - 3♦ = forcing raise
1♥ or 1♠ - 2NT - 3♥ or 3♠ = non-forcing; if in your suit, weaker than 3♣.

Gerber is used only when obvious and must be a jump.

Over Blackwood interference, double is penalties (take sure profit). Pass shows no aces. Bid up the line with 1 or more ace.

Opening Leads

We lead high from 3 or 4 small. Fourth best from honors or 5 or more. Q from KQT demands Jack. Against NT, A asks for highest card. K for second high. Foster echo to first trick. Versus NT - lead aggressive if 5-4. Lead strength, not length.

Special Distributional Rules

Many of these are from Culbertson's rule of symmetry. Others may seem silly, but if you play the same way always you eliminate guessing.

Rule for Finding Queens and Jacks

When you are looking for a queen or jack, it is over the jack or ten in minors.

Club suit
KT9
AJx - play LHO for Q

KT9

Qxx - play RHO for J

In the majors this is reversed. This does not take precedence to knowledge of where length is. It applies only in guessing situations.

Missing Four to the Queen

Always a problem or do you always play for the drop? According to the rule, you check your own distribution first. If your combined hands contain a singleton, you play for this suit to break 3-1 too. If you have two singletons, they balance and so will your mystery suit - play for the drop. If you are 3-0 or 2-1 in a side suit, this also will balance - again play for the 2-2.

Missing Three to the King

When you lead toward the ace, if the next hand plays the smallest card, play the ace - if he plays the middle card, then finesse. This has a partial logic in that, with two small most players will play small.

QJT98

A6543 2 - play ace; 7 - finesse