

Improving 2/1 Game Force - Part 1
By: Fred Gitelman

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A great many club and tournament players these days write "Two Over One Game Force" in the General Approach area of their convention cards. The main advantage of playing 2/1 is that the early establishment of a game force allows for extra bidding space to explore for slam or choose the right game contract. There are two main weaknesses inherent to the 2/1 system:

1. You cannot play in 1NT if your partner opens the bidding with one of a major. The 1NT response is forcing.
2. Responder often has a rebid problem after his forcing 1NT when opener rebids 2 of a minor (possibly a 3 card suit) due to the wide high card ranges and many possible distributions of both hands.

If you are going to play 2/1 you better get used to these problems since there isn't much you can do about them. The way that most partnerships play 2/1 creates many other problems that are not inherent to the system. The purpose of this article is to discuss some of the problems caused by the way that most people use 2/1 and to suggest some solutions.

PROBLEM 1: The lack of definition of the 2/1

Since a 2/1 response to a major suit opening is a game force, many pairs use a 2/1 simply to establish a force without regard to the fact that they may be misdescribing their hands. They assume that all of the room that they save will allow them to "catch up later". They are wrong. Imagine, for example, that you hold:

South	West	North	East	South
♠ AQ6543 ♥ 2 ♦ A32 ♣ Q32	Pass	2♣	Pass	1♠
	Pass	3♠	Pass	2♠

You open 1♠ and your partner bids 2♣, forcing to game. You rebid 2♠ and partner raises to 3♠. Do you like your hand? You should. Despite your minimum point count you have good trumps, good controls and a good fit for partner's suit. Unfortunately, partner's "suit" may not really be a suit. Partner could have:

North
♠ KJ10 ♥ AK43 ♦ K4 ♣ J654

where even the five level is not safe. On the other hand, if you reverse partner's Hearts and Clubs slam is laydown. If you reverse your Hearts and clubs, slam is also laydown. Would you like your hand as much if you had a singleton in your partner's suit? You shouldn't, but when a 2/1 can

show just about any balanced hand with game forcing values you are asking for trouble like this. There are several popular solutions to this sort of problem. Most of them involve making some other bid besides a 2/1 when responder has a balanced game force with 3 card support for opener's major. Some players bid 1NT forcing followed by a jump to four of opener's major as showing a balanced 13-15 with 3 card support. Some players play that a 3NT response to a major suit opening shows this type of hand. Variations of the Swiss convention use jumps to the four level to show various balanced raises. All of these methods have the problem that they take up too much room and make it impossible to find out how well the hands fit at a safe level.

The solution that I suggest is to use a 2NT response to a major suit opening just like Goren did - as a game-forcing balanced hand with 13-15 HCP (you can play that it could also show 19+ with a 3NT response showing 16-18). The 2NT response can (and frequently does) contain 3 card support for opener's major. 2NT usually should not contain a side 5 card suit (make a 2/1 with that), but if you have a really bad five card suit (like Qxxxx) in an otherwise suitable hand, it may be best to bid 2NT rather than make a 2/1. Opener's rebids after the 2NT bid are natural. Opener will bid another 4 card or longer suit if he has one giving responder a chance to take preference with 3 cards in opener's major. Opener can rebid his major when he has 6 or more cards or bid 3NT or 4NT (quantitative) with 5332. Over opener's 3NT rebid responder may elect to pass with 3 card support for opener's major, especially if he is 4333.

As a consequence, a 2/1 response will almost always show a good 5 card or longer suit - a source of tricks. Having this information will frequently help opener decide how well the hands fit and if a slam try is warranted. It will also allow opener to feel more comfortable with raising the 2/1 suit with 3 card support.

If you currently play Jacoby 2NT, you will have to find another way to make a forcing raise of opener's major. I suggest using the cheapest jump shift (1♥-2♠ and 1♠-3♣) as a forcing raise. Hands for strong jump shifts are very uncommon and modern methods like 2/1 and fourth suit forcing are usually effective for dealing with these hand types. If you play Bergen raises, the 3♣ response to 1♠ may already have a use. In this case, I suggest that you make 3♦ and 3♥ your Bergen raises over 1♠. I will not get into my suggested responses to the 2♠ and 3♣ forcing raises here - perhaps in another article.

PROBLEM 2: The (misguided) principle of fast arrival

You hold this hand:

South	West	North	East	South
♠ 432	Pass	2♣	Pass	1♥
♥ AQJ32	Pass	4♥	Pass	3♣
♦ A2				
♣ KJ2				

You open 1♥, partner forces to game with 2♣. You raise to 3♣ (isn't it nice to know partner has a good five card suit?) and partner jumps to 4♥. What should you do now? If you play 2/1 the way that most pairs do, partner's unnecessary jump in a forcing auction shows a minimum hand (the principle of fast arrival). That information is not very useful here. Opposite this minimum:

North
♠ KJ10
♥ AK43
♦ K4
♣ J654

you have a laydown slam. Opposite this minimum:

North
♠ Q54
♥ K65
♦ K3
♣ AQ543

The five level is not safe. The problem here is the jump to 4♥. This bid deprives you of finding out at a safe level whether or not a spade control exists. The theory behind using the principle of fast arrival after 2/1 auctions is that without fast arrival, neither partner ever gets to express whether or not they have extra values. Standard 2/1 places such a large emphasis on bidding out your pattern and finding out how well the hands fit that the bidding is often at a high level before either partner has been able to limit his hand. Using fast arrival gives responder a chance to say that he has a minimum 2/1. Unfortunately, the price that must be paid for limiting responder's hand is too high. There are simply too many times that you need the four level for cue-bidding, especially when opener's hand is virtually unlimited (as is usually the case in 2/1 auctions). Even if both opener and responder are minimum, twelve tricks can easily exist if the hands fit well. Here is the solution that I propose:

In the above auction (1♥-2♣-3♣) and in all similar 2/1 auctions in which responder can raise opener's major for the first time at the three level:

A jump to four of opener's major, instead of a raise at the three level, is a picture jump. A picture jump shows good trump support, a good suit of your own (promised by the 2/1) and no first or second round control in any unbid suit. Opener usually has such a good picture of responder's hand that he can place the contract (sometimes after using Keycard Blackwood). Here is an example of a hand for a jump to 4♥ by responder in the auction we have been discussing:

North
♠ Q4
♥ K654
♦ 43
♣ AQJ43

A jump in a new suit is a splinter (a singleton in the suit bid), but it is very well defined. Like the picture jump it shows good trumps and a good 5 card 2/1 suit. The splinter bid denies first or second round control in the unbid suit. Also, do not splinter with a singleton Ace or with a void.

Here is an example of a splinter bid of 4♦ in the above auction:

North
♠ 654
♥ K654
♦ 3
♣ AQJ43

Once again, responder's hand is so well-defined that opener will frequently be able to place the contract. In the above example, opener will know that:

South
♠ A32
♥ AQ732
♦ 42
♣ K52

produces slam while the same hand with the ♦A instead of the ♠A belongs at the four level. Notice that in the auction that we have been discussing, responder never mentions the word "Hearts". The raise is implicit. It is certainly non-intuitive that the splinter should be in support of Hearts (as opposed to Clubs) and you should have an explicit partnership understanding before making this kind of bid.

With all other hands with 3 card or more support for opener's major, raise at the three level (auctions in which you can raise at the two level are different - perhaps I will discuss those in another article). Since both opener's and responder's hands are virtually unlimited at this point, it is necessary to have a way for either partner to show genuine slam interest. The answer is a convention called "Serious 3NT" (**John Gowdy** discussed Serious 3NT in a previous issue of Canadian Masterpoint). Here is the definition of serious 3NT:

When an 8 card or longer major suit fit is agreed at the three level and the bidding is forced to game, a bid of 3NT by either partner is completely artificial. It says: "partner I have serious slam interest, please cue-bid for me."

If you fail to bid serious 3NT when you have the opportunity and cue-bid instead, that carries the following message: "Partner, I do not have serious slam interest, but I am cue-bidding in case you do."

What should you cue-bid? In my partnerships with **Geoff Hampson** and **Sheri Winestock** we have found the following approach very successful: I suggest that a cue-bid in partner's 2/1 suit shows one of the top three honours (Ace, King, or Queen). A cue-bid of your own 2/1 suit shows two of the top three honours. A cue-bid in an unbid suit shows any first or second round control (Ace, King, singleton, or void). Cue-bidding is always done up the line. By skipping a step, you deny an appropriate holding in the step that you skip. 4NT by either partner is always Roman Keycard Blackwood. Some consequences of this approach to slam bidding:

- It is impossible to get to the five level off two quick tricks in any suit.
- It is almost never necessary to cue-bid at the five level. In case you haven't noticed, cue-bidding at the five level is usually a sign of desperation - you don't know what to do so you cue-bid at the five level to transfer the decision to your partner.

- You will never get too high when neither partner has the extra values or knowledge of a good fit needed for a serious slam try.
- You can never play in 3NT when you have an eight card major suit fit after a 2/1 auction. Some players (**Irving Litvack** for example) would find this to be a big enough problem that they would not consider playing this method. In my experience, playing in 3NT in these sorts of auctions is the least of your problems. This is especially true when responder is known to have at least a five card 2/1 suit and the odds are high that at least one person has an unbalanced hand and/or has extra values.

Here are some examples of using serious 3NT and the cue-bidding style that I recommend in 2/1 auctions:

EXAMPLE 1:

West	East	West	North	East	South
♠ KJ432	♠ AQ5	1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
♥ A32	♥ 4	2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
♦ Q2	♦ AKJ1043	4♦	Pass	4NT	Pass
♣ Q32	♣ A54	5♥	Pass	7NT	Pass
		Pass	Pass		

Opener's 4♦ denies serious slam interest (else 3NT) and denies first or second round club control (else 4♣), but shows one of the top three honours in Diamonds. Responder can count 13 tricks.

EXAMPLE 2:

West	East	West	North	East	South
♠ AQJ32	♠ K654	1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
♥ A2	♥ KQ	3♦	Pass	3♠	Pass
♦ K432	♦ AQJ65	3NT	Pass	4♦	Pass
♣ Q2	♣ J3	4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opener's 3NT shows serious slam interest. Responder's 4♦ shows good Diamonds but denies a club control. Opener's 4♠ is an absolute sign-off - a statement that no club control exists. Responder, despite holding extra values, must pass.

EXAMPLE 3:

West	East
♠ AJ1032	♠ KQ4
♥ KJ2	♥ 543
♦ 2	♦ AKQJ43
♣ Q432	♣ A

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♥	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♦	Pass	6♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

4♥ denies serious slam interest, a club control, and a top honour in Diamonds (do not cue-bid shortness in partner's suit). A heart control is all responder needs to know about. What would happen if you exchange opener's honours in Hearts and Clubs?

EXAMPLE 4:

West	East
♠ AJ1032	♠ KQ4
♥ Q987	♥ 543
♦ 2	♦ AKQJ43
♣ KJ2	♣ A

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♦	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

When responder bids 4♦, he is announcing serious slam interest. This is due to the fact that opener has denied serious slam interest by not bidding 3NT. Responder would sign off over 4♣ if he did not have serious slam interest of his own. Opener is now obligated to show a heart control if he has one. When opener bids 4♠, responder knows that the defense can take at least the first two heart tricks.

EXAMPLE 5:

West	East
♠ K32	♠ Q4
♥ AJ5432	♥ K76
♦ 32	♦ AQ7654
♣ K2	♣ AQ

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♥	Pass
3♠	Pass	3NT	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♦	Pass
4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

When Hearts is agreed at the three level, opener must bid 3♠ if he has a control in Spades. Any other bid would deny a spade control (3NT would be Serious with no spade control). Responder has extra values and shows this by bidding 3NT. 4♣ shows a control and 4♦ shows two of the top three honours. When opener does not take charge (by bidding Blackwood), despite the fact that all suits are known to be controlled, responder knows that opener must be minimum. Responder has bid out his hand and should pass 4♥.

EXAMPLE 6:

West	East
♠ A32	♠ Q4
♥ AKJ432	♥ Q65
♦ AJ	♦ KQ432
♣ 32	♣ KQ4

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♥	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♣	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♣	Pass
6♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

Responder, despite having a terrible hand, must bid 4♣ because opener is still unlimited (remember, Serious 3NT by opener would deny a spade control). Responder can take some comfort in the fact that his 4 cue-bid denies serious slam interest. In this example, opener can take over once he learns that responder can stop Clubs.

As you may have realized by now, the approach to cue-bidding in 2/1 auctions that I recommend is quite a bit different from the fast arrival methods that most 2/1ers play. I suggest that if you decide to adopt this approach you and your partner should discuss it thoroughly first. Serious 3NT is a convention for serious players. It is not something that you can casually adopt. If you are really serious about this, you might ask me about a convention called Last Train to Clarksville. Last Train is a convention that fills some of the holes in the cue-bidding style that I recommend (holes that my carefully constructed examples do not fall into).

If there is one lesson to be learned from this article it is that there is considerably more to effective bidding than just writing down the name of a convention or a system on your convention card. Good partnership agreements are much more important than the system that you play. If you and your partner decide to play a complex non-standard system, put in the time to do it right. Discuss your auctions and make sure you understand why you play bids to mean what they do. When you truly understand your system, you will start to see the benefits in your results.

Improving 2/1 Game Force - Part 2

By: Fred Gitelman

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I have written an article in each and every issue of Canadian Masterpoint. In the last issue (November 1993) I wrote my first article about bidding, specifically on improving the way that most people play 2/1 game force. Much to my surprise, I received far more fan mail than usual for this article. Many people requested a follow-up article. Well readers, you asked for it! I recommend that you (and make some coffee) before reading this. I apologize in advance for how technical this article is. I have tried to keep things as simple as possible. Unfortunately, the subject is complex.

What is "Last Train to Clarksville"?

"Last Train to Clarksville" (LTTC) is a convention I mentioned in my last article. I claimed that it was necessary to make the method of cue-bidding that I recommend effective. LTTC is not an easy convention to understand. It can mean different things depending on exactly how the auction has gone. There are 2 rules that can at least tell you when a bid is LTTC.

1) We have an agreed 8+ card major suit fit at the 3-level and the bidding is forced to game. We have embarked upon a cue-bidding auction of the type discussed in the last article. One hand has shown serious slam interest. There are 2 ways to show serious slam interest. One way is by bidding Serious 3NT. The other way is by continuing to try for slam despite the fact that partner has denied serious slam interest by bypassing Serious 3NT.

2) The bid by either partner of the step immediately below 4 of our agreed major (4♦ if Hearts agreed, 4♥ if Spade agreed) is LTTC.

Before I attempt to tell you how LTTC is used, I first want to define what I mean by "Blackwood" in this article:

We play some sort of Roman Keycard Blackwood. This means that the King of the agreed trump suit counts as a fifth Ace and it is possible to find out about the trump Queen. By bidding Blackwood, you commit the hand to the six level if only one of these cards is missing. You cannot use Blackwood and sign off when you discover that only one of these six cards is missing. Since people seem to do this all of the time against me, perhaps it is an acceptable practice in some schools of bidding theory. It is not an acceptable practice in the methods I am discussing. Hopefully, you will gain some insight into why this is so as you read my examples. I will also refer to a convention called Lackwood. As you will see, when you play LTTC, you can no longer cue-bid in the LTTC suit (Diamonds if Hearts is agreed, Hearts if Spades is agreed). Lackwood can be used to resolve any problems of missing controls in the LTTC suit while retaining the possibility of bidding grand slams.

Lackwood is always a bid of 5 of the agreed major. It is either a bid immediately after LTTC or as a direct raise of 4 of the agreed major. Bidding Lackwood always denies control of the LTTC suit. Lackwood is a last resort. It is a convention you should go out of your way not to use. Most of the time you can infer the presence or absence of a control in the LTTC suit and simply bid Blackwood.

Here are the responses to Lackwood:

- PASS - I have no control in the LTTC suit
- 1st step - First round control of LTTC suit & 0 or 3 Keycards
- 2nd step - First round control of LTTC suit & 1 or 4 Keycards
- 3rd step - First round control of LTTC suit & 2 Keycards no Queen
- 4th step - First round control of LTTC suit & 2 Keycards & Queen
- 6 of our major - Second round control of LTTC suit

If you play 1430 RKCB feel free to invert the 1st and 2nd steps.

There is no simple rule for what it means to bid LTTC since it doesn't always mean the same thing. Assuming that we have agreed a major suit at the 3-level, there are 16 possible LTTC sequences. In 4 of these sequences, it is necessary to play that LTTC has a very specific meaning.

AUCTION 1:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
Pass	2♦	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	3NT
Pass	4♦	Pass	4♥

In Auction 1, 3NT is serious. 4♦ shows good Diamonds and denies a control in Clubs (see last article). 4♥ is LTTC. In this example LTTC means:

"Partner, I have forced you to cue-bid and I do not know how good your hand is. If I was to bid 4 it would be an absolute signoff, a statement that we have at least 2 Club losers. I have the Club control that you are lacking, but my hand is flawed in some way so that I cannot bid Blackwood. Perhaps you have sufficient strength to move towards slam (by bidding Blackwood or Lackwood depending on the Heart situation).

AUCTION 2:

West	North	East	South
			1♥
Pass	2♦	Pass	2♥
Pass	3♥	Pass	3NT
Pass	4♦		

In Auction 2, 3NT is serious but it denies a Spade control (else 3♠). 4♦ is LTTC (denying a Club control). In this example LTTC means:

"Partner, you have shown a strong hand with no control in Spades. If I also had no Spade control, I would bid 4♥ as an absolute signoff. I cannot bid 4 (showing both Spades and Clubs controlled) or bid above 4♥ because I do not have a Club control. Therefore, I am bidding LTTC. Since my hand is still unlimited, you are expected to continue (Blackwood or Lackwood depending on the Diamond situation) any time you have a Club control."

AUCTION 3:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
Pass	2♥	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	3NT
Pass	4♣	Pass	4♥

In Auction 3, 3NT is serious and 4♣ is a cue-bid. 4♥ is LTTC, denying a Diamond control. In this example, LTTC means:

"Partner, I have taken control of the auction, but I am lacking a Diamond control. If you do not have a Diamond control either, please signoff. Otherwise, please bid Blackwood or Lackwood depending on the Heart situation."

By bidding 4♠ instead of 4♥ (LTTC) the message would be:

"Partner, I have shown extra values, but I am lacking a Diamond control. If you have a Diamond control please use your judgement as to whether you should bid PASS or bid Blackwood or Lackwood depending on the Heart situation."

AUCTION 4:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
Pass	2♥	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♣
Pass	4♥		

In Auction 4, 4♣ is a cue-bid denying serious slam interest (else 3NT). 4♥ is LTTC. In this example LTTC means:

"Partner, you have told me that you have a minimum hand, but I am still interested in slam. However, I am lacking a Diamond control. If you also have no control of Diamonds, please signoff. Otherwise, please bid Blackwood or Lackwood depending on the Heart situation."

In the first two auctions, LTTC is a statement that a control exists in a particular suit. In the last two auctions, LTTC is a question that asks for a control in a particular suit. In all of these auctions, LTTC is completely artificial, saying nothing about the suit mentioned.

There are 12 more possible LTTC auctions where the meaning of LTTC is not clear. Here are some examples:

AUCTION 5:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
Pass	2♥	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♦
Pass	4♥		

4♦ is a cue-bid denying serious slam interest and denying a club control. What does 4♥ mean? It must show extra values and a club control. Without either of these, you would signoff in 4♠.

There are 3 possible further interpretations (of which only one can be used):

- 1) A cue-bid of a Heart control, but in a hand with not quite enough strength to bid Blackwood. The message is that the other hand should use their judgement as to whether or not to bid Blackwood.
- 2) A denial of a Heart control. The message is that the other hand must bid Blackwood with a Heart control and bid 4 otherwise.
- 3) Neither showing nor denying a Heart control. The message here is that the 4♥ bidder is still interested in slam, but needs help somewhere. Their partner can choose to bid Blackwood with a Heart control or Lackwood without one.

AUCTION 6:

West	North	East	South
			1♥
Pass	2♦	Pass	2♥
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♦

4♦ clearly denies spade and club controls as well as serious slam interest. This time there are only 2 possible interpretations (of which only one can be used):

- 1) A cue-bid of a Diamond control. Bidding 4♥ instead would deny a Diamond control.
- 2) Neither showing nor denying a Diamond control but showing a good hand given what has been denied (a good minimum with no control in spades or clubs - chances are you would have a Diamond control). This interpretation implies that you could sometimes bid 4♥ with a really bad hand and a Diamond control. With a really good hand with controls in Spades and Clubs, the 3♥ bidder can still choose to bid either Blackwood or Lackwood (depending on the Diamond situation).

I prefer to play interpretation 3) in Auction 5 and interpretation 2) in Auction 6. These interpretations cause there to be a little bit of murkiness in an otherwise highly structured cue-bidding style. In my experience, however, the partner of the LTTC bidder can almost always figure out when to advance. Therefore, I am going to propose the following interpretation of LTTC for auctions other than auctions 1-4.

Bidding LTTC means that you are still interested in slam, but do not have sufficient values or controls to bid Blackwood. You would like to involve your partner's judgement.

If your hand is suitable for Blackwood, but you lack a control in the LTTC suit, bid LTTC, not Lackwood. Hopefully, partner will take over and bid Blackwood. If partner signs off you can still judge to use Lackwood if you want.

Bidding 4 of the agreed major instead of LTTC is an absolute signoff when:

1. Partner has shown a missing control.
2. Partner has denied serious slam interest and you have not yet limited your hand.

Bidding 4 of the agreed major instead of LTTC shows a lesser hand than bidding LTTC but does not preclude slam when:

1. You have made a serious slam try and there are no suits (besides the LTTC suit) with unresolved control problems.
2. Your partner has made a serious slam try and there are no suits (besides the LTTC suit) with unresolved control problems.

Here is a summary of the structure I have described:

When an 8+ card major suit fit is agreed at the three level and the bidding is forced to game (as in 2/1 auctions):

- Cue-bidding starts one step above 3 of the agreed major. Cue-bidding is done "up-the-line". Bypassing a step denies something.
- A cue-bid in an unbid suit shows any first or second round control (Ace, King, singleton, or void).
- A cue-bid in the first suit you have bid shows two of the top three honours. A cue-bid in a suit your partner has bid shows one of the top three honours.
- 4NT is always some form of Roman Keycard Blackwood. RKCB is forcing to slam if only one Keycard or the trump Queen is absent.
- 3NT shows "serious slam interest". A better description is that it assumes the captaincy, forcing partner to cue-bid. By bidding serious 3NT you force yourself to show your (unlimited) partner any controls he has denied (possibly via LTTC, see auction 1 above).
- Bypassing 3NT to cue-bid denies "serious slam interest". A better description is such a bid relinquishes captaincy. That is you will respect your partner's sign-off, but respond appropriately to his slam try having already got the minimum nature of your hand off your chest.
- Bidding the last step below 4 of our major (4♦ for Hearts, 4♥ for Spades) is Last Train to Clarksville. Bidding LTTC versus bidding 4 of our major can carry different messages. LTTC means either:
 1. I have a specific control that you denied.
 2. Please tell me if you have a specific control.
 3. I want you to use your judgement.
 4. Some combination of 1, 2, and 3.

There are a few other aspects of these methods that you should know about:

1. Play 1430 RKCB instead of 0314. I will not explain why in this article.
2. If Hearts is the agreed suit, play that a bid of 4♠ is a "transfer to Blackwood". This is an especially useful bid if you want to bid RKCB but fear a response of 5♠ (2 with the Queen) will get you too high. Having your partner bid Blackwood will solve the problem. You should also bid 4♠ instead of 4NT if your own RKCB response would be 5♣ and you lack the trump Queen (you can figure out why).
3. Whenever a major suit is agreed, a bid of five of any other suit is "Exclusion RKCB". This means that you have a void in the bid suit and you want to know how many Keycards your partner has, not counting the ace of your void. Before you make this sort of bid, make sure none of the possible responses will get you too high if you are off two keycards.

2) and 3) have serious disaster potential. Always remember WE NEVER CUE-BID AT THE FIVE LEVEL.

If you and your partner feel that you thoroughly understand this article and my last one, you are probably ready to try these methods. I suggest that you practice bidding with computer generated hands (I sell them) before you actually try playing the structure I have described.

The rules are not clear in this area, but I think it is best not to alert serious 3NT, LTTC, or your cue-bids. Instead inform the opponents as to what your auction meant before the opening lead is made.

Improving 2/1 Game Force - Part 3

By: Fred Gitelman

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In the first article I suggested using a natural, game-forcing 2NT response to a major suit opening bid. I further suggested using the cheapest jump shift (1♥-2♠ and 1♠-3♣) as forcing raises of the major suit that was opened (the hand you would normally bid Jacoby 2NT with). Here is the response structure I suggest for these raises. The emphasis is on opener describing his hand. Opener can always show whether or not he has extra trump length, extra values, as well as if and where he has shortness.

1) 1♥-2♠ - Opener's responses:

- 2NT - 5 trumps, extra values, balanced
- 3♣ - Any minimum (but see 4 below)
- 3♦ - 5 Trumps, extra values, unbalanced
- 3♥ - 6+ Trumps, extra values, balanced
- 3♠ - 6+ Trumps, extra values, singleton or void in spades
- 3NT - Unused
- 4♣ - 6+ Trumps, extra values, singleton or void in clubs
- 4♦ - 6+ Trumps, extra values, singleton or void in diamonds
- 4♥ - 6+ Trumps, minimum, balanced

2) 1♠-3♣ - Opener's responses:

- 3♦ - Any minimum (but see 4 below)
- 3♥ - 5 Trumps, extra values, unbalanced
- 3♠ - 6+ Trumps, extra values, balanced
- 3NT - 5 Trumps, extra values, balanced (forcing)
- 4♣ - 6+ Trumps, extra values, singleton or void in clubs
- 4♦ - 6+ Trumps, extra values, singleton or void in diamonds
- 4♥ - 6+ Trumps, extra values, singleton or void in hearts
- 4♠ - 6+ Trumps, minimum, balanced

The following rules should make it pretty easy to remember the above. I think that if you learn the first 2 rules, the entire structure follows naturally from there.

1. The cheapest suit bid shows any minimum except a balanced minimum with extra trump length (bid 4 of the major with that). All other bids show extra values.
2. The next cheapest suit bid shows 5 trumps and extra values in an unbalanced hand.
3. The cheapest no trump bid shows 5 trumps and extra values in a balanced hand.
4. Rebidding your major at the 3 level shows extra values, extra trump length, and no shortness.
5. Jumps in new suits (or bidding 3 when hearts was opened) show shortness in the suit bid (like splinters), but also show extra values and extra trump length.

3) After Opener Bids the Cheapest Suit:

The auction has gone:

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♠	Pass	1♥
			3♣

or

West	North	East	South
Pass	3♣	Pass	1♠
			3♦

Opener's rebid shows just about any minimum. If responder is interested, he can bid the next step (3♦ or 3♥) to ask. Opener responds as follows:

- Opener bids his major with 6 or more trumps and an unbalanced hand (with a balanced hand, opener would have bid game in the major on the last round). Responder can now bid the next step to ask opener where his shortness is. All other bids by opener show 5 trumps.
- Opener bids 3NT with a 5 trump balanced minimum that does not mind playing in 3NT (eg Jxxxx KJ AQx Q10x). This is the one sequence in my entire system that contradicts the definition of serious 3NT in the November 1993 article.
- Opener bids his shortness with a 5 trump unbalanced minimum.
- Opener bids game in the major with a 5 trump balanced minimum with no interest in playing 3NT (eg AQxxx xx xx AJxx).

4) After Opener Bids the Next Cheapest Suit:

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♠	Pass	1♥
			3♦

or

West	North	East	South
Pass	3♣	Pass	1♠
			3♥

Opener's rebid shows 5 trumps, extra values, and shortness somewhere. If responder is interested he can bid the next step to ask for shortness. Opener then bids his short suit.

Once opener has described his strength, trump length, and approximate distribution, responder can start cue-bidding if he still has slam interest. Responder can also start a cue-bidding auction before opener has fully described his hand by bidding above the next step. My November 1993 and January 1994 articles described an effective cue-bidding style that compliments this structure well.

IMPROVING FORCING 1NT AUCTIONS:

Playing a forcing 1NT response to a major suit opening is an important corollary to playing 2/1s as forcing to game. There are many hands in the 10-12 point range that qualify for a Standard American 2/1 response. Playing 2/1 Game Force, you bid a forcing 1NT with most of these hands. The fact that the 1NT response has a wide range and that opener must sometimes bid a non-suit in response can make follow-up auctions tricky. The problem is so difficult that I believe that no matter which methods you play in this area, you will sometimes end up in a ridiculous contract. Here are a couple of suggestions:

1) Don't Pass Opener's Minor Suit Rebids Very Often

The auction has gone:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♣
Pass			

You hold:

North
♠ KJ432
♥ A32
♦ Q2
♣ Q32

Do Not Pass. Bid 2♠ or 3♣. (I prefer 2♠).

Game is still possible in Spades, if partner has something like:

South
♠ AQJ103
♥ 4
♦ 765
♣ AKQ6

In Clubs, slam is excellent opposite:

South
♠ A6543
♥ 4
♦ A5
♣ AK876

3NT might make opposite:

South
♠ A6543
♥ K4
♦ 765
♣ AKQ

By bidding you will occasionally take a minus when you would have made 2 but the potential game (or slam) bonus is much more important (at IMP scoring anyway).

2) Have More Than 1 Way To Raise Opener's Minor

The auction has gone:

West	North	East	South
			1♥
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♦

North	North	North
♠ KJ432	♠ KJ432	♠ KJ432
♥ A32	♥ A32	♥ A32
♦ Q2	♦ Q2	♦ Q2
♣ Q32	♣ Q32	♣ Q32

My first suggestion implies that you should not pass with any of these hands. At the same time, it is not right to bid 3♦ with all 3 of them. That would give the raise of partner's minor too wide a range and make it impossible for him to judge accurately. There is an easy solution when hearts is the suit that has been opened:

Use responder's 2♠ rebid as some kind of conventional raise. 2♠ has no natural meaning since responder did not bid 1♠ at his first opportunity.

I prefer to play that 2♠ shows either a hand like the first hand or a hand like the third hand (that is either a weak raise with a lot of trumps or a hand almost worth a 2/1). With a hand like the second hand you simply raise opener's minor (this is called a courtesy raise). Over responder's 2♠ rebid, opener can return to his minor with no game interest or bid 2NT to ask which hand type responder has. This 2NT bid will not effect who declares a possible no trump contract because responder has already bid 1NT. After opener's 2NT inquiry, responder can go back to 3 of the minor with Hand 1 or make some other descriptive bid with Hand 3.

When 1♠ is the opening bid, things are more difficult. If opener bids 2♣, you can use responder's 2♦ rebid as an artificial force. There are many variations of this convention. The one that I play is called BART. Unfortunately it is quite complex, but if interest warrants I will discuss BART in a future article. Notice that BART (or one of its variations) does give something up (the natural 2♦ bid) while the 2♠ bid discussed in the previous paragraph is free (it does not replace a natural bid). If opener's suits are spades and diamonds, bidding is extremely awkward. If somebody has a good solution to this problem, I would be happy to hear it.

3) Have Methods After Responder's 2NT Rebid:

The auction has gone:

West	North	East	South
			1♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♦
Pass	2NT		

Responder has shown 10-12 points but he has many possible distributions. Opener's hand is virtually unlimited and he also has many possible distributions. The right level could be a partscore, game, or slam. It could still be right to play in any trump suit or in no trump. Do you and your partner have the methods to deal with all of these possibilities?

There are 6 types of hands that opener might wish to describe:

1. 5-5 minimum opening
2. 5-5 game force
3. 6-4 minimum opening
4. 6-4 game force
5. 5143 (roughly) game force
6. 5341 (roughly) game force

In the discussion below, Type 5 will always be the 5431 hand with 3 cards in the lower ranking unbid suit. Type 6 will be the 5431 hand with 3 cards in the higher ranking unbid suit.

The structure that I use lets opener show all of these hand types at a convenient level. After that, responder is usually in a good position to place the contract or at least to know what the best trump suit is (if any). In the above auction, this is how opener would continue:

- 3♣ - Artificial force (types 2, 4, or 5 above). Responder must bid 3♦ and opener will clarify.
- 3♦ - Type 1 above. Responder would either PASS, take preference to spades, or raise diamonds with a good fitting hand.
- 3♥ - Type 6 above. Responder can place the contract in the appropriate game, bid 3♠ to show 2 card support, 4♥ to agree hearts, or 4♦ with a good hand in support of diamonds.
- 3♠ - Type 3 above. Responder would usually PASS, but might occasionally raise spades or go back to 4♦.

If opener bids 3♣ (the artificial game force, types 2, 4, or 5), responder must bid 3♦. Opener would then bid:

- 3♥ - Type 2 (5-5 game force)
- 3♠ - Type 4 (6-4 game force)
- 3NT - Type 5 (5143 game force)

This structure works in all sequences in which opener's second suit is not clubs. If opener's second suit is clubs, the 3♣ bid is needed to show the weak 5-5. 3♦ is now used as the artificial force. There are only 2 sequences:

1. West	North	East	South
			1♥
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♣
Pass	2NT		

- 3♣ - Type 1 (weak 5-5)
- 3♦ - Type 2 (strong 5-5), 3 (weak 6-4), or 4 (strong 6-4)
- 3♥ - Type 5 (strong 1534)
- 3♠ - Type 6 (strong 3514)

In this case, opener must bid the artificial force (3♦) if he wants to play 3♥ (Type 3, weak 6-4). Responder will bid 3♥ and opener can pass.

2. West	North	East	South
			1♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♣
Pass	2NT		

- 3♣ - Type 1 (weak 5-5)
- 3♦ - Type 2 (strong 5-5) or 4 (strong 6-4)
- 3♥ - Type 3 (weak 6-4) or 5 (strong 5134)
- 3♠ - Type 6 (strong 5314)

Once again, opener must "transfer to his major" to get out in 3 of that suit. In this case, opener can continue with 3NT to show a strong 5134 (Type 5). Here is yet another set of rules to help you remember all of this:

1. With a weak 5-5 (Type 1) opener always bids 3 of his second suit
2. With a weak 6-4 (Type 3) opener bids 3 of his first suit unless opener's second suit is clubs. In this case, opener must "transfer to his major".
3. The cheapest new suit is an artificial force. Responder must bid the next step. The artificial force always can contain the strong 5-5 (Type 2) and the strong 6-4 (Type 4). Unless opener's second suit is clubs, the artificial force can contain Type 5 (a 5431 hand with 3 cards in the lowest unbid suit).
4. To show Type 5 (strong 5431 hand with 3 in the lower unbid suit), opener bids 3 (artificial force) followed by 3NT unless clubs is his second suit. If clubs is opener's second suit, he bids 3♥.
5. To show Type 6 (strong 5431 hand with 3 in the higher unbid suit), opener bids his 3 card suit unless clubs is his second suit. In that case, he bids 3.

The last thing I would like to offer is a warning:

Unless you are willing to really learn a system well with a regular partner, you are better off without it. Not knowing your system will get you poor results, ruin the game for your opponents, and create ethical problems that you really do not need. The more complex and artificial your methods, the greater the scope is for all of these types of problems.

I am not suggesting that everyone has to play methods as complex (and I believe effective) as those that I present. Having agreements with your partner is the important thing. They do not have to be the best possible agreements. In fact, I strongly believe that having simple agreements that your partnership knows well is far more effective than having complex agreements that your partnership is uncomfortable with.

If you believe that the methods I have described are too complex for you or your partnership, then I hope I have been able to show you some weak parts of how you play 2/1. If you do feel like you would like to adopt some or all of these methods, all I can tell you is that it is worth the effort. You will experience one of the most satisfying parts of bridge when the perfect hand for your methods actually comes up (as it will).