

The Advancing Player

Forcing One No Trump



By Maritha Pottenger

marithapottenger@gmail.com

Although the 1NT Forcing bid is a basic part of 2 over 1, it can also be used by people who play Standard American. Computer simulations suggest that the 5-2 major fit often plays better than 1NT. Also, the forcing NT sometimes allows partnerships to play at the two level in Responder's long minor with a weak hand, which is a winning spot. Many intermediate players have trouble with the 1NT Forcing bid, missing important parts of the system, so we will review it all.

The Forcing 1NT response can **only** be used when Opener starts with 1♥ or 1♠. There is **no** Forcing 1NT when Opener starts with 1♣ or 1♦. The Forcing No Trump is used when **Responder has between a good 5 to a bad 12 HCP** and cannot make an immediate raise of partner's major opening, and **cannot bid 1♠ over partner's 1♥ opening**. [Do NOT bypass 4-card spade suit to bid 1NT forcing when partner opens 1♥!!] The reason the Forcing NT goes up to 12 HCP is that we are opening most 12 HCP these days (and a fair number of good 11 HCP hands), so Responder needs 13 HCP to force to game. Thus, **in the 2 over 1 system, bidding a new suit at the two level, over a major suit opening, is forcing to game–3NT or four of major–not five of a minor.**

If Responder has 5+ to 10- HCP, the hand is considered minimum, and the bidding will usually be passed out at the two level. If Responder has 10+ to 12, the hand is considered invitational, and Responder can make a game try if the rest of the hand is appropriate. (With a 6-card or longer suit and fewer than 5 HCP—all points in suit—Responder can make a weak jump shift if playing WJS. If playing Bergen raises, weak jump shifts in minor suits are not possible.) **The Forcing 1NT says more about what your hand is NOT than what it is.** Your rebid will clarify the picture for partner.

The following types of hands qualify for a **1NT Forcing response when partner opens one of a major:**

1. Relatively balanced hands with 5 to 10 HCP and no support for partner's major, e.g., 1♠ Opener

- ♠xx ♥KJx ♦xxxx ♣Qxxx
- ♠xx ♥Kxxx ♦A9xxx ♣xx
- ♠xx ♥KQJxx ♦Jxx ♣Qxx
- ♠x ♥Kxxx ♦xxx ♣Kxxxx
- ♠x ♥Qxxxx ♦Axx ♣Jxxx etc.

2. Hands with 5-7 HCP and 3 or 4 card support for major (IF playing constructive raises). If not playing constructive raises, just raise major to two level with these hands, e.g.,

♠Qxx ♥xxx ♦KJxx ♣xxx
♠xxxx ♥Jxx ♦10x ♣AJxx
♠KQx ♥10xxx ♦xxx ♣Qxx
♠Axx ♥Qxx ♦xxxx ♣xxx
♠xxx ♥Kxx ♦Qxxx ♣10xx

3. Hands with 10-12 HCP and exactly 3-card support for major (next bid will be 3 of major), e.g.,

♠Kxx ♥Kxxx ♦AJxx ♣xx
♠xxx ♥AKxx ♦Kx ♣109xx
♠J10x ♥K10x ♦AQJx ♣xxx
♠Qxx ♥Ax ♦KJxx ♣Qxxx
♠xxx ♥KQxx ♦KQxx ♣xx
♠Axx ♥KJx ♦Kxxx ♣xxx

4. Weak, unbalanced hands with long suit(s), but fewer than two cards in the major opened. Hope that partner bids your minor and you can pass, or that you get to bid your suit at the 2 level next round which forces partner to pass, e.g.,

♠x ♥KJxxxx ♦xx ♣Qxxx
♠x ♥xx ♦AQxx ♣J9xxxx
♠x ♥Kxx ♦KQxxxx ♣xxx

5. Balanced or unbalanced hands strong enough to invite game (usually 10-12 HCP), e.g.,

♠Qx ♥Qxxx ♦KJx ♣KJxx
♠x ♥Axxx ♦Axxx ♣K10xx
♠xx ♥x ♦AQJxx ♣A10xxx

Such hands will usually rebid 2NT, or bid your suit at 3 level, or raise partner on a doubleton.

6. Exceptional hands, e.g., a game-forcing hand that does not have a suit good enough to make a 2/1 bid, e.g.,

♠Jx ♥AKQx ♦xxx ♣Axxx

bid 1NT Forcing; then rebid 3NT unless partner shows 6 spades.

♠Qxx ♥AKxx ♦Kxx ♣Kxx

bid 1NT Forcing and then rebid 4♠ to show balanced hand with three trumps.

OPENER'S REBIDS

With a 6-card suit and 12 to 15- HCP, opener rebids the major at the 2 level.

With a 6-card suit and 15+ to 18 HCP, opener jump rebids the major at the 3 level.

Jumping to 4 of major usually shows a 7-card suit and a hand that chose not to open 4 of the major (or NAMYATS if you are playing it). Denies slam interest.

Rebid of 2♣ or 2♦ promises 12 to 15- points and usually at least 3 cards in the minor. HOWEVER, if Opener is 4-5-2-2 (and you are NOT playing Flannery), could rebid 2♣ on a 2-card suit. **This is called “convenient minor” rebid and is the most common response to 1NT Forcing.** If Opener is 3-3 in minors, bids 2♣.

Rebid of 2♠ (after opening 1H) shows at least 4-5 in majors, 16+ HCP and is forcing one round.

A jump shift by Opener shows 19+ HCP and is forcing.

A raise to 2NT shows a balanced 18-19 HCP and is virtually forcing (but Responder can pass with a terrible 5 or 6 HCP).

A jump raise to 3NT shows 16-18 HCP and a solid 6-card major suit (source of tricks).

A rebid of 2♥ (after opening 1♠) guarantees 4 hearts.

NOTE: Some people insist that a rebid by Opener of the major should show a GOOD suit, able to play opposite a singleton. If the Opener has a side 4-card suit and a bad 6-card major, should show side 4-card suit BEFORE rebidding major. Others say rebid 6-card suit with all minimum hands. Bid 4-card side suit when you have extra values (just short of a jump rebid in suit). When you have six spades and four hearts, show the hearts (rather than rebidding the spades) when they have the same HCP or more as the spades, e.g.,

♠Q9xxxx ♥AQ9x ♦Ax ♣x

rebid 2♥ rather than 2♠.

♠AQ9xxx ♥Kx ♦x ♣AJxx

rebid 2♣ to show (possibility of) extra values.

♠AQxxxx ♥Jx ♦x ♣A10xx

rebid major to slow partner down and suggest minimum hand.

This is an area for partnership discussion and agreement on what the two of you want your style to be.

RESPONDER’S REBIDS

With a Minimum Hand: 5 to a bad 10 HCP

Your Duty is to Halt the Auction at the Two Level.

If you have exactly two cards in your partner’s major (& no support for minor), return to the major.

This is called the “false preference” and is the most common sequence with forcing NT: one of major/P/1NTF/P/convenient minor/P/2 of major with only 2-card support.

Pass the convenient minor IF you have 5 cards in it & only 1 or 0 in partner’s major.

Pass the convenient minor if you are 1-4-4-4 with a singleton in partner's major.

If partner opens 1♠ and rebids 2♥, I was taught to pass 2♥ with 4 hearts, but take a preference to 2♠ with 2 spades and 3 hearts (because a 5-2 fit plays better than a 4-3 fit). John Jones tells me to pass 2♥ because partner will sometimes be 5-5 and will have a ruffing value in your hand with doubleton spade. Take your pick.

If partner rebids 2♣ and you have only 1 in his/her major and fewer than 5 clubs, but you do have 6 or more diamonds, you can bid 2♦. Ditto with 6 hearts, you can bid 2♥. Both of those bids are sign-offs. Partner is expected to pass.

If partner rebids 2♣ and you have 1 or 0 in the major and fewer than 5 clubs, you can take a chance and bid 2♦ or 2♥ with a 5 card suit. (Partner's most likely distribution is some permutation of 5-3-3-2, so on a good day you land in a 5-3 or 5-2 fit.) Or, if you have 4 clubs and don't want to risk a 5-card red suit, pass 2♣ and hope.

If you have a 7-card or longer club suit and partner rebids 2♦ or 2♥, you can bid 3♣ as it is the only place you want to play. That is a sign-off—showing the weak hand and long minor—and partner is expected to pass. Ditto with 7 clubs or 7 diamonds, and partner opens 1♠ and rebids 2♥. If you are 1 or 0 in spades and 2 or fewer in hearts, bid your 7-card minor at the 3-level. Partner is expected to pass.

If partner makes a forcing bid—e.g., a reverse or jump shift, make the most natural bid you can. [You can pass a raise to 2NT with a truly terrible hand.]

NOTE: IF you are playing Constructive Raises, the return to two of a major could actually show three trumps and 5 to 7 HCP. [Constructive raises demand 8-10 HCP for an immediate raise of the major to the 2 level, so the “false preference” will be either 2 card support with 5 to a bad 10 or 3 card support with 5-7 HCP.]

With an Invitational Hand (good 10 to 12 HCP):

Your Duty is to Invite Game

A delayed limit raise shows exactly 3 trumps and 10+ to 12 HCP, e.g., ♠QJx ♥Kx ♦AJ10xx ♣xxx would bid 1NT Forcing and bid 3♠ over partner's bid of a “convenient minor” at the two level.

Responder rebids 2NT with a balanced hand with either 1 or 2 cards in partner's major and good 10 to 12 HCP. e.g.,

with ♠x ♥QJxx ♦KJ9xx ♣KJ9, Responder bids 1NT Forcing and rebids 2NT over partner's 2♣ or 2♦ “convenient minor.” Opener is expected to bid 3NT with 14 or 15 HCP; pass with less. Promises spade stopper by Responder if Opener's major was hearts.

Responder jumps to 3 level in a good 6-card suit, inviting game, e.g., ♠xx ♥AQJxxx ♦Kxx ♣Qx, Opener starts with 1♠. Responder bids 1NTF. Opener rebids 2♣ (convenient minor) and Responder jumps to 3♥—invitational.

Jump to game in major shows either the balanced hand with 3-card support and no slam interest or a hand that was upgraded on the auction, e.g., 1♠-P-1NTF-P-2♦-P-Bid 4♠ with: ♠Kxx ♥Kxxx ♦KQxx ♣xx or ♠Axx ♥KQxx ♦Axxx ♣x.

The “impossible spade” shows a really good raise of partner's minor—can only be used when partner opens 1♥, e.g., 1♥-P-1NTF-P-2♦-P-2♠ with: ♠x ♥x ♦AQxxxx ♣KQ9x

Raising partner's second suit shows 5 cards if clubs or diamonds, 4 cards if hearts, and invitational values, e.g., 1♠-P-1NTF-P-2♣-P-Bid 3♣ with: ♠K ♥xxxx ♦KJx ♣KJxxx or 1♥-P-1NTF-P-2♦, bid 3♦ with: ♠xx ♥xx ♦AQxxx ♣KQxx.

NOTE: all the following auctions carry connotations of extra strength:

1♠-P-1NTF-P-2♦-P-2♥-P-2♠: Opener has 6 spades and 4 or more diamonds and extra strength.

1♠-P-1NTF-P-2♣-P-3♣-P-3♠: Opener has 6 spades and extra values (and Responder has invitational strength).

1♠-P-1NTF-P-2♦-P-2NT-P-3♠: Game Force. Opener has extra values and 6 spades. Responder has 10+ to 12 HCP. Opener is offering a choice between 3NT and 4♠.

Remember: **With direct support, support directly.** If you have a classic hand for Jacoby 2NT, or a splinter bid, or a “Weak Freak” raise, bid accordingly. If you have 13 or more HCP and support for partner's major, but a good 5-card suit of your own, make the 2 over 1 bid. Slam is possible with two good 5 card suits in the mix. **The Forcing NT is usually a slow-down bid, warning of a likely misfit.** Partner will show the 3-card limit raise or jump to game later if s/he has actual support.