

Introduction To The 2 Over 1 Game Force System – Part 2

This is the second of two articles introducing the basic principles of the 2 Over 1 Game Force bidding system. In the first article, I discussed auctions starting with one of a major, where responder wishes to force to game. In this article, I will discuss auctions starting with one of a major, in which responder does not have a game forcing hand.

When I refer to “Standard American” in these articles, this is the same system as SAYC. SAYC stands for “Standard American Yellow Card”, so named because the ACBL has developed a yellow convention card which describes their recommended version of Standard American.

In both articles, I assume no interference by the opponents. When the opponents interfere, 2 Over 1 and Standard American are identical.

The Forcing NT

For most hands, the auction is identical in both Standard American and 2 Over 1. As indicated in the first article, the major difference between Standard American and 2 Over 1 is that if responder bids at the 2 level over an opening bid of one of a major, this establishes a game forcing auction.

The only problem that occurs is when responder has an invitational but not game forcing hand (around 10 or 11 points). In Standard American, responder can bid at the 2 level to show 10 points or more. However, in 2 Over 1, this option is not available, because a hand with 10 or 11 points is invitational, not game forcing. In order to handle this problem, the 2 Over 1 system modifies how the 1NT response works over one of a major. In Standard American, 1NT shows 6-9 (or 6-10) and can be passed. In 2 Over 1, a 1NT bid is a one round force; opener may not pass. This treatment is known as the “Forcing NT”.

In actuality, most of the time responder has the same type of hand when bidding the forcing NT as he has in Standard American when bidding 1N over one of a major (6-10). However, because opener is forced to bid once more, this gives responder a lot of flexibility in describing his hand with the next bid.

Some partnerships play that 1N is “semi-forcing” or not forcing at all if responder is a passed hand. I prefer to play 1N as forcing, even by a passed hand. I like the flexibility the forcing NT gives to responder. And, as described below, if 1N is not forcing by a passed hand, it makes it more difficult to describe a hand with a 3 card limit raise.

Responding To The Forcing NT

First of all, if opener has a very strong hand (18 or more) or an intermediate hand with a strong suit, he bids the same way as in Standard American. With a very strong hand, he jumps to the 3 level in a new suit. With 5+ hearts and 4 spades and 16+, he reverses to 2S after opening 1H. With a good six card major and 16-18, he jumps to 3 of his suit.

However, most of the time opener will have a minimum opening hand. In that case, his choices are straightforward. With a 6 card suit, he rebids his suit. With 4 hearts, he bids 2H. Otherwise, he bids his better minor. With 5-3-3-2 distribution, this means he has to bid a 3 card minor, but responder is aware that bidding a 3 card minor is part of the response structure to the forcing NT.

You open 1S and your partner responds 1NT forcing. What do you bid with each of these hands:

♠AKxxx
♥Kx
♦Qxx
♣xx

Bid 2S, showing your six card spade suit.

♠AKxxx

♥Kxxx
♦Qxx
♣x

Bid 2H, showing your 4 card heart suit.

♠AKxxxx
♥Kxxx
♦Qx
♣x

I would still bid 2H, to show the 4 card heart suit, rather than 2S to show six spades. As you will see below, responder frequently returns to opener's first bid suit, even with 2 card support, so you will usually end up in your 6-2 fit when you are supposed to.

♠AKxxx
♥Kxx
♦Qxxx
♣x

Bid 2D, since you do not have 6 spades.

♠AKxxx
♥Kxx
♦Qxx
♣xx

Bid 2D, since you do not have 6 spades. As indicated above, sometimes you have to bid a 3 card minor when responding to the forcing NT.

In the hands below, you open 1H, and partner bids 1N forcing (which denies 4S). What do you bid with each of these hands:

♠AKxx
♥AKxxx
♦Qxx
♣x

Bid 2S, a reverse, showing 5 hearts, 4 spades, and 16+ points.

♠Axxx
♥AKxxx
♦Qxx
♣x

Bid 2D. You cannot bid 2S, as that is a reverse, so you bid your better minor.

♠Axx
♥AKQxxx
♦Kxx
♣x

Bid 3H, showing 16-18 and a good six card heart suit.

♠Axx
♥AKQxx
♦KQxx
♣x

Bid 3D, a jump shift, showing 18+ and forcing to game.

♠AQxx
♥AKxxx
♦xx
♣xx

This is a problem hand with the forcing NT system. You cannot bid 2S, as that is a reverse, so you must bid 2C, even though you only have a small doubleton club. Fortunately, this auction occurs very rarely, and even when it does, partner usually pulls the 2C bid, so in actuality it is not as much of a problem as it appears at first.

Some partnerships play a convention known as Flannery 2D, to take care of the problem hand described above. They play that an opening bid of 2D shows 5 hearts, 4 spades, and 11-15 HCP. I strongly recommend against playing Flannery. The problem auction that it addresses rarely occurs (in my experience, it occurs once every couple of years at most). And even when the problem auction occurs, you rarely get in trouble. The weak 2D bid occurs much more frequently, and is a very effective bidding tool, so I see no reason to give that up to handle a very rare bidding problem.

Responder Rebids With No Support

In this section I will describe how responder bids if he has less than 3 card support for opener's major. In the next section, I will describe responder's bids with 3 card or more support in the majors.

With less than an opening hand and less than 3 card support, responder usually bids the forcing NT (he would still bid 1S over 1H with 4 spades). Depending on both the strength of responder's hand and opener's second bid, responder has a number of available rebids.

If opener shows a strong hand by bidding a jump shift, reverse, or rebidding his suit at the 3 level, then the responses are the same as in Standard American.

If opener shows a 6 card suit by rebidding it at the 2 level, typically responder would pass. With an invitational hand and 2 card support, responder would invite by bidding the suit at the 3 level. If opener bids 2H, showing a 4 card heart suit, with 4 hearts, responder can pass or invite by bidding 3H. With 3 hearts and a doubleton spade, responder should normally return to 2S, as a 5-2 fit is usually a little easier to play than a 4-3 fit; additionally, if opener has a strongish 5/5 hand, this gives him the opportunity to rebid 3H.

When opener rebids a minor suit, there are several choices for responder. One of the most common auctions is for responder to return to 2 of opener's major with 2 card support. Opener is aware that responder only has 2 card support, because with more than 2 card support, responder would have initially made some other bid, as described in the next section.

With 5 card support in opener's minor, responder can pass. With 4 card support in the minor and a singleton or void in the opener's major, responder may also pass. With an invitational balanced hand, responder can bid 2N.

The only auction remaining is when responder bids a new suit over opener's rebid. Typically, this is to play and shows a weak hand with a long suit (something resembling a weak 2 in responder's suit). Almost all of the time, opener should pass.

Partner opens 1S, you bid 1N, and partner rebids 2C. What do you do with each of these hands:

♠xx

♥Axxx
♦Kxxx
♣xxx

Bid 2S, showing a weak hand with 2 card support.

♠xx
♥Axxx
♦xx
♣Kxxxx

Pass. You have at least a 5-3 club fit.

♠x
♥Axx
♦xxxxx
♣Kxxx

Pass. You have a at least a 4-3 club fit, and only a 5-1 spade fit.

♠xx
♥Axx
♦xxxx
♣Kxxx

I have a slight preference for 2S, although pass is reasonable. 2S has the advantage of forcing the opponents to come in at the 3 level, if they are so inclined. However, it has the disadvantage of possibly missing an 8 card club fit.

♠x
♥xxxx
♦AQxxxx
♣xx

Bid 2D. This is to play, and shows a hand resembling a weak 2 diamond bid.

♠x
♥Jxxx
♦AKQxxx
♣xx

Bid 3D. This shows an invitational hand with a very good diamond suit.

Your partner opens 1S, you bid a forcing NT, and partner rebids 2H. What do you bid with these hands:

♠xx
♥xxx
♦AQxxx
♣xxx

I would bid 2S, as a 5-2 fit is usually better than a 4-3 fit. Pass is reasonable.

♠x
♥xxx

♦AQxxx
♣xxxz

Pass. It is better to play in a possible 4-3 fit, than a likely 5-1 fit.

♠xx
♥xxxx
♦AQxx
♣xxx

Pass. It is better to play in a 4-4 fit than a 5-2 fit.

♠xx
♥KJxx
♦AQxx
♣xxx

Bid 3H, inviting the 4H game.

Responses with Support

In this section, I will discuss how responder bids when he has 3 or more cards in opener's major.

Let me first discuss how to bid with 4 card support. I recommend Bergen raises with 4 card support. Although you can play Bergen raises even without playing 2 Over 1, they fit in particularly well with the 2 Over 1 system. I recommend what is known as "reverse" Bergen. With 5-6 HCP and 4 card support, responder raises opener to 3. With 7-8 HCP (or a bad 9) and 4 card support (a "constructive raise"), responder bids 3D. With 9-11 HCP and 4 card support (a "limit raise"), responder bids 3C. I prefer reverse Bergen, because it gives opener more room to explore for game over a limit raise, but if you prefer straight Bergen (where 3C is the constructive raise and 3D is the limit raise), that is perfectly fine.

Here is how to bid with 3 card support. With a non-invitational hand (a bad 9 or less), responder makes a simple raise to 2. With an invitational hand (good 9-11), responder first bids 1N forcing, and over opener's rebid, bids 3 of opener's first suit. This sequence specifically shows a limit raise with 3 card support, and is one of the best features of the forcing NT, as it allows opener to bid close games with a 9 card fit, and play at the 3 level with an 8 card fit.

With 5 card support and less than 9 HCP, responder should jump to 4. With 9-11, responder should make a limit raise and then raise 3 to 4 if necessary (this assumes you are playing Bergen raises). The reason I recommend this approach is, if opener has a strong hand, it allows opener to explore for slam, whereas a direct jump to 4 precludes opener from looking for slam.

Some partnerships play the Drury convention. Without going into a lot of detail, if responder is a passed hand and bids 2C (and, in some versions of Drury, 2D), that shows 9-11 HCP with at least 3 card support. Opener's rebid then describes whether or not he has a light opening bid. The reason Drury was originally invented was that, years ago, the consensus of the experts was that openings in first and second seat were limited to sound values (at least 13 HCP). Therefore, third and fourth seat openers needed to be light, to make sure that the partnership did not miss game. Since the range of opening bids in third and fourth seat was so great, Drury allowed the partnership to discover whether or not the opener's bid was sound, at least when responder had support. I do not play Drury, because I use the same criteria for opening in all seats, the rule of 20. Since the rule of 20 lets you open light in first and second seat, there is no reason to open extra light in third and fourth seat, as there is no danger of missing game. So there is no reason for me to play Drury. However, if you prefer to play a 1N bid by responder as non-forcing by a passed hand, you should consider playing Drury; otherwise it is difficult to show a limit raise with 3 card support.

Your partner opens 1H. What do you respond with each of these hands:

♠xx
♥KQxx
♦xxxx
♣xxx

Bid 3H, showing 4 card support and 5-6 HCP.

♠xx
♥KQxx
♦Kxxx
♣xxx

Bid 3D, showing a constructive raise, 7-8 HCP and 4 card support.

♠xx
♥KQxx
♦KQxx
♣xxx

Bid 3C, showing a limit raise, 9-11 HCP and 4 card support.

♠xx
♥KQx
♦Qxxx
♣xxxx

Bid 2H, showing a weak raise with 3 card support.

♠xx
♥KQx
♦KQxx
♣xxxx

Bid 1N forcing, and bid 3H over opener's rebid, showing a 9-11 HCP with 3 card support.

♠xx
♥KQxxx
♦xxx
♣xxx

Jump to 4H.

♠xx
♥KQxxx
♦KQx
♣xxx

Bid 3C, showing 9-11, ostensibly with 4 card support. If partner bids 3H, raise to 4 anyway (with only 4 card support you would pass 3H).