

MY SYSTEM

THE UNBALANCED DIAMOND



MARSHALL MILES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



1. THE SYSTEM	5
2. MAJOR-SUIT AUCTIONS	19
Two-over-one responses	23
Other major-suit auctions	27
Other auctions	29
3. THE WEAK NOTRUMP	35
4. THE UNBALANCED DIAMOND	41
After a major-suit response	41
The notrump responses	46
Responding with minor suits	48
5. THE 1♣ OPENING	61
Taking it further	65
The 1♥ relay	67
Refusing the relay	76
6. THE OPENING 2♣ BID	83
Responding to the 2♣ opening	89
7. THE TWO DIAMOND OPENING	97
8. THE OPPONENTS COMPETE	103
The (negative) double	103
When 1♦ is overcalled	107
Competition over our 1NT opening	110
More on (negative) doubles	110
More on overcalls	114
9. THE SYSTEM IN ACTION	117
10. A COMPARISON OF SYSTEMS	131
11. A RECAPITULATION	141
APPENDIX 1	147
APPENDIX 2	153

AUTHOR'S NOTE



In bidding diagrams, I have adopted the following standard notation: 1M means one of either major; 3m means three of either minor; 4x means four of any (new) suit. In text, $1\diamond-(1\spadesuit)-1\text{NT}$ means that after a $1\diamond$ opening, opener's LHO overcalls $1\spadesuit$, and opener's partner bids 1NT. In contrast, $1\diamond-1\spadesuit; 1\text{NT}$ is an uninterrupted auction where the response to $1\diamond$ is $1\spadesuit$, and opener rebids 1NT.

You will undoubtedly find some of the concepts inherent in the System unfamiliar. However, the entire system uses General Chart treatments which, according to ACBL regulations, must be allowed in all ACBL sanctioned tournaments (other than in events with an upper restriction of 20 or fewer masterpoints and events for which the ACBL conditions of contest state otherwise). Where strict adherence to the System would take you beyond the General Chart, I have indicated this in the text, and offered an alternative treatment. Note, though, that many basic sequences will require alerts and explanations to your opponents.

THE SYSTEM



No doubt you are starting to read this book because you are anxious to learn all about my recommended system, the Unbalanced Diamond, so that you can return better armed to the tournament arena. Patience: I will furnish all the details regarding what various bids mean in this system shortly. My purpose now is to explain the bidding philosophy.

If you have read any of my previous books on bidding, you will know that I have long favored a forcing club system as the optimum approach. There are a number of reasons for this, but one of the most compelling is that other opening bids are thereby constrained to a much smaller range of strength than is the case in standard systems.

There are many advantages to having an opening bid describe your hand within narrow limits in terms of both high-card strength and distribution. If the opponents preempt or make a simple overcall at the two-level, partner can make far better decisions in a limited framework than if you are playing so-called Standard. Even when the opponents do not compete, your bidding is easier when both of you know early on whether a game or slam is likely or almost impossible.

Let's look at an example of what the lack of such definition can lead to. One of the worst sequences in Standard bridge is:

Opener

1♦
2♣

Responder

1♥ or 1♠

The range for this sequence is roughly 11 to 19 HCP, and opener may have six diamonds and four clubs:

♠ A7 ♥ 9 ♦ AJ6532 ♣ AKJ5

(because the diamond *suit* is too weak to jump in and the *hand* is too strong to rebid 2♦), or he can have several other distributions: 6-6, 6-5, 5-5, 5-4. Some experts can even be 4-5: they bid this way on a hand like

♠ xx ♥ Kx ♦ AK10x ♣ Qxxxx

which is far too weak for a reverse and on which they don't really want to open 1♣ and rebid 2♣. Hands for this sequence can vary in high-card strength from 11 HCP

♠ Kx ♥ x ♦ AQxxx ♣ Q10xxx

to 19 HCP

♠ A ♥ KJ ♦ AQxxx ♣ AJxxx

Some players might jump to 3♣ with the latter hand, but most would not, since you need a lot of strength to make eleven tricks in a minor, and this hand doesn't look appealing for notrump.

Given the incredible variation in these possible hands for opener for this simple sequence, you can only pity responder when he holds something like

♠ Kxxxx ♥ J10x ♦ J ♣ KJxx

Opener

1♦
2♣

Responder

1♠
?

Should he raise clubs to avoid the risk of missing game, or should he pass, because game is unlikely? And if responder raises to 3♣, should opener bid 3NT with 14 points or so and a stopper in the unbid major? Or does opener need 15? Or 16? Or 17? When responder has 8 or 9 points, should he take a false preference to 2♦ with something like

♠ A x x x x ♥ K x x ♦ J x ♣ J x x

to give opener another chance when he holds a strong hand? I think he should, but that can work out very badly, especially if opener can have four diamonds and five clubs with a minimum opening bid.

The Unbalanced Diamond, hereafter referred to for convenience as ‘the System’, avoids these and similar problems in other wide-range Standard sequences, such as

Opener

1♣

1♠

Responder

1♥

which may show a balanced 12 points or an unbalanced 11 to 19. Some players, who always bid ‘up the line’, might have 4-3-3-3 distribution while others would guarantee at least four clubs.

In the System, your normal range for opening 1♠ is 10-14 HCP; a 1♥ opening can be slightly stronger (10-15). Just as in Precision, when partner opens 1♥ and you hold any of the following hands

1) ♠ x ♥ K J x x ♦ K x ♣ Q x x x x x

2) ♠ K x ♥ Q x x x x ♦ x ♣ x x x x x x

3) ♠ K x x x ♥ Q x x ♦ A Q x x ♣ K J

you should bid 4♥. Opposite the first two hands with a near minimum, but well-fitting opening bid, partner could easily make game. Give partner something like

♠ A x x ♥ Q 10 x x x ♦ A J x x ♣ x

opposite the first hand or

♠ Q x x ♥ A K x x x ♦ 10 x x ♣ K x

opposite the second, and you may make game when the opponents can make a game of their own; at worst you will be taking a very cheap sacrifice. Even when the hands don’t fit so well, and you are down one or two, the opponents can probably make a partscore at the three-level or a game of their own. However it works out, you would like partner to play 4♥, preferably

undoubled, with the first two hands. With the third hand, a slam is extremely unlikely when partner has a maximum of 15 points, so again you simply bid 4♥ over 1♥. If the opponents double your 4♥ bid or bid over it, you can probably get a better score defending a doubled contract than by just making 4♥ (and you are not *certain* that you can make 4♥), so you hope they will compete. Nor are you likely to miss a slam opposite a hand in the 10-15 point range (10-14 with a six-card heart suit). When you bid the same way with all three hands, the opponents have some very difficult decisions to make. Should they compete or not?

If you bid this way, then not only do you give the opponents problems in the auction, you also give them problems on opening lead and sometimes later in the defense — especially as compared to standard sequences like

Opener

1♠

2♥

3♠

Responder

2♦

2♠

4♠

When both dummy's and declarer's hands are balanced, passive defense is often best. If there is no long suit in dummy to establish, the opponents can afford to wait for their tricks while declarer has to guess which finesses to take. If either hand is distributional, especially when the dummy has a long suit, it usually pays for the defenders to lead aggressively so as to take or establish their winners before declarer can discard them on the long suit. But if you bid many of your game hands the same way, they have tougher guesses on opening lead.

However, there are only a limited number of bids available. In order to make your opening bids, especially in the majors, narrowly defined as to strength and distribution, it is necessary to make some of your minor-suit bids more ambiguous. I think the system described here is a good compromise.

In order to narrow the limits on opening bids, we use an artificial 1♣ opening, quite similar to a Precision 1♣, but with one main difference: it has an upper limit (with a few exceptions mentioned later) as well as a lower limit. Playing a strong club leaves the 1♦ opening with the burden of showing hands with which standard players would open 1♣ as well as hands with which they would open 1♦. Part of that burden is relieved by playing a weak

notrump: this covers all minimum balanced hands without a five-card major. Consequently a 1♦ opening not only shows a hand too weak to open 1♣ (or one of the other strong bids), but it also shows an unbalanced hand without a five-card major.

Nevertheless, in all strong club systems it is necessary to open 1♦ on some hands where standard players would open 1♣. In Precision, most people play that a 1♦ opening can be made with as few as two diamonds. Others even open 1♦ with a void (with 4-4-0-5 distribution). In other words, the latter treat an opening 1♦ bid as showing a hand too weak to open 1♣ while denying a five-card major, perhaps with one of the following:

1) ♠ A Q x x ♥ K x x x ♦ x ♣ K x x x

2) ♠ A K x ♥ A x x x ♦ x ♣ J x x x x

3) ♠ A x x x ♥ K J x ♦ Q x ♣ Q x x x

In the Unbalanced Diamond, the first two hands would qualify as a 1♦ opening, but the third hand would be opened 1NT (12-14 HCP). The 1♦ opening bid denies a five-card (or longer) major and always shows an unbalanced hand ('unbalanced' in this context usually means that you have a singleton or void or a six- or seven-card minor). The closest we come to an exception to this rule is with 5422 distribution when the five-card suit is a minor and the four-card suit is a major. Even then, you have the option to treat it as a balanced hand, rather than a 1♦ opening, depending upon whether the strength is concentrated or scattered. I would open 1NT (12-14 HCP) with

♠ K x ♥ Q x x x ♦ K Q x x x ♣ J

but would open 1♦ with

♠ x x ♥ K Q x x ♦ A x ♣ K 10 x x x

When you hold the latter hand, you hope partner will be the declarer if the final contract is 3NT.

Until you get used to it, using the diamond opening to show an unbalanced hand may seem strange, and your thinking certainly has to be different. But the auctions commencing with 1♦ usually tell you and your partner what you need to know to make the right decisions, even though the

information provided is quite different from standard bidding. After a diamond opening, you may have a better idea of each other's distribution and strength after the second round of bidding than in either Bridge World Standard (hereafter referred to as BWS) or Precision.

One final point: four of a major is the most frequent game. When you find a good major-suit fit, you can often make game with 22 or 23 combined points (and sometimes with fewer). You don't need stoppers in all the suits. You don't need as many tricks or controls as you do for game in a minor. The frequency of games in a major with reduced high-card strength justifies making all bids with one or two fewer points when there is either a fair or strong likelihood of a good major-suit fit. So rather than say that all one-bids in a suit other than clubs show the same range of points, we may say the range is '*a* to *b*' with a long major, '*c* to *d*' with a four-card major, and '*e* to *f*' with no major suit.

Let's run through an overview of the opening bids, so that you can get a grasp of the overall approach. I will explain what each opening bid means, but delay a full explanation of opener's rebids and how the auction is likely to continue until the appropriate chapters.

1♣

The 1♣ opening is similar to Precision, but has an upper limit. It is usually 15-19 HCP, but it could be as much 20 HCP with a weak five-card major or an unbalanced hand and no five-card (or longer) major — or as little as 14 with a long, strong major suit. (Later I will suggest a few exceptions to the upper limit, but until then, assume 20 points as the absolute maximum.)

1♦

This is the 'catch-all' bid, denying a five-card (or longer) major, but it always shows an unbalanced hand containing a singleton or void, a six-card (or longer) minor, or, conceivably, 5422 distribution under certain conditions. The high-card range is usually 12-14 HCP, but could be 15 or 16 with no four-card major. It could also be a hand with a six-card minor and 11 HCP including at least an ace and a king, preferably in the long suit, or a hand that is 4-4 in the majors and 4-1 or 5-0 in the minors. The most common distributions are (a) a six-card minor, (b) 4441 with the singleton in any suit (including diamonds!), or (c) 5431 with a singleton in any suit (but the five-

card suit must be a minor). A hand with 5422 distribution also qualifies if the five-card suit is a minor and the four-card suit is a major. (There is a good reason for this exception, which will be explained later.)

1♥

A 1♥ opening shows roughly 10-15 HCP with a five-card suit or 10-14 points with a six-card suit. But many 10-HCP hands are too weak to open, while some hands with a long suit and good controls may qualify with fewer than 10 HCP.

1♠

A 1♠ opening shows roughly 10-14 HCP with a five-card (or longer) suit. The reason for treating the 1♠ and 1♥ bids slightly differently will be explained later.

1NT

The 1NT opening is weak: it shows a balanced 12-14 HCP and denies a five-card (or longer) major.

2♣

Just as in Standard systems, 2♣ is our very strong opening bid — with the difference that it is major-suit oriented. It guarantees five or more of a major (usually six or more), with a strong hand, 19+ HCP with one or two very strong five-card majors or 17+ with a good six-card or longer suit. When the major suit is not particularly strong, then in order to justify opening 2♣, the hand must be good enough to force to game anyway.

One factor to consider when deciding between a 1♣ and 2♣ opening is how flexible your hand is. When you hold a hand like one of these

1) ♠AKQJxx ♥x ♦AKx ♣xxx

2) ♠KQJ10xx ♥AQ ♦x ♣AJxx

most of the time you belong in spades, no matter what partner has. The primary question is the level. You should open 2♣ and rebid 2♠ over the

semi-automatic 2♦ response. This sequence usually shows 19-20 HCP, but these hands are as good as a typical 19-point hand. When you hold

3) ♠Kxxxxx ♥AKxx ♦AK ♣K

despite the fact this hand also has a six-card major suit with three more points than either of the first two example hands, it calls for a different treatment. You should open 1♣, which usually shows 15-19 HCP. If you open 2♣ and rebid 2♠, partner would pass with

♠x ♥J10xxx ♦xxx ♣KJxx

because of the apparent misfit, while he would respond 1♥ to a 1♣ opening bid. Unlike in Precision, responder doesn't need 8 or 9 points to respond to 1♣ with one of a major, since, in the System, this sequence isn't forcing to game! And even if responder doesn't bid 1♥, there is a better chance to find a heart fit after

Opener

1♣

1♠

Responder

1♦

than after

Opener

2♣

2♠

Responder

2♦

With Hands 1 and 2, you can afford to bid to the two-level in spades before partner can voice an opinion. With the third hand, you are not confident that you belong in spades and it will be hard to find a heart fit if you 'preempt' partner with a 2♠ rebid. So you should open a strong club and rebid spades at the *one*-level (unless partner responds 1♥), planning to show hearts next round.

The discussion in the last paragraph illustrates two principles:

- 1) With a choice of two approaches, you should tend to adopt the stronger one when you have a very strong trump suit in a one-suited hand. When the hand may easily play in two or three denominations, you should tend to make the cheaper or weaker bid to give your side a chance to find the best trump suit.

- 2) All point ranges are approximate. You are not only allowed to treat a hand as worth more or less than the actual point count, but are encouraged to do so.

Which hand do you like better?

1) ♠ x ♥ KQJ 10 x x x ♦ AK ♣ A 10 x (17 points)

2) ♠ AJ x x x ♥ AKQ x ♦ K x ♣ K x (20 points)

I would force to game with Hand 1 by bidding

Opener

2♣

3♥

Responder

2♦

since the queen of clubs is all you need from partner to give you an adequate play for game, while ♣KQx(xx) and an ace will give you a laydown slam (barring an unexpected ruff or a very bad trump split). Partner would not realize that the queen of clubs is a crucial card if you merely *invited* game.

With Hand 2, you have no idea what denomination you belong in, or at what level, so you should just open 1♣, despite the 20 points. You can't always show the difference between a strong suit and a weak suit, but when you have a close decision, you should often choose a slight underbid when your hand is flexible and can play well in more than one suit — and choose the stronger or higher bid with something like Hand 1.

2♦

An opening 2♦ shows 22-23 balanced or 20+ unbalanced. Unless opener rebids 2NT over the usual 2♥ or 2♠ responses, the 2♦ bid denies a five-card (or longer) major or a balanced hand.

2♥ and 2♠

These openings are normal weak two-bids.

2NT

As in Standard, 2NT shows 20-21 HCP with a balanced hand (which may include a five-card major).

Opening bids not described above will have their usual ‘standard’ meanings. An opening 3NT bid can be whatever you agree upon. Whether or not you choose to play Namyats or Gambling 3NT will have little effect upon the rest of the system. However, I recommend you play Namyats openings (4♣ shows hearts; 4♦ shows spades), in which case 3NT will show a hand worth a 4♣ or 4♦ opening when playing Standard. Without Namyats, it would be difficult to describe hands such as

♠ AKJ 10 x x x ♥ x ♦ KJ x x ♣ x

or

♠ K x ♥ K Q J x x x x x ♦ — ♣ K x x

which lack the high-card strength for a 2♣ opening, but are too strong for any alternative. (You might miss a slam by opening 4♠ or 4♥.) Also, you don’t want to open 1♣ and make it easy for the opponents to enter the auction and perhaps outbid you.

As stated earlier, all of the above point-count requirements are approximate. Suppose you were playing Precision, where a 1♣ opening shows 16 or more HCP. What would you open with one of these hands?

♠ AKQ 10 x x ♥ AJ 9 x x ♦ x x ♣ —

♠ AQ ♥ AK 10 9 x x ♦ Q 10 9 x ♣ x

I can’t imagine that anyone would fail to open 1♣ with either hand. Opposite the first hand, two small spades and the queen of hearts are all you need to have a reasonable play for game, while ♥KQxx and the ace of diamonds will provide an excellent play for a grand slam, which would be almost impossible to reach if you opened 1♠. However, with

♠ Q x ♥ Q J ♦ K Q J x ♣ K Q x x x

you should open 1♦ or 1NT rather than 1♣ (in Precision) and probably 1NT in the System, despite having two more points than the usual upper limit. The fact that your hand falls within a certain point range, like 10-14 or 15-17 with the right distribution, does not compel you to make a particular bid. Exercising judgment is not only allowed, but encouraged. For example, you are the dealer and hold

♠ A x ♥ K J x ♦ A x ♣ 10 x x x x x

You surely do not want to pass, nor do you want to treat this as an unbalanced hand, despite the six-card suit, so opening 1NT is the least of evils.

While one of a major purportedly shows 10-14 HCP, or perhaps 15, you should open the bidding 1♥ when holding

♠ x ♥ A 10 9 x x x x ♦ A x x x ♣ x

Your strong playing strength and two aces are worth much more than two extra jacks. But you should pass rather than open 1♠ with

♠ Q x x x x ♥ K x x ♦ Q x x ♣ K x

Your weak suit, scattered values and balanced distribution make three strikes against opening the latter hand. Add the ten-nine of spades and move your queen of diamonds to go with a king —

♠ Q 10 9 x x ♥ K x x ♦ x x ♣ K Q x

and you have an optional opening bid, although my preference is still to pass. Hands without aces are overvalued by the 4-3-2-1 point count. The test on borderline hands is this: if partner raises your one-of-a-major to game with a fit and a good 13 HCP, will you have a reasonable play for it? Another test is whether you have a sound vulnerable overcall at the one-level, which means that you will be more likely to open with 5431 or even 5422 distribution than with 5332. You should also be more inclined to open when you would like partner to lead your suit on defense if the opponents outbid you.

It will be easier for you to remember the various ranges and why they vary, depending upon which suit you open, if you understand the bidding concept of the System. Your opening bids are divided into several categories.

- 1) Hands with a good major suit and 5-9 points are opened with a weak two-bid.
- 2) Although there are a few exceptions, hands with a five-card or longer major and 10-14 or 15 HCP, are opened with one of a major. (Game is unlikely unless partner has 10 or more high card points or a good distributional fit.)
- 3) Hands with a five-card or longer major and more high card points (15-16), should be opened 1♣. Major-suit hands in the 17-19 range without exceptional playing strength and controls should also be opened 1♣.

- 4) Hands with a strong six-card major and 14 HCP (exceptionally with 13) can be opened 1♣, since the major-suit length may allow you to make a game with 22 or 23 points. If you open 1♠ with

♠ KQJ 10 x x ♥ x x ♦ x ♣ AK 10 x

partner won't think you belong in game when he holds the queen of clubs and an ace, even if he has another (probably wasted) queen or jack. So he might pass your 1♠ bid or fail to compete over an opponent's overcall. But opening 1♣ with 13 HCP is exceptional; you would open one of a major rather than 1♣ with most 14-point hands, even with a six-card major:

♠ x x ♥ KQ x x x x ♦ AK x ♣ Q x

- 5) Very strong hands with a six-card major or a very strong five-card major are opened 2♣. Then, if opener rebids 2♥ or 2♠, his bid is very encouraging but not forcing. If he jumps in his major, it is forcing to game.
- 6) A 1NT opening bid shows a balanced hand in the 12-14 point range. It also denies a five-card (or longer) major. The distribution should be 4333, 4432, 5332 or, exceptionally, 5422 if the long suits are both minors.
- 7) A 1♦ opening shows an unbalanced hand. The usual range is 12-14 HCP. It denies a five-card (or longer) major, and if there is no four-card major, the hand could be as strong as 16 HCP.
- 8) A 1♣ bid usually shows 15-19 HCP, but occasionally may be as much as 20 or as little as 14 (with a long, strong major suit). With an unbalanced hand and not even a four-card major, the minimum is 17. The reason for varying the ranges according to the presence or absence of a major suit is that hands with a good major fit often make game with fewer than 24 HCP.
- 9) An opening 2NT bid shows a balanced hand with 20-21 HCP.
- 10) An opening 2♦ bid shows whatever is left, other than preemptive bids: in other words, 20+ unbalanced, without a five-card major, or 22-23 balanced.

An important warning is necessary before we go much further. Since the various opening bids are limited, especially one of a major, the responder should be 'captain' in most sequences. Earlier, I gave several examples of hands

where responder would raise an opening 1♠ or 1♥ bid to game. However, opener is guessing as to what responder has based the raise on. He may, for example, have only three-card support:

♠ Kxx ♥ Kxx ♦ AKxxx ♣ xx

or

♠ Kxx ♥ x ♦ xxx ♣ AK10xxxx

In competitive situations, responder may stretch to bid game, hoping to induce a sacrifice; he may have a balanced hand or a distributional hand. Given this uncertainty, think about the following problem. You hold

♠ AJ10xxxx ♥ xx ♦ x ♣ Axx

Vulnerable against not, if the bidding goes

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	2♠ ¹	4♠	5♦
?			

1. Hearts and a minor.

what would you bid as West?

I think you have no alternative to passing. With a balanced hand, you might double; with distribution, you should pass. At the table, West made a costly decision when he bid 5♠. East held

♠ Qxxx ♥ A10x ♦ KJxx ♣ Q

Down two, when North held 2-5-1-5 distribution. If West had passed the decision to his partner, he would have doubled and the opponents would have been down two. Even playing BWS, I think opener should pass the 5♦ bid since two small cards in one of the opponents' suits is a bad holding for offense, and partner doesn't need much defensive strength to help you defeat a five-level contract. A pass is even more clearly right in the System since responder may hold a balanced hand and/or only three-card spade support, which increases the likelihood that the ace of spades will be a defensive trick.

MAJOR-SUIT AUCTIONS



As we have seen in Chapter 1, opening one of a major shows at least a five-card suit and usually 10 to 14 HCP. The reason for saying ‘usually’ is that, as was discussed in the previous chapter, hand valuation may cause you to bid one of a major with either more or less high-card strength. The following are typical minimum opening bids:

♠ x ♥ K 10 9 x x ♦ x x x ♣ A K x x

♠ Q 10 9 x x ♥ A x ♦ A x x x ♣ x x

♠ A x x ♥ Q 10 9 x x x ♦ K 10 x ♣ x

♠ x x ♥ A J 10 x x x x ♦ x ♣ K 10 9

♠ A Q J x x x ♥ x ♦ x x ♣ Q x x x

The latter three hands have too much playing strength for a weak two-bid. A typical maximum hand for one of a major is

♠ Q x x x x ♥ K Q ♦ K J x ♣ K J x

— 15 HCP, with a weak suit and aceless; you are very unlikely to make a game opposite a balanced 10 points. The decision is close, but I would be tempted to open 1♠ even with the jack of spades substituted for a low spade, especially if I were in third or fourth position. Later I will explain why you could have a slightly stronger hand for a 1♥ bid than for a 1♠ bid.

Playing strength is another factor to consider. The main reason for limiting opening bids at the one-level is so that responder can choose to stay out of the bidding on mediocre hands without risk of missing a game, either with or without competition. However, when you have wild distribution, the opponents tend to have wild distribution also. This is not just a superstition: it is true. When you have a long suit, somebody has to be short in the suit. When you have a singleton or void, other players will have additional length. Some hands are so distributional that you can count on the opponents to keep the bidding open for you if partner doesn't; meanwhile, if you open 1♣ to show your strength, the opponents are likely to preempt you and you will have a harder time describing your shape.

Suppose you are the dealer, holding

♠ — ♥ AKJxx ♦ KJ10xxx ♣ Kx

If you open 1♣, when the bidding comes around to you again, it is likely to be at about 4♠. At the five-level, should you bid diamonds or hearts? Despite your 15 HCP (in fact, a *good* 15 HCP), it would be better to open 1♥, planning to bid diamonds next round, even if it is at the five-level. (Besides, opening 1♦ would deny a five-card major). The same factors might persuade you to open 1♥ with either

♠ x ♥ QJ10xxx ♦ A10xxxx ♣ —

or

♠ — ♥ AKQJx ♦ A ♣ Qxxxxxx

There is a huge difference in strength between the last two hands, and you may have to make a lucky guess about the bidding *level*, but it is even more important to find the best *suit* to play in. The fact that you may, with perhaps one hand in a hundred, open a one-bid with great playing strength should not be allowed to affect partner's bidding. He still assumes that you have 10 to 14 points with normal distribution until you tell him otherwise. If you open 1♥ with

♠ — ♥ AKJxx ♦ KJ10xxx ♣ Kx

or

♠ — ♥ AKQJx ♦ A ♣ Qxxxxxx

and partner bids 1♠ or 1NT, you should jump on the next round. Over 1NT you should jump to the four-level, but over a 1♠ response you should just jump to 3♦ or 3♣ since a jump to the four-level has a different meaning. (Without further discussion it sounds like a splinter bid with strong spade support.) Besides, when partner bids a suit, his hand is more likely to be distributional than when he bids 1NT, and there is a greater danger of a misfit.

Here is another similar hand. I recently held

♠ — ♥ A Q 10 9 x x x ♦ A K J 10 x x ♣ —

when playing BWS (although I would bid it the same way in the System). This looks like a made-up hand to illustrate a point, but it was actually dealt in a home team game. I can't imagine that a 1♥ bid will be passed out: if partner is too weak to bid, the opponents will rescue you. If you open 1♥ and plan to bid 6♦ next round (which is a slight gamble), partner will know that only his holding in the red suits is important. With ♥Kx ♦Qx or ♥Kxx ♦x, he should bid a grand slam. If partner makes any sort of heart raise, you would bid 5NT (provided that you play graded responses to the grand slam force).

I have told you that an opening 2♣ bid shows a very strong hand with at least a five-card major, most likely a six-card or longer suit. Meanwhile an opening 2♦ followed by a 2NT rebid shows 22-23 points, and there are ways to show other strong balanced hands. So what would you expect a 2♣ opening, followed by a 2NT rebid, to show? It can't show a balanced hand since other bids cover the entire range of notrump openings and rebids. At this stage, a good guess on your part would be that it shows both majors. You wouldn't want to open 2♣, followed by 2♠ (non-forcing!) with

♠ A J x x x ♥ A K Q x x ♦ x ♣ A Q

for fear that partner would pass with

♠ x ♥ 10 x x x ♦ A x x ♣ x x x x x

when you belonged in hearts. We'll come back to this idea later. For now, I am just trying to give you a feel for the system, and will furnish the details further on.

While an opening 2♣ bid guarantees at least a five-card major (with a very good hand), not all strong hands with a five-card major are opened with

2♣. Opening 2NT shows a strong balanced hand, as does opening 2♦ followed by rebidding 2NT, and in each case your hand may include a five-card major. Later you will discover other sequences, starting with 1♣, which show a strong hand with both majors, one of them being only a four-card suit.

Eliminating balanced hands from auctions that begin 2♣, followed by two or three of a major, makes these sequences more descriptive. But if you routinely open 2NT (or 2♦ followed by rebidding 2NT) with a very strong balanced hand that includes a five-card major, you should play some form of Puppet Stayman. I like my version best (described in Appendix 1), but any version is better than none.

Let's return to the more common opening bids of 1♥ and 1♠. If you open one of a major and partner responds 1NT, you should pass with 5332 distribution. *A 1NT response to a major-suit opening bid is not forcing!* You may also pass with 5422 distribution (unless your second suit is hearts), depending upon whether your cards are mostly in your short suits (which calls for a pass) or in your longer suits (which calls for rebidding the *four*-card suit). With a six-card (or longer) suit, you will usually rebid it at the two-level, but if your suit and playing strength are both quite strong, you may jump to three of your major over a one-level response. Both

♠ x ♥ K Q J 10 x x ♦ K Q 10 x ♣ x x

and

♠ x x ♥ A Q J 10 x x ♦ x ♣ K J 10 x

are too weak in high cards for an opening 1♣ bid. If you open 1♣ and partner decides to play in 3NT or in a suit of his own, or if he later makes a penalty double, your hand will be a disappointment to him. In both cases, open 1♥ and rebid 3♥ over 1♠ or 1NT.

The 1NT response to a major opening shows roughly 8-11 HCP. It also tends to deny three-card support, even three small. You don't need to keep the bidding open with less strength since partner's major opening usually shows a maximum of 14 HCP. The main reason for responding with as few as 8 points is that it makes it harder for the opponents to compete and makes it possible for opener to bid further if there is competition. Also, you may find a good fit when the response is 1♠ over 1♥. But you should pass partner's 1♥ opening with

♠ Q J x x ♥ x ♦ K x x x ♣ J x x x

Responding 1♠ will work out well if partner has four spades and raises only to 2♠. It *may* work out well if he rebids a four-card minor. But he is far more likely to rebid his six-card heart suit, and then you will be sorry you bid. Even if he rebids 1NT, you won't like it. With 18-20 total points and a misfit, this hand will not play as well in 1NT as in 1♥. At least if partner plays in hearts, he should take a few heart tricks, which he may not get in a notrump contract. Game is virtually impossible, and you want to stay low or let the opponents play the hand.

Playing the 1NT response to a major-suit opening as non-forcing affects responder's other possible bids, especially his two-over-one responses, which will be discussed shortly. Also, a raise of opener's major to the three-level is a limit raise. It may show either three- or four-card support and could be balanced or unbalanced. (With four-card support and a singleton or void, the tendency is to raise directly to game, so a limit raise usually shows four-card support with a balanced hand or three-card support with an unbalanced hand.) Playing Standard, it is important to distinguish between three- and four-card raises since when you show a four-card raise, partner is more likely to be interested in a slam. In the System, since no sort of limit raise opposite an opening bid of one of a major will interest opener in a slam, you don't need to tell him what kind of support you have. Make him (and the opening leader) wait till you put down the dummy! While there is an overlap, the minimum high-card strength for a three-card limit raise will be somewhat higher than for a four-card limit raise.

TWO-OVER-ONE RESPONSES

1M-2♣

A 2♣ response to an opening bid in a major is forcing to game and presumed to be natural, although it may not in fact be so. Responder should jump to 3♣, invitational, with a hand like

♠Ax ♥Jx ♦xxx ♣AQ10xxx

With only a five-card major and with neither four of the other major nor a distributional hand, opener should tend to rebid 2♦ over 2♣ (unless he has both unbid suits stopped plus tenaces, in which case he can rebid 2NT or

3NT). There are two reasons for bidding 2♦. First, he wants to deny a six-card suit or a notrumpish hand with stoppers in the unbid suits, in case responder is strong enough to be interested in a slam. Second, he wants to give responder a chance to bid 2♥ if the opening bid was 1♠, since a 2♥ response to 1♠ is natural and invitational, but *not forcing*. (The delayed 2♥ bid, after first responding 2♣, *is* forcing, of course.)

With a relatively balanced hand and stoppers in both unbid suits, you should rebid 3NT with 10-12 points and 2NT with 13-14 points. This method allows more room for slam investigation when you have the better hand. You can support partner's presumed club suit with hands like these

♠ A Q x x x ♥ x x ♦ K x ♣ A x x x

♠ A J x x x ♥ A K x ♦ x ♣ x x x x

While I have said that a 2♣ bid is *presumed* natural, about one time in ten responder will have something like one of these hands:

1) ♠ A x ♥ K Q x x x ♦ K x x x ♣ K x

2) ♠ Q x x x x ♥ A x ♦ A Q x x ♣ A x

3) ♠ Q x x ♥ A x x ♦ K x x x ♣ A Q x

With the first hand he wants to make a forcing bid in hearts (remember an immediate 2♥ bid would be invitational, not forcing). With the second hand, responder wants to take advantage of the forcing-to-game feature of the 2♣ response to show spade support, followed by cuebidding to invite a slam. With the third hand, he wants to give partner a choice in the next round or two between 4♠ and 3NT.

1M-2♦

A 2♦ response to a major is forcing for only one round, but guarantees a rebid unless opener raises diamonds, rebids 2NT or jumps to game. Incidentally, you should alert all two-over-one responses, including this one; explain here that partner could have more clubs than diamonds since 2♣ would be forcing to game, and that in any event, 2♦ does not promise four of them. The following example sequences are all non-forcing:

Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
1♠	2♦	1♠	2♦
2♥	2♠	2♠	3♠
Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
1♠	2♦	1♠	2♦
2♠	2NT	2♥	3♥
Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
1♥	2♦	1♥	2♦
2♥	3♥	2♥	2NT
Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
1♥	2♦	1♠	2♦
2♥	3♦	2♠	3♦

When not playing the System, one of a major, followed by a rebid of the major over a two-over-one response, does not guarantee a six-card suit, according to most experts, but when playing the System, it should (because you are not guaranteed several rounds of bidding over a 2♦ response).

Compared to the 2♣ auctions, you have less room to be descriptive when partner bids 2♦ over your 1♠ opening. In that case, unless you have four hearts, you may have to rebid 2NT despite flaws, rather than rebid your suit, which would show six or more. Similarly, when you open 1♥ and partner responds 2♦, you may have to rebid 2NT with 3-5-1-4 distribution since a 3♣ rebid should show five clubs. This time a 2NT rebid over a 2♦ response should show 10-12 HCP and be non-forcing, and with 13 or 14 you would rebid 3NT. It may seem strange to bid 3NT with a bad hand over 2♣ and 3NT with a good hand over 2♦, but the reason is that when partner bids 2♣, he definitely has game-forcing values, while when he bids 2♦, he may not.

1♠-2♥

There is a good reason to play the 2♥ response to 1♠ as non-forcing. Playing BWS, responder would bid a forcing notrump after a 1♠ opening with either of these hands

♠ x x ♥ K J 10 x x ♦ K x x ♣ K J x

♠ x ♥ K J x x x x ♦ A x x ♣ J x x

and, depending on opener's rebid, may never show his heart suit. In the System, a non-forcing 1NT response would be passed when opener has a heart fit on a hand such as

♠ A Q x x x ♥ Q 10 x ♦ x x ♣ A Q x

So there should be some way for responder to show a good five-card heart suit (or even a six- or seven-card suit) with only invitational values or a hand quite unsuitable for play in 1NT, such as

♠ — ♥ Q J 10 9 x x x ♦ K J x x ♣ x x

With the latter hand, he would like partner to pass 2♥, but if opener makes a minimum rebid, other than raising hearts, responder will simply rebid 3♥.

With

♠ A Q x x x ♥ Q 10 x ♦ x x ♣ A Q x

opener would raise a 2♥ response to 4♥. With a tiny bit less, and the same distribution, he would raise to 3♥ (which is invitational but not forcing). With two small hearts and a five-card spade suit, opener would pass a 2♥ response since a 5-2 heart fit should be as good as a 5-2 spade fit, and responder might have six or more hearts and only one or two spades. With a good six-card spade suit and fewer than three hearts, opener would rebid 2♠.

A 2NT rebid by opener shows only a five-card spade suit and a relatively balanced hand (including 5431 distribution when the singleton is in responder's heart suit). A new suit rebid by responder over 2NT would be non-forcing (since the 2♥ bid was non-forcing). So for this auction

Opener

1♠

2NT

Responder

2♥

3♦

responder would have something like

♠ x ♥ A 10 9 x x ♥ A J x x x x ♣ x

He would pass a 2♠ rebid since a 6-1 spade fit should play at least as well at the two-level as a 6-1 or 6-2 diamond fit at the three-level; also there is a chance that opener would take a preference to hearts with a doubleton in both suits.

OTHER MAJOR-SUIT AUCTIONS

1M-3♣

Since the 2♣ response is game-forcing, we use 1M-3♣ as natural and invitational. A typical hand was the one given earlier:

♠ A x ♥ J x ♦ x x x ♣ A Q 10 x x x

Why do we not play 2♣ followed by 3♣ as invitational and an immediate 3♣ response as weak? Because playing 2♣ as artificial *and forcing to game* is permitted by the ACBL as a General Chart agreement while an artificial 2♣ response that is not forcing to game is at least a Mid-Chart treatment). With something like

♠ x x ♥ x ♦ Q x ♣ Q J 10 x x x x x

your best choice is to pass and *possibly* bid clubs later if the opponents compete and partner rebids his major.

1M-3♦

By contrast, since we have an invitational 2♦ bid available, a 3♦ response to one of a major is weak, not invitational. Because most of us are used to playing a forcing notrump and two-over-one responses that are forcing (or almost forcing) to game, it will take a bit of adjustment to play this way. Playing BWS, I like strong jump shifts, at least at the two-level. But in the System, weak jump shifts are better. One reason is that most strong jump shifts are made with a good fit in opener's suit, but neither an opening 1♣ or 1♦ bid in the System is natural. Consequently, responder does not know, when he makes his first response, whether or not he has a good fit for opener's minor suit. Another reason is that, in the System, opener generally describes his hand within narrow limits and responder makes the decisions, while in BWS opener is more often captain.

1M-2NT

A 2NT response is Jacoby, forcing to game, and it guarantees four or more trumps. The requirements are somewhat higher than for BWS — a good 15

HCP — since opener's hand is limited, and there is no reason to force opener to describe his hand to the opponents unless getting to slam is a substantial probability. The 2NT response denies a singleton or void (unless responder intends to take complete control of the bidding, perhaps with Roman Keycard Blackwood, after setting the trump suit).

You may have your own system for bidding after a Jacoby 2NT response, and, if so, you can continue to use it. However, since the opening bid is severely limited, I have a few suggestions. A jump by opener to four of the original major shows a balanced hand, probably not worth an opening bid at BWS. A 3NT rebid shows the next-to-worst hand, balanced, but with poor controls for slam. Rebidding the major shows a better hand, possibly with a six-card or longer suit, 5422 distribution or good controls. Bidding a new suit at the three-level shows a singleton or void.

Whether playing the System or BWS, I think a jump to the four-level in a new suit over a Jacoby 2NT response should not only show 5-5 or better, but should also deny two quick losers in either of the remaining suits. So when the bidding goes

Opener

1♠

4♦

Responder

2NT

responder will assign almost no value to honors, other than the ace, in hearts or clubs, but will highly prize any honors in spades or diamonds. So opener should bid 4♦ with

♠AQxxx ♥x ♦QJxxx ♣Kx

but bid 3♥, showing the singleton, with

♠AQxxx ♥x ♦AJxxx ♣Qx

Over the 3♥ splinter bid, responder will value both the king of diamonds and the king of clubs.

I have a further suggestion after these four-level new-suit rebids. The important cards responder can hold are aces and the kings and queens of opener's two long suits. Counting 2 for each ace, 2 for the kings of the long suits, and 1 for each queen of the long suits, my suggestion is to show these points in steps. The cheapest bid shows 4 or fewer of these points. The

higher steps (excluding 4NT, which is still some form of Blackwood) show 5, 6 or 7 points.

Suppose opener holds

♠ A Q x x x ♥ x ♦ K x ♣ K x x x x

and bids 4♣ over the 2NT response. Responder, with

♠ K J x x ♥ A x x ♦ J x x ♣ A Q x

bids 5♣ to show 7 of these *Jacoby points*, and opener can simply bid 6♠. With a 3-2 club break, he can discard two of dummy's diamonds. If that doesn't work, he will have to lead up to his king of diamonds. If responder's red ace were in diamonds, the hand would be virtually cold. Suppose, after getting a 6-control response (4♥), opener bids something other than a sign-off in spades (like 5♦). That means he is still interested in slam (probably needing a doubleton club from partner to compensate for the missing queen).

OTHER AUCTIONS

Many bidding sequences will be the same as in Standard. The following are some that will be different. Partner opens 1♠ in each case.

a) ♠ x x x ♥ x x ♦ K J x x ♣ J x x x

You should bid 2♠. Playing BWS, you may prefer constructive raises, in which case with this hand you would bid 1NT (forcing) and then give preference to spades. You would not want to bid 2♠ directly and get partner excited with such a weak hand. But in the System, opener will not bid too much with his limited hand. Usually he will pass your simple raise. With a six- or seven-card suit or a five-card side suit, or with 5440 distribution, he may bid again, but in that case he should be able to make 3♠, and if he can't make it, the opponents can usually make something their way. So the main reason for the raise (this time) is to make a mild preempt with a bad hand. A second reason is that a 1NT response is not forcing.

b) ♠ J x ♥ Q x x x ♦ J 10 x x ♣ K x x

Pass. You are not strong enough to be interested in game, and you don't mind letting the opponents compete at the two-level. Your mild misfit

makes your hand poor for offense, but better for defense. If LHO bids a suit, his partner can't tell how strong he is, and the opponents may get overboard if they are not too high already. You would pass with the same high cards and a singleton spade. Opposite a mediocre hand, the worse your fit for partner's suit, the better your defense is and the worse your offense. With mediocre, misfitting hands, it is unlikely that you have a better spot than 1♠ unless it is defending against the opponents' contract.

c) ♠ Q x ♥ x x ♦ A x x x x ♣ K x x x

Raise to 2♠. In Standard bidding, you would bid a forcing 1NT and give preference back to spades. It is more effective to raise to 2♠ right away than to bid 1NT (remember that one notrump is not forcing, and notice that you have a potential ruffing value in a spade contract); you may preempt the opponents or prevent them from overcalling in hearts.

d) ♠ K x ♥ A x x x ♦ A x x ♣ 10 x x x

Bid 1NT. You are unlikely to make game unless partner has a six-card (or longer) spade suit. He will usually pass with only a five-card spade suit, but with a longer suit he will rebid it, and you will raise to invite game.

e) ♠ K x x ♥ K x x x x ♦ A J x ♣ x x

Bid 3♠ with this hand. For one reason, you can't bid a *forcing* notrump followed by 3♠ to show a three-card limit raise. For another, it isn't so important for partner to know whether your limit raise shows three- or four-card support. If there were a chance for a slam, it could make a lot of difference, but not for game. With a maximum of 14 HCP, partner is not going to bid or invite a slam opposite your limit raise.

f) ♠ K x ♥ Q x ♦ Q J x x ♣ A 10 x x x

With this hand, you should bid 2♦. You are slightly too strong to bid 1NT, but not strong enough to force to game; therefore you cannot bid 2♣. If partner rebids 2♠, showing at least a six-card suit, you will make an invitational raise to 3♠. If he rebids 2♥, you will bid 2NT, again not forcing. If partner rebids 2NT, showing 10-12 HCP and a relatively balanced hand, you will pass. If partner raises to 3♦, you will pass. While your 2♦ bid is your shorter minor this time, the 2♦ bid will usually be natural — perhaps with

♠Ax ♥Kx ♦AQJxx ♣Qxxx

— but in that case you could not make a non-forcing simple raise or bid a non-forcing 2NT next round.

g) ♠Ax ♥AQJxx ♦Jxxx ♣Kx

Here you should bid 2♣. Remember, an immediate 2♥ response is not forcing, so you plan to bid hearts next round, which *is* forcing. If you had responded 2♦, opener could not bid hearts himself without a four-card suit, and it is more convenient to be able to show your forcing heart response at the two-level, rather than the three-level. If you bid 2♦ and then 3♥ over a 2NT rebid, the sequence is forcing and presumably shows 5-6 in hearts and diamonds. If you start 2♦ and then bid 3♥ over a 2♠ rebid, you might hold

♠x ♥AJxx ♦AKQxxx ♣xx

or

♠x ♥AJx ♦AKQxxxx ♣xx

rather than 5-6 in the red suits and be trying to get to 3NT if opener has a club stopper, just as in BWS. With 5-6 in the red suits and a game-forcing hand, say

♠x ♥AKJxx ♦AQJxxx ♣x

you would bid 2♦ and 3♥, but probably continue with 4♦ over partner's 3NT bid. With

♠AKxxxx ♥10xx ♦x ♣Kxx

he should revert to 4♥.

h) ♠Qx ♥Kxxx ♦Ax ♣Kxxxx

With this hand, you would like to bid 2♦ so as to invite, but not force, to game. That is what you might do in an ACBL Mid-Chart event if you receive permission to respond in a two-card diamond suit. But according to the General Chart, you can't bid 2♦ (pursuant to an agreement) without at least a three-card suit. So you are forced to underbid or overbid, my choices being 2♠ at matchpoints and 3♠ at IMPs. Bidding 1NT is also possible. With one

more diamond and one fewer club, you could bid 2♦, after which all new suits and jump preferences are forcing. But you would pass a 2NT rebid or raise a 2♠ rebid to 3♠.

i) ♠ x x x ♥ Q x ♦ J 10 x ♣ A K J 10 x

This time you can bid 2♦. I don't like a limit raise in spades, since the only likely rebids by partner would be 'pass' and 4♠, while the hand might play better in notrump. If partner rebids 2NT (showing 10-12 points with only five spades), you can pass (my choice) or bid 3♠, non-forcing; if he rebids 2♥, you will bid 2♠ (also non-forcing). You are too weak to respond 2♣ and force to game, and you don't want to choose a unilateral and non-forcing 3♣ with a spade fit. It usually pays to be optimistic when you have a fit and an unbalanced hand, but not when both hands are balanced.

Suppose you open 1♠ and partner responds 2♣. What would you rebid with the following hands?

♠ A K x x x ♥ A x ♦ x x x ♣ x x x

♠ A J x x x ♥ K x ♦ K J x ♣ 10 x x

♠ K 10 x x x ♥ x ♦ A K J x x x ♣ x

With Hand 1, rebid 2♦. You are going to game on this hand, and if you get to a notrump contract, you prefer that partner be declarer. Also you give partner a chance to bid hearts at the two-level, in which case you will raise to 3♥ for lack of a better choice. Since partner was able to show his forcing heart bid at the two-level, he has room now to bid 3NT with an appropriate hand. Partner should alert your 2♦ bid, saying it does not guarantee four or more diamonds.

With Hand 2, you will make the natural-looking rebid of 2NT. You are supposed to have 13 or 14 points, but with your tenaces and mild fit for partner (partner *usually* has clubs) this hand can be upgraded to 13 points. With the same distribution and ♠Ax ♥Axx, you would bid 2♦ to let partner be declarer if the final contract is 3NT; if partner rebids 2♥, forcing to game, you will bid 2NT since you have only two hearts, while your 2♦ rebid already showed that you weren't anxious to bid notrump yourself. Take away the jack of diamonds, and you should bid 2♦ to imply either less than a BWS opening bid or a flaw for notrump.

With Hand 3, you can bid 3♦, although you wish your king of spades were the ace. Your suit is worth showing because of the likelihood of a diamond slam, but you don't want to bid past 3NT to show it.

If partner had responded 2♦ instead of 2♣, you would rebid 2NT non-forcing with Hand 1, for lack of a better choice. Hand 2 is a borderline case but I would probably bid 3♦ because of the fit. With Hand 3, I would raise a 2♦ response to 4♦, taking the slight risk that partner doesn't have a diamond suit and that we belong in 3NT.

This time partner opens 1♥.

a) ♠ Axxxx ♥ Qxx ♦ K10xxx ♣ —

With this hand, you should just bid 4♥. There is little point in introducing the spade suit or trying to be ultra-scientific. Opposite most hands, partner will have a good play for 4♥, and he will probably have the same losers in hearts as in spades (even when partner fits spades). A slam is unlikely to make and even more unlikely to be bid. If you bid 1♠, the opponents may get together in clubs — they could have a cheap sacrifice or they may even make 5♣. Or they may defend better if you force partner to describe his hand.

b) ♠ Qxxx ♥ Kxxx ♦ AQ ♣ Kxx

Here, you should again bid 4♥. If an opponent has a distributional hand, he may overcall or double (mostly for takeout), in which case you will probably either make a doubled contract or obtain a penalty that is greater than your score for making game. Also, the possibility that you have this hand may intimidate the opponents (next time) when you bid 4♥ with

♠ xxx ♥ QJxxx ♦ x ♣ Jxxx

and they can make a game in spades or diamonds.

c) ♠ Kx ♥ Qx ♦ AJ10xx ♣ A10xx

With this hand you should bid 2♦, just as you would when playing BWS. With a six-card or longer suit, partner will rebid it, probably at the two-level. With a good six-card heart suit and a diamond fit (you usually have diamonds for your diamond bid) partner may jump to 3♥. In either case, you will bid 4♥ since a 3♥ bid over 2♥ would not be forcing. If partner has 5332 distribution, whether or not he has stoppers in both unbid suits, he will bid 2NT and you can raise to 3NT.

d) ♠ x x ♥ x x ♦ A Q J 10 x x x ♣ Q x

This time you will respond 3♦ to show no interest in game. Partner would need the perfect hand in order for game to be a good prospect (e.g. the king of diamonds, aces in two suits and a stopper in the third for 3NT). Change the hand to

♠ x x ♥ x x ♦ A Q 10 x x x x ♣ A x

and you would bid 2♦, followed by 3♦ (invitational).

e) ♠ Q J x ♥ K x x ♦ A Q x x ♣ K x x

This is a hand on which you should bid 2♣. You want to force to game, but you don't know which contract will be better, 4♥ or 3NT. You plan to bid a minimum number of hearts next round, followed by 3NT, to give partner a choice. If you respond 2♦ instead of 2♣, you will have to jump to game next round since neither 2NT nor 3♥ is forcing over a rebid of 2♦, 2♥ or 2♠.

THE WEAK NOTRUMP



An opening 1NT bid shows a balanced hand, within the 12-14 HCP range, that does not contain a five-card major. My idea of ‘balanced’ is 4333, 4432 or 5332 distribution. Also included is 5422 distribution when both long suits are minors, since there is little danger of missing a good major-suit fit and it makes the rebids after an opening 1♦ bid more descriptive.

As mentioned earlier, you also have the option to open 1NT with some 5422 hands where the four-card suit is a major, provided the strength is scattered and both doubletons are headed by the ace, king or queen.

I *like* notrump opening bids. They show balanced hands within a narrow range and make it easy for responder to evaluate both his offensive and defensive prospects. For example, he can jump to 4♥ with

♠ x ♥ J 10 9 x x x x ♦ Q J x x ♣ Q

since he might make it. It is also likely the opponents can make 4♠, and almost certain they can make 3♠. But unless most of the strength is in one of the opponents’ hands, it will be hard for them to know when to bid and when to double. With Stayman and various transfer bids, responder can find out what he needs to know about opener’s distribution. If responder is strong enough to bid, the partnership will usually get to the right contract; that is still true on hands with an eight-card major fit.

However, while in my view 2♦ and 2♥ over 1NT should be transfer bids, I don't think 4♦ and 4♥ should be Texas transfers. It is not nearly as important for the notrump bidder to be declarer when you are playing a weak notrump; concealing the distribution of the hand with the long suit is at least as valuable. The more persuasive consideration is that a Texas transfer allows the opponents to compete with safety. When you hold

♠ x ♥ J 10 9 x x x ♦ Q J x x ♣ Q

you would like to get to play 4♥. The opponents may be cold for 4♠ or have a one-trick sacrifice if you can make 4♥. When the opponents' strength is divided, neither of them can risk a double of 4♥. But if you bid 4♦ as a transfer, LHO can double to show a good hand, knowing you can hardly afford to play there, and that may enable RHO to double or bid 4♠ when partner accepts the transfer to 4♥.

The 1NT opening is preemptive since the opponents can only compete by doubling or bidding at the two-level or higher. There are pros and cons to playing a weak notrump but, on balance, I think it comes out well ahead, especially in the System, since you will have fewer problems describing hands in the strong notrump range. There is some danger of being doubled and going for a big number, but it doesn't happen very often. If the opponents become too aggressive, they may go for a big number themselves. So the risks for each side tend to balance each other out.

I'll give you an example of the 'risk for each side' from the 2006 North American Swiss. With both sides vulnerable (IMPs) I opened 1NT with

♠ Q x ♥ K Q 9 x ♦ 10 x x ♣ A J 10 x

Next hand doubled with

♠ A K x ♥ J x x ♦ K J x x ♣ Q x x

Partner bid 3♠ with

♠ J 8 x x x x ♥ x ♦ A Q 9 x ♣ x x

The next hand bid 4♥ with

♠ x x ♥ A 10 x x x ♦ x x ♣ K x x x

Was either bid by the opponents unreasonable? This was passed around to partner, who doubled for +800. The cards lay very favorably for us, but

that was predictable from the bidding since partner’s diamond holding was almost surely worth two tricks and the trumps were not breaking evenly. With ♠KJ10xxxx and nothing else, partner would pass 4♥, while with a different hand (♠KQx and three small hearts), I might have bid 4♠, either making or as a cheap sacrifice.

After a 1NT opening, it is hard for opener’s side to find a 4-4 major suit fit at the partscore level, but it is even harder for the opponents to find a major fit, 4-4 or otherwise, below game. So you may play 1NT, making one or two, when you could have been plus 140 in hearts. Is this a bad result? Not necessarily! Perhaps the opponents could have made 2♠ or 3♠ themselves. If they had been able to get into the auction at the one-level, your score would have been -140 or +50, so your +90 or +120 is well above average. Also, it is harder for the opponents to defend when you open 1NT than when you open a suit and rebid 1NT. Edgar Kaplan claimed that the following two auctions led to the hardest contracts to defend in bridge.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	all pass		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	pass	pass	dbl
all pass			

The defenders, on average, lost at least one trick, as compared to par. Two more reasons I like the weak notrump are (1) that it comes up so frequently, much more often than a strong notrump; and (2) it makes other bids more descriptive. No longer does a 1♦ bid merely show a minimum opening without a five-card major (as in Precision). For me, it also shows an unbalanced hand, which avoids certain rebid problems that exist when using the strong notrump. The latter statement will be explained fully later.

Many players who play a weak notrump (whether 12-14 or 10-12) also play a runout system when 1NT is doubled. For example, a redouble may ask opener to bid 2♣. If that is responder’s long suit, he can pass; if not, he can then bid his suit to show a one-suited hand. An immediate bid may show the lower of touching suits. Thus

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	dbl	2♦	

might show diamonds and hearts. A pass by responder, when his RHO doubles, forces a redouble. If responder then bids a suit, he shows that suit and a higher, non-touching suit.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1NT	dbl	2♦	

♠ 9 5 4
 ♥ 9 4 3
 ♦ Q 10 4 2
 ♣ K 10 7

♠ A 10
 ♥ K Q J 6
 ♦ A 7 3
 ♣ J 5 4 3

♠ K Q 8 7 3
 ♥ 7 2
 ♦ 9 5
 ♣ Q 7 6 2

♠ J 6 2
 ♥ A 10 8 5
 ♦ K J 8 6
 ♣ A 9

N
 W E
 S

West doubles 1NT and North passes. East may well pull the double to 2♠, but for the sake of argument let's suppose he passes. West leads the king of hearts. South wins and leads the king of diamonds. West will probably win this since it could cost him a diamond trick if he ducks and his partner has ♦Jxx. West can now set the contract two tricks if he plays the ace and another spade. But how will he know to do that? He will probably cash the two high hearts, after which he can still shift to the ace and another spade. He may do that if East discards a diamond to show he doesn't have a diamond stopper or if he discards a discouraging club (instead of discarding a high spot in spades). An expert pair may defend that way, but there are many opportunities for the defenders to go wrong, letting South off for down one or even allowing him to make his contract. I could probably construct a more convincing example.

I think it is better for responder to pass with a balanced hand regardless of strength — unless he has 9 or more HCP. In that case, he should redouble to show the balance of power. Then opener's side may score +560 or +760 non-vulnerable and +760 or +1160 vulnerable if allowed to play there, or a good penalty if the opponents run out. If responder redoubles with 9+ HCP and 2-3-4-4 distribution and the opponents run out to spades, opener can double 2♠ with a four-card spade suit; if responder fails to redouble, it will be hard for either hand to double for penalty with confidence.

THE UNBALANCED DIAMOND



In Precision, you often open $1\spadesuit$ whether your longer minor is clubs or diamonds since a $1\clubsuit$ opening has a conventional meaning. In the System, that is even more true; there is no $2\clubsuit$ opening available to show a long club suit, nor does a $2\spadesuit$ opening show a three-suiter with a singleton or void in diamonds. Admittedly, that creates several new problems, but, unlike in Precision, you don't have to open $1\spadesuit$ with 4333, 4432 and 5332 — the three most common distributions — since those hands are opened $1\clubsuit$ for the strong notrump range or 1NT for the 12-14 range. If you open $1\spadesuit$ and rebid $2\clubsuit$, the diamond bid is 'cancelled'. All you are really showing is clubs, probably six of them since you can't have a balanced hand, or a hand with five clubs and a four-card major. I will give further reasons why in a moment.

AFTER A MAJOR-SUIT RESPONSE

If the response to $1\spadesuit$ was one of a major and opener rebids $2\clubsuit$, his most likely diamond holding is three. This is why. Suppose the bidding starts

Opener

$1\spadesuit$
 $2\clubsuit$

Responder

$1\heartsuit$

If opener had four spades, he would rebid $1\spadesuit$. With 3-1-4-5 or 3-1-5-4, he would rebid 1NT since he has already promised an unbalanced hand and if he has a singleton in a suit other than hearts he would not rebid 1NT. He *could* hold six or seven clubs and four diamonds, but that is unlikely.

If the response had been 1♠, opener might rebid 1NT with 2-4-2-5 or 2-4-5-2 distribution. But again, the only way he could have four diamonds is with 4-6, 4-7 or 4-8 distribution in the minors, and one would normally open 5♣ or 3NT (playing Namyats) with the latter distribution.

With 4-1-4-4, opener must rebid 1♠ if responder bids 1♥. With 1-4-4-4, 1-3-4-5, 1-3-5-4, 1-4-3-5 or 1-4-5-3, opener would rebid 1NT over a 1♠ response. He would also rebid 1NT with 2-4-5-2 or 2-4-2-5 distribution. Now responder can bid 2♦ (forcing and possibly artificial):

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♠
1NT	2♦
?	

Opener rebids 2♠ on all hands with a doubleton spade (with three he would have raised immediately rather than rebid 1NT). So a 2♠ bid shows 2-4-5-2 or 2-4-2-5 distribution, while all other bids guarantee at most a singleton spade but are natural. Thus a 2♥ bid shows four hearts and 5-3 in the minors either way round. A minor-suit bid shows five of the suit bid, with three hearts and four of the other minor: 3♣ is 1-3-4-5 and 3♦ is 1-3-5-4. Finally, 2NT shows the 1-4-4-4 hand.

The remaining sequence is this one:

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♠
2♥	

This auction shows 0-4-4-5 or 0-4-5-4 distribution.

This structure does not risk getting too high when opener has a minimum, since 2♦ over the 1NT rebid shows a strong hand, forcing either to game or to four of a minor. Showing opener's distribution is very important for both game and slam bidding, and the ambiguity regarding distribution on the first round of bidding is more than compensated for by the precision of the information derived from opener's third-round rebid. For example, if responder holds

♠AJxx ♥x ♦AQxx ♣KJxx

then after

Opener

1 ♦
 1NT
 ?

Responder

1 ♠
 2 ♦

he can almost guarantee a good play for slam if opener shows a singleton spade. Admittedly, responder has a problem when he holds something like

♠ A x x x x ♥ x x x ♦ A x x x ♣ x

and the bidding goes

Opener

1 ♦
 1NT

Responder

1 ♠
 ?

since 2 ♦ is forcing. A diamond contract would be far better than 1NT when partner's suit is diamonds, but the probability is that partner's suit is clubs — the suit you are short in. So you (responder) should pass and hope for the best. If an opponent reopened with 2 ♣, I would assume that partner had real diamonds and would bid 2 ♦.

With 5-5, 6-5, etc. in the minors, opener should jump to 2NT over a major response or raise to 2NT over a 1NT response. If your suits are fairly strong, you don't mind risking being set at the three-level, since the opponents can probably make at least two of a major and perhaps a game, and you will have preempted them. With weak suits and a near-minimum in high cards, say

♠ A x ♥ K ♦ A x x x x ♣ Q x x x x

you should pass originally, unless your spot cards are good, since you can anticipate the need to rebid 2NT if you open the bidding. Besides, you don't like hands where a majority of your high cards are in your short suits — and/or when you have to count the points for a singleton king or queen in order to justify opening the bidding.

What about hands with support for responder's major?

Opener

1 ♦
 ?

Responder

1 ♠

With 3-1-4-5 or 3-1-5-4 distribution, opener should raise spades. This will show three-card support with a singleton or four-card support with a doubleton (4-2-5-2 or 4-2-2-5). Then, if responder has enough to bid or invite game and wants to know whether opener has four-card support, he can bid 2NT to find out. With three-card support (and a singleton), opener now bids his longer minor. With four-card support and a doubleton, he bids 3♠ with a minimum or 4♠ with a maximum. This sequence would not arise if opener had four-card support and a singleton, since with that holding he would have raised to 3♠ directly over 1♠. This sequence would show a maximum of 14 points since, with 15+ and a four-card major, he would have opened 1♣. That is why you need only 15 points to open 1♣ when you have four or more of a major — so that partner has information about your high-card strength (a maximum of 14) when you open 1♦ and show a four-card major later in the bidding.

However, the jump raise with four-card support and a singleton works out extremely well. Many games are missed, when playing Standard, on hands like these:

Opener

♠ K Q x x
♥ x
♦ A K x x x
♣ x x x

Responder

♠ A x x x x
♥ J x x
♦ Q x x x
♣ J

Opener bids 1♦ and raises a 1♠ response to 2♠. He is afraid to raise to 3♠ for fear that responder will expect more and bid a losing game or slam. Responder likes his hand, but not well enough to bid again over a single raise. So the System, in which you can raise to 3♠ on these cards, often helps you to get to a good game. And if it turns out that you can't make 3♠ opposite four-card support and a singleton, the opponents can usually make a contract at the three-level (or higher) themselves.

If the bidding had gone

Opener

1♦
1♠

Responder

1♥
?

the spade bid would show a maximum of 14 HCP and responder, with

♠ Q x x x ♥ K x x x x ♦ A x ♣ x x

would not bother to raise spades except in competition. For one thing, there is a strong probability that opener has a singleton heart, in which case the hands do not fit well. The opponents are not likely to compete since both major suits have been bid, and it is not clear to them (or to you) whether opener has clubs or diamonds or both. Responder would also pass with

♠ J x x ♥ A 10 9 x ♦ x ♣ A 10 x x x

since he strongly suspects that opener has diamonds and a partscore in spades looks best, especially at matchpoints — certainly better than notrump. Standard bidders would probably bid

Opener

1♦

1♠

Responder

1♥

1NT

not because responder prefers notrump over spades, but because he can't risk passing for fear of missing a game, while a raise with three-card support looks dangerous since it may lead to a 4♠ contract when the hand belongs either in 3NT or only in partscore.

Suppose you have such a good 14-point hand that you would have raised a major-suit response to the three-level if you were playing BWS. Opener might hold

♠ A Q x x ♥ x ♦ A K J x x ♣ x x x

or

♠ A x x ♥ K Q x x ♦ x ♣ A J 10 x x

for example. If partner responds to the 1♦ opening in opener's four-card major, a System raise to the three-level might cause the partnership to miss a slam. With the first hand, I recommend a 3♥ (splinter) rebid over a 1♠ response or, with a second hand, a 3♠ bid over a 1♥ response to show a 'super' raise. With

♠ K Q x x ♥ x ♦ A K J 10 x x x ♣ x

or

♠ A J 10 x ♥ x x ♦ — ♣ A K 10 9 x x x

instead of splintering, I suggest bidding four of the minor after a 1♠ response. When you have a strong 7-4 hand, showing which minor you have will usually be more helpful to partner than showing your shortage — or one of your shortages.

Suppose you hold:

♠ Q 10 x x ♥ K Q J x x ♦ A x ♣ A x

Partner opens 1♦ and you respond 1♥. He rebids 1♠. What would you bid now? Since partner has a four-card major, he can't have more than 14 HCP, since with 15 or more he would have opened 1♣. Nevertheless, if partner has a good fit, you may be cold for a slam. You would like to make a forcing bid of some kind, followed by raising to 4♠, so as to suggest a slam if partner has the right sort of hand. But what forcing bid can you make? Fourth suit forcing? Not really — a 2♣ bid would merely say, 'Since we apparently do not have a heart fit, I think we should play in two of a minor. If clubs isn't your suit, bid 2♦.' Partner and I had this problem the first time we played the System in a live tournament. To avoid a misunderstanding, responder bid 4♠. In fact, opener had the perfect hand

♠ A K x x ♥ A x ♦ K x x x x ♣ x x

so we did belong in a slam. We agreed that 2♦ by responder should be 'fourth suit forcing' since 2♣ would suggest playing two of opener's minor, whichever it was, and 3♣ would be an invitational 'jump preference' to partner's minor.

THE NOTRUMP RESPONSES

What would you expect a 1NT response to the 1♦ opening to mean? It could show the same type of hand as a 1NT bid when playing Standard, but in fact, here the upper range is higher since a 1NT response is forcing! Remember, the 1♦ bid shows an unbalanced hand. Opener will usually have either a six-card minor or a singleton (perhaps both), so when would he ever want to pass a 1NT response, which denies a four-card major? (Actually, I might respond 1NT for tactical reasons with a balanced hand and a weak major suit, like

♠ K x x ♥ x x x x ♦ K x x ♣ Q J x

There I would be willing to gamble that we don't belong in hearts, and that the 1NT response will preempt the opponents out of making a 1♠ overcall. Besides, if we have a 4-4 heart fit, the opponents probably have a nine-card spade fit.) Anyway, opener will *assume* that responder has no four-card major, and over 1NT he will bid his longer minor, jumping to the three-level if he has a very good hand and a very good suit — something like

♠ x ♥ Kx ♦ AKQxxxx ♣ Qxx

or

♠ Ax ♥ Kx ♦ xxx ♣ AKJxxx

Responder doesn't know whether opener has clubs or diamonds for his opening bid, and the forcing notrump allows opener to show which minor he has immediately. With 4-1-4-4 or 1-4-4-4 distribution, opener should rebid his four-card major. This may get you to the three-level when you don't belong there, but this is a lesser danger than guessing which minor to bid and possibly winding up in a 4-2 fit rather than a 5-4 fit. Responder has the option now to rebid 2NT or pass the major-suit bid with a 4-3 fit. Also, since the 1NT bid is forcing, it can be used with good hands like

♠ Ax ♥ Kxx ♦ Qxxxx ♣ Kx

where responder will bid conservatively if he discovers that opener's suit is clubs (responder will probably rebid 2NT) and aggressively if his partner's suit is diamonds (by bidding his better major as a game-force). Slam is possible if opener has something like

♠ Kxx ♥ x ♦ AKxxx ♣ Axxx

(and this isn't even a perfect fit since the king of hearts is wasted!)

When responder has passed originally, the 1♦ bidder can pass a major-suit response with three-card support and a minimum hand. He should seldom pass a 1NT response, but with 4441 distribution, especially with two four-card majors, a pass is permissible. There is no assurance of finding an eight-card minor fit and theoretically no chance of finding an eight-card major fit. Opener may have 4-4-4-1 distribution opposite 3-3-2-5 distribution, for example. But if opener has a five-card, or longer, minor suit, he should bid the same way as he would if his partner had not passed originally.

A 2NT response to 1♦, other than in competition, is natural and forcing to game. However, if opener has a singleton (other than a king or queen), he should bid it. That way, you can get to game in a minor instead of 3NT when responder has Axx or Qxx opposite a small singleton.

The direct 3NT response to 1♦ shows 16-17 HCP, natural and balanced with all suits well stopped — a hand that may be enough for slam when opener has a long minor.

RESPONDING WITH MINOR SUITS

When responder doesn't have a four-card (or longer) major, he will usually have fair support for both minors. When that is the case, if the hand doesn't look suitable for notrump, responder can bid 2♣ or 3♣, or even 4♣, as his first response, which suggests that opener 'pass or correct'. A direct 2♦ response is forcing, while an immediate 3♦ response shows very good diamonds but suggests that partner should pass if he has a singleton or void in that suit. A 2NT response, other than in competition, is natural and forcing to game. However, if opener has a singleton (other than a king or queen), he should bid it over 2NT. That way, they can get to game in a minor instead of 3NT when responder has Axx or Qxx opposite a small singleton.

With

♠ Ax ♥ xx ♦ Qxxxx ♣ Jxxx

responder should bid 2♣, which shows a simple raise in either clubs or diamonds. Unless opener has substantial extra values, he will pass with clubs and correct to diamonds if his suit is diamonds. A 3♣ response would show a limit raise in either minor, often based more on distribution than on high cards — something like

♠ Ax ♥ x ♦ Jxxxx ♣ Qxxxx

or

♠ x ♥ Qx ♦ Kxxxxx ♣ KQxx

In fact, with either hand you might even bid 4♣ since if you can't make four of a minor, the opponents can almost surely make three or four of a major. If, over 3♣, opener rebids 3NT, hoping you have a balanced 11- or 12-point hand, you should not leave him there. You will bid 4♣ (again giving him a choice of minor suits). In many sequences, until opener shows

which minor he has, a club bid by responder shows support for both minors. For example, after

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♠
1NT	?

responder would bid 2♣ with

♠ A J x x x ♥ x ♦ J x x x ♣ Q x x

or 3♣ (invitational) with

♠ A J x x x ♥ A x ♦ Q x x ♣ J x x

In other words, before opener has shown which minor suit he holds, a club bid by responder at any level (below 5♣) opposite a 1♦ opening suggests that opener pass or correct (unless he has extra values). Remember, if opener does not have a four-card major, he can hold a very good hand, like 15 or 16 HCP and a long minor suit. Any non-jump diamond bid by responder, before he knows which minor opener has, purportedly shows diamonds and is forcing, whether opener holds clubs or diamonds.

If responder has a very good hand with long clubs — good enough to suggest a game in diamonds or a slam in clubs — he should start with a forcing 1NT. He may follow with a jump in clubs if opener rebids clubs, or with a club bid if opener shows diamonds. Over

Opener	Responder
1♦	1NT
2♦	3♣

if opener has a void in clubs, responder will rebid diamonds. With a singleton club, he will normally bid notrump; with a good club fit, say

♠ A x x ♥ x ♦ A K x x x ♣ Q x x x

or

♠ x ♥ K x x ♦ A Q x x x x ♣ K x x

he should splinter in a major.

Simply stated, when responder has a strong hand with primary diamonds, he will start with a 2♦ response (forcing to game or four of a minor). When responder has a strong hand with a good club suit, he will start with a 1NT bid and bid strongly thereafter (for example with a jump in clubs, or possibly a jump in a major suit on the second or third round — obviously forcing — followed by a club bid). Incidentally, even by a passed hand, a 2♦ bid, either immediately or on the second round, is forcing to 2NT or the three-level in a minor.

Suppose responder has a long suit of his own and a good hand — something like

♠ A J x x x x ♥ x x ♦ K x ♣ Q x

or

♠ A x x ♥ K J 9 x x x ♦ x ♣ Q J x

Playing BWS, he would respond 1♠ or 1♥ over 1♦, planning to rebid 3♠ or 3♥ next round, invitational but not forcing. In the System, there is a strong likelihood that opener has a singleton or void opposite your long suit, in which case the three-level may be too high. But if you bid 1♠ followed by 2♠, or 1♥ followed by 2♥, with these hands, you could easily miss a game when partner has a doubleton in your long suit, such as

♠ K x ♥ x ♦ A Q x x x x ♣ K x x x

or

♠ x x ♥ Q x ♦ A x x ♣ A K x x x x

So what is the solution? Over the diamond opening, jump to 2♠ or 2♥ with the sort of hand on which you would respond at the one-level and rebid at the three-level when playing BWS.

I don't think I need to tell you what to do with the following hand after partner opens 1♦ and RHO bids 4♠. You hold

♠ x ♥ A x x x x ♦ K x x ♣ K J 10 x

If partner happens to be short in hearts, the hands will fit like a glove. If partner has a singleton spade, the opponents can make a lot of spades. Even when partner has something like

♠ Q x ♥ J x ♦ A Q x x x x ♣ A x x

you would prefer to play five of a minor rather than defend against 4♠. I said that any club bid up to and including 4♣ asks partner to pass or correct. But if you bid a suit, it will have to be at the five-level, and that is for play. The obvious solution is to bid 4NT to show both minors.

One tends to forget what a strong hand opener can have when he opens 1♦ without a four-card major. I was embarrassed to have forgotten this myself one time when I held

♠ x x x ♥ J x x x ♦ K x x x ♣ A x

Partner opened 1♦ and RHO overcalled 1♥. Without competition a 1NT response is forcing, but in competition it is not — nor is 2NT since a cuebid can be used as a forcing bid. With a weak hand and a skimpy heart stopper, I elected to bid 2♣ (pass or correct). Partner bid 3♦ and I passed. Partner's failure to bid spades denied a four-card spade suit, so he could, and did, hold a very good hand, probably short in hearts, and therefore with club length on the side. Partner actually held

♠ A x x ♥ — ♦ A Q J x x x ♣ K J 10 x

Without a spade lead, partner was almost cold for 6♦, and even with a spade lead, he had a finesse for slam. I could hardly have predicted such a perfect fit, but I should, at least, have raised to 4♦.

Even with a four-card major, don't forget you can have a hand with excellent playing strength and still open 1♦. You open 1♦ with

♠ Q 10 x x ♥ x ♦ K Q J 10 x x ♣ A Q

and partner responds 1♥. In BWS, you would bid 1♠, expecting partner to raise with something like

♠ K J x x ♥ A x x x ♦ x x ♣ x x x

But in the System, that sequence would show a maximum of 14 points, and partner would pass. So what should you do? When I held this hand, I bid 2♠. I couldn't have more than four spades when I opened 1♦ so I must have a very strong minor suit and a maximum point count to justify this strange bid. As nearly as I remember, partner had 12 points in a balanced hand, so he bid 3NT, which was the normal contract. With a weak hand and less than four-card spade support, partner would have bid 3♣ to let me pass or correct to diamonds. And I hope that with

♠ K J x x ♥ A x x x ♦ x x ♣ x x x

he would have raised to 3♠ or 4♠.

I could give more examples, but these should be enough to convince you that while the System furnishes the tools you need, you still have to do some thinking to utilize them effectively.

QUIZ

Partner opens 1♦ and RHO passes. How do you plan to bid each of the following hands?

- (1) ♠ Axxx ♥ Kxx ♦ Kxx ♣ Kxx [To Answer](#)
- (2) ♠ Jx ♥ Kxxxx ♦ Kxx ♣ AJx [To Answer](#)
- (3) ♠ xx ♥ AQ ♦ KJxx ♣ Qxxxx [To Answer](#)
- (4) ♠ Kxx ♥ KQxxx ♦ Kxx ♣ xx [To Answer](#)
- (5) ♠ Kx ♥ KJxxx ♦ Qxxx ♣ xx [To Answer](#)
- (6) ♠ Jxx ♥ KQx ♦ Kxxxx ♣ Qx [To Answer](#)
- (7) ♠ Kx ♥ xxxxx ♦ Q10xx ♣ QJx [To Answer](#)
- (8) ♠ KJ98x ♥ A10x ♦ J ♣ KJ9x [To Answer](#)
(partner rebids 2♣ over your 1♠ response)
- (9) ♠ A976542 ♥ Ax ♦ J9xx ♣ — [To Answer](#)
- (10) ♠ Qx ♥ 10xx ♦ QJ108xx ♣ Ax [To Answer](#)

MY ANSWERS

These are the most unusual 1♦ sequences. You have to keep in mind partner's probable distribution and decide how the hands will play in various contracts.

(1) ♠Axxx ♥Kxx ♦Kxx ♣Kxx [To Question](#)

You will respond 1♠, of course. Then, if partner bids 1NT, you probably don't belong in notrump. Partner could hold 2-4-5-2 or 2-4-2-5 distribution, but he is more likely to hold a singleton spade (which won't be good for notrump opposite your hand). Despite your 13 HCP, 3NT is not likely to make when partner rebids 1NT, but five of a minor might. You should bid 3♣, sort of a jump preference (which partner will correct to some number of diamonds if his suit is diamonds). If partner has 1-4-4-4 distribution, he will either pass or bid 3NT.

If partner raises to 3♠, you will bid 4♠ with your 4-4 fit. Since partner has no singleton, all of your kings will be working. If he bids 4♠, you will pass. Over a raise to 2♠, you will bid 2NT to find out what kind of raise he has. If partner bids three of a minor, showing a three-card raise with a singleton somewhere, you should bid 3NT since you will probably solidify partner's minor suit (and the rest of the field will get to 3NT with your hand opposite an opening bid and no eight-card major fit).

(2) ♠Jx ♥Kxxxx ♦Kxx ♣AJx [To Question](#)

You will respond 1♥. If partner raises, you should bid 4♥. If he rebids 1♠, you should rebid 2NT, invitational. If he rebids 2♣ or 2♦, raise him to three of his minor. With no spade stopper in your hand, and probably a singleton heart opposite your ♥Kxxxx, you are not strong enough to insist on game unless partner raises your heart response.

(3) ♠xx ♥AQ ♦KJxx ♣Qxxxx [To Question](#)

Bid 1NT, forcing. If partner is short in hearts, you may get to 3NT, played by you. Unless partner has a very strong suit and a good hand, he will rebid two of his minor, and you can then bid 2♥ to invite 3NT if partner has a spade stopper. If partner bids two of a major directly over 1NT, he shows a singleton or void in the other major and either 4-4 or 5-4 in the minors.

- (4) ♠ Kxx ♥ KQxxx ♦ Kxx ♣ xx [To Question](#)

You will respond 1♥, of course, but you should take a very pessimistic view with this hand. Even if partner raises hearts, you will bid only 3♥ to *invite* game. One of your kings is probably opposite a singleton.

- (5) ♠ Kx ♥ KJxxx ♦ Qxxx ♣ xx [To Question](#)

You will bid 1♥, but take no aggressive action thereafter. If partner rebids 1♠, you will bid either 1NT or 2♣, not 2♦.

- (6) ♠ Jxx ♥ KQx ♦ Kxxxx ♣ Qx [To Question](#)

Bid 1NT. You will pass if partner rebids 2♣. Since partner will probably have a singleton somewhere, which means that part of your skimpy hand will be wasted, 3NT is not likely to make. You will raise if he rebids diamonds since he could have a pretty good hand if he lacks a four-card major, perhaps

♠ Kxx ♥ x ♦ AJxxxx ♣ AKx

Suppose, unlikely as it may be, that over your 1NT response partner bids 2♥ (showing a void in spades and 4-5 or 5-4 in the minors)? With your perfect fit you would bid 5♦.

- (7) ♠ Kx ♥ xxxxx ♦ Q10xx ♣ QJx [To Question](#)

You should respond 1NT and treat your hearts as though you had only three. If you bid 1♥ and partner raises with three-card support and a ruffing value, you won't like it. Another reason for not bidding hearts is that, if you do find a 4-4 heart fit, it is quite likely the opponents have a good spade fit, and you will allow them to enter the bidding on marginal values, while a 1NT response might preempt them. In fact, there is danger in allowing your LHO to overcall 1♠ whether there is a heart fit or not.

- (8) ♠ KJ98x ♥ A10x ♦ J ♣ KJ9x [To Question](#)

I think you should bid this hand as though you were playing BWS. After bidding 1♠ and hearing 2♣ from opener, bid 2♥, and if partner bids 2NT, bid 3♣ to show short diamonds and give partner a choice between bidding more clubs or notrump. Neither 5♣ nor 3NT is a certainty, but you have enough to force to game. When this hand was dealt, responder bid 3♣ over 2NT and opener passed, thinking that only a 3♦ bid would have been

forcing. But you had to reveal your club support, or opener couldn't make an intelligent decision! As a general rule, making two forcing bids followed by raising partner's suit creates a force. In this sequence, you could have bid 3♣ over 2♣ to *invite* a further bid. Partner actually held

♠ Q x ♥ x ♦ K x x x ♣ A Q x x x x

which was, admittedly, a very good fit. You can make 5♣ despite the almost wasted king of diamonds.

(9) ♠ A 9 7 6 5 4 2 ♥ A x ♦ J 9 x x ♣ — [To Question](#)

Respond 2♠. If partner has a singleton small spade, you are very unlikely to make game, and even the three-level won't be safe. But if he holds

♠ K x ♥ x ♦ Q 10 x x ♣ A K x x x x

or

♠ J x ♥ K Q x ♦ K x ♣ A J 10 x x x

you want to play in 4♠ (which you wouldn't get to by bidding 1♠ followed by 2♠).

(10) ♠ Q x ♥ 10 x x ♦ Q J 10 8 x x ♣ A x [To Question](#)

Without prior agreement, I think there are two reasonable choices. One is to bid 3♦, which might show a hand like this one (since 2♦ is strong). But if you are not sure how partner would interpret 3♦, or even if you are, a pass is certainly reasonable. When partner's longer minor is clubs, you have almost no chance for game. If he has diamonds, game is still very unlikely. In the unlikely event that partner has five or more diamonds, it is extremely unlikely that the opponents will pass out 1♦, and then your problem will be whether to bid 2♦ or 3♦ next round. I am embarrassed to admit that I bid 2♣ at the table with this hand. Partner had

♠ A Q 9 x ♥ A x x x ♦ K ♣ Q 10 x x

which he treated as a 14-point hand, and I had the privilege of declaring this hand in 2♣ for down three. Partner would have taken eight or nine tricks in diamonds, depending upon the opening lead.

Think about this hand for a moment:

♠ K x x ♥ K x x ♦ K Q x x x x ♣ —

Partner opens 1♦. How would you plan to show this hand? You could bid 2♦, followed by 3♦, but my choice would be to bid 3♦ immediately. I think this suggests a great hand unless partner has a misfit for diamonds (but weaker than 2♦ followed by 3♦ since you have preempted him out of showing a club suit or a four-card major). He actually had

♠ Axx ♥ AJx ♦ — ♣ K10xxxxx

with which he passed 3♦. With something like

♠ Axxx ♥ x ♦ Ax ♣ KJxxxx

partner probably would have bid 3♠ and you would have bid 3NT. In the previous paragraph I suggested that one might bid 3♦ with a far weaker hand than this. Since you can't, or shouldn't, bid 3♦ with both hands, my recommendation is to pass 1♦ with

♠ Qx ♥ 10xx ♦ QJ108xx ♣ Ax

and play the 3♦ response as natural and invitational, but with no interest in clubs.

SUMMARY

I suggest that when you read about the System for the first time you skip over the following tables of uncontested auctions. If you are like me, going into all these details before finishing with the general picture is a distraction. But you may want to come back to it as a sort of review, since the 1♦ bid and its follow-up auctions are so different from the way you have been playing.

1♦-1♠; 1NT	Opener shows 2-4-2-5, 2-4-5-2, 1-3-4-5, 1-3-5-4, 1-4-3-5, 1-4-5-3 or 1-4-4-4.
1♦-1♠; 2♥	Opener shows 0-4-5-4 or 0-4-4-5 distribution.
1♦-1♥; 1♠	Opener shows 4-3-5-1, 4-3-1-5, 4-1-5-3, 4-1-3-5, 4-2-2-5, 4-2-5-2, 4-1-4-4 or various hands with four spades and six or seven of a minor.
1♦-1♠; 2♠	Opener shows 4-2-5-2, 4-2-2-5, 3-1-4-5, 3-1-5-4, 3-1-6-3, 3-1-3-6, 3-3-1-6, 3-3-6-1. (1♦-1♥; 2♥ is similar)
1♦-1♠; 3♠	Opener shows 4-1-4-4, 4-1-5-3, 4-1-3-5, 4-1-6-2, 4-1-2-6, 4-4-1-4, 4-4-4-1. (1♦-1♥; 3♥ is similar)
1♦-1♠; 4m	4-1-7-1, 4-1-1-7, 4-0-7-2, 4-0-2-7. (1♦-1♥; 4m is similar)
1♦-1x; 3m	Shows a six- or seven-card suit and a maximum.
1♦- (2♣/3♣/4♣)	Pass or correct to diamonds, bid more with a maximum.
1♦-2♦	Forcing to game or four of a minor; responder will correct with clubs.
1♦-3♦	Natural and forcing if partner has diamonds; do not correct to clubs.
1♦-1M; 2♣	5+ clubs (and a hand unsuitable for a 1NT rebid)
1♦-1M; 2♦	5+ diamonds (and a hand unsuitable for a 1NT rebid)
1♦- 1x; 2NT	5-5, 6-5, 5-6, 6-6 in minors
1♦-1NT; 2m-2M	Forcing, implies clubs, concentration of strength in the major.
1♦-1NT; 2m-3M	Splinter bid. Opener will assume club support since responder might have bid 2♦ instead of 1NT with good diamonds.

1♦-2NT

Natural and forcing, probably 13-15 or 18+. Opener should rebid a singleton if he has one (except with singleton K or Q).

1♦-3NT

16-17, natural and balanced with all suits well stopped, maybe enough for slam when opener has a long minor.

THE 1♣ OPENING



I will start by stating some general rules and save the exceptions for later. An opening bid of 1♣ shows roughly 15-19 HCP, but can be less than 15 HCP with a very strong major suit or as many as 20 HCP with either a two-suiter or an unbalanced hand lacking a strong suit — something like

♠ x ♥ A J x x x ♦ A K J ♣ A Q J x

Unlike Precision, where 1♦ is the negative response to 1♣ and all other bids are forcing to game, responder bids almost naturally over 1♣. A 1♥ or 1♠ response is natural and shows 6+ HCP, although it could have as few as 5 HCP with a five-card major or even 4 HCP with e.g.

♠ A x x x x x ♥ x x ♦ x x x x ♣ x

This last hand should be upgraded to a 1♠ response.

A response of 2♠ or 2♥ shows at least a six-card suit and a very weak hand (less than 5 HCP and no ace). Over either jump response, opener will usually pass, and if he bids a new suit, it is non-forcing — probably with a singleton or void in the major and a good long suit of his own. Responding two of a minor shows at least a five-card suit with 10+ points and is forcing to game.

A 1♦ response is ambiguous. It may be made with a weak hand and any distribution, or it may be made with a fair hand (up to 12 or 13 points with no four-card major). All these hands qualify:

♠ Kxxxx ♥ xx ♦ xx ♣ 10xxxx

♠ Qxx ♥ Kxx ♦ Qx ♣ 10xxxx

♠ Axx ♥ Kxx ♦ x ♣ Jxxxxx

Change the jack of clubs to the queen in this last one, and I would ‘stretch’ to bid 2♣.

A 1NT response shows 13-15 points with a balanced hand. Unlike Precision, whereby any ‘positive’ response to 1♣ is forcing to game, no System response at the one-level (except 1NT) is forcing to game. A 1NT response is to be avoided unless responder has a very strong hand, probably with tenaces, since it is desirable for the stronger or more distributional hand to be declarer. While no response other than 1NT or 2NT (the latter showing 16+) is forcing to game, it is unlikely that either player will pass when his partner bids a new suit. Suppose the bidding starts:

Opener

1♣

1♠

Responder

1♦

?

and responder holds

♠ xx ♥ Qxxx ♦ Kxx ♣ xxxx

Opener’s hand is somewhat limited by his failure to open 2♣, so a spade game is very unlikely; however, responder should bid 1NT anyway since opener might have something like

♠ AKxxx ♥ AJ109x ♦ Ax ♣ x

and would bid 3♥ next time if given the chance. Change responder’s hand to

♠ xx ♥ Kxx ♦ Qxxx ♣ xxxx

and a pass is justified. Opener needs both a maximum for his bidding and five hearts as his second suit for there to be any game prospects. Suppose responder holds

♠ x x ♥ Q x x x ♦ Q J x x ♣ J 10 x

and he responds 1♥ to his partner's club opening. Now opener rebids 1♠. Again game looks quite remote and responder should pass. (With four or more hearts, opener would raise hearts.) Obviously, if opener rebids 1NT, responder can pass.

When responder bids one of a major over 1♣, he shows 6+ HCP or the equivalent (maybe 5 HCP with a five-card suit or an ace with a six-card suit). As Leo Bell, one of my favorite partners, suggested, I think a 2♣ or 2♦ rebid should be forcing for at least one round. If opener has no major suit, he needs 17+ points for his minor rebid. If he has a four-card major, there is a chance to find a 4-4 fit. If there is no good major-suit fit, the problem is to get to 3NT with the appropriate hands and to stay out of 3NT with skimpy values or an unstopped suit. So you need to have room to investigate alternative contracts, and it is unlikely that 2♣ or 2♦ is the last contact that will make. Besides, as will be mentioned very shortly, if opener rebids a major suit, he shows at least five. Consequently, after

Opener

1♣
?

Responder

1♥

opener should be able to rebid 2♣ (or 2♦) with hands like

♠ A K Q x ♥ x ♦ A Q x ♣ 10 x x x x

without risking a pass opposite

♠ J x x ♥ Q x x x x ♦ K x x x ♣ J

Responder should bid 2♦ over 2♣ on this hand; opener will bid 2♠ and now responder can pass. Opener might also have a strong hand, like

♠ A K x ♥ A K x ♦ x ♣ A 10 x x x x

If 2♣ were not forcing, opener would have to gamble on an immediate raise to 3♥ or 4♥, which would not work out well if responder held

♠ x x ♥ J x x x ♦ K Q x x ♣ K x x

There are two reasons for bidding one of a major rather than 1♦ when responder has a four-card major and at least 6 HCP. One is that when the

hand is only worth one bid, it is better to show the major as the most likely road to game. The other is that the 1♦ bid is quite ambiguous. It might be made with a five-card major and a weak hand —

♠ x ♥ Q 10 x x x ♦ J x x ♣ x x x x

It might also be made with a much stronger hand with no four-card major:

♠ A K x ♥ J x x ♦ x x ♣ x x x x x

or

♠ A x ♥ K J x ♦ x x x x ♣ A x x x

But since it doesn't guarantee 6 HCP (or 5 HCP with a five-card major), responder must continue with a jump raise or a jump in notrump with 8 HCP (or a good 7) to show the difference between a weak hand and a fair hand. If responder has a good hand with diamonds, like

♠ A Q x x ♥ x ♦ A K x x x x ♣ Q x

he should respond 2♦ immediately. If he starts with 1♦ and simply bids spades later, opener might expect ♠KJ10xx and nothing else. Well, perhaps not when I explain some alternative sequences to you, but partner certainly will not expect you to have a good hand with long diamonds unless you respond 2♦ originally.

Although I said you should bid your major with 6 HCP, I would respond 1♦ with

♠ Q x x ♥ x x x x ♦ J x x ♣ Q J x

With such a bad 6 HCP and such a bad four-card suit, it is better to pretend that you don't have a four-card major. It is hard to see how it can hurt to hide your hearts with this hand. But you have to be consistent: you can't change your mind and try to show your four-card major suit later. Partner would attribute some exotic meaning to a heart bid after you said you didn't have hearts. With an unbalanced hand like

♠ x x x x ♥ x ♦ A x x x x ♣ Q x x

you should show your spade suit, since any four-card fit — and possibly even a three-card fit — should play better than notrump at the partscore level.

TAKING IT FURTHER

If you are just learning the System, I suggest that you stop reading here and try playing the basic structure without considering further complications. Just remember that a 1♣ bid shows roughly 15-19 HCP, rarely 20 HCP, but occasionally a very good 14 HCP with a good major suit. That is the way I played for several months. But after you and your partner familiarize yourselves with the basics, you should finish reading the book and consider the following exceptions and complications which are necessary to make the system effective at the highest level of competition. By using the 1♣ bid with a few stronger hands, you can describe them more accurately and effectively than by just opening 2♣ or 2♦. Many of the following suggestions were made by Stephen Goldstein when he started to play the System with me.

Opening 1♣ and rebidding a major immediately shows at least five cards in the major. In BWS, 1♣ followed by a rebid of 1♠ over 1♥ only shows a four-card spade suit, but that is because the 1♣ bid is natural, and presumably the second-bid suit is four cards long. When a major is the first natural bid, it should show five or more.

Consequently, when opener holds

♠ A Q J x ♥ x ♦ A x x ♣ A J x x x

or

♠ A Q J x ♥ x ♦ Q x x x ♣ A K x x

he should rebid 2♣ over a 1♥ response, expecting to show his spade suit later. Similarly, with

♠ K x ♥ A Q J x ♦ A Q x x x x ♣ x

he would rebid 2♦.

After opening 1♣ with

♠ K Q J x ♥ A x ♦ K Q x ♣ J x x x

and receiving a 1♦ or 1♥ response, opener should rebid 1NT, not 1♠, for the reasons just stated. If the response to 1♣ was 1♥ by partner, then with

♠ K x x ♥ K Q x x ♦ Q J x ♣ A Q x

opener should raise to 2♥, not 3♥. He has already shown at least 15 HCP by opening 1♣ and needs 18 HCP (or the equivalent with ruffing values) to raise to 3♥. Remember, responder can have as little as

♠ Qxx ♥ Axxx ♦ xxx ♣ xxx

You don't usually assume that partner has the worst possible hand for his bidding, but opposite a minimum you are a long way from having enough for game (and in this case you probably won't even make 2♥). With

♠ J10x ♥ KQxx ♦ QJx ♣ AQx

because it is a bare minimum, I recommend a 1NT rebid over a 1♥ response, which is less encouraging than a raise to 2♥. If partner can't bid again, you will be no worse off than the standard bidders who open 1NT. If responder has a strong, unbalanced hand, he can bid 2♣ as 'new minor forcing' to find out about heart support. As opener, you should raise a 1♠ response to 2♠ with

♠ AKxx ♥ AKJx ♦ 10xx ♣ xx

After your raise (which could have been made with good three-card support and a ruffing value), if partner bids 2NT (natural and non-forcing), you will just bid 3♠. But if he bids 3♥, not only do you have enough for game with your fit, but you should bid 4♥ yourself. Partner does not always have the worst hand, and he may be interested in slam with something like

♠ Qxxxx ♥ Q10xxx ♦ AKx ♣ —

Showing that you have four-card support for hearts and giving partner some idea of where your values lie may enable him to bid 6♥ or 6♠, probably making seven.

Since a major-suit response to 1♣ shows at least 5 or 6 HCP, responder does not take strong action with a typical minimum response of 6-8 HCP. After

Opener

1♣

1♠

Responder

1♥

?

responder should just raise to 2♠ with

♠ Qxx ♥ Kxxx ♦ xx ♣ Kxxx

He would bid 1NT with

♠ Qx ♥ Kxxx ♦ Qxx ♣ Jxxx

But when the bidding starts with 1♣-1♦, responder hasn't really promised any high-card strength. Of course, he can pass next round with a near-Yarborough, but will raise 1♠ to 2♠ as a chance-giving bid with

♠ xxxxx ♥ Kxxx ♦ Qxx ♣ xx

or bid 1NT with

♠ x ♥ Kxxx ♦ Q10xx ♣ 10xxx

(hoping opener will rebid a new suit, preferably hearts). So, with

♠ Kxx ♥ xx ♦ Axx ♣ 109xxx

he should jump to 3♠, and with

♠ xx ♥ Kxx ♦ Qxxx ♣ QJxx

he should rebid 2NT, not 1NT.

With a strong one-suited minor hand, like

♠ K ♥ A10 ♦ AKQxxxx ♣ Jxx

opener should jump rebid in the minor, whether the response to 1♣ was 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠, still showing a maximum of 19 HCP. If, after opening 1♣, he bids one minor and then the other minor, he simply shows a minor two-suiter — again with perhaps as much as 19 points.

THE 1♥ RELAY

As you will recall, a 1♥ or 1♠ response to 1♣ shows 6 HCP or more, or 5+ HCP with a five-card major. So opener can afford to jump to 2NT over either response with 18 or 19 points. With 15-17 points and a balanced hand, opener will rebid 1NT whether the response was 1♦, 1♥ or 1♠. However, it would be very dangerous for opener to jump to 2NT to show 18 or 19 points over a 1♦ response, which could, potentially, be made with a Yarborough. The solution to this problem is for opener to play something similar to the Kokish Relay. He rebids 1♥, which asks his partner to bid 1♠. Then, if opener rebids anything but 1NT, he retroactively guarantees hearts

for his 1♥ bid. But if he rebids 1NT, he shows 18-19 HCP with a balanced hand, and the implication that he holds a heart suit is cancelled.

This treatment allows responder to pass the 1NT rebid with a bad hand or to use *some* of the conventions he prefers over an opening 1NT. Remember that even if he uses Stayman or transfers to a major, he still must have a weak hand — something like

♠ x ♥ QJxxx ♦ xxxx ♣ xxx

or

♠ Jxxx ♥ Qxxx ♦ Jxxx ♣ x

since if he had a major suit with a better hand, he would not have responded 1♦ in the first place. So I suggest modifying your treatments in both these sequences:

Opener

1♣

1NT

Responder

1♦

?

Opener

1♣

1♥

1NT

Responder

1♦

1♠

?

A 2NT bid by responder now is natural and invitational, perhaps with

♠ A 10x ♥ J 10x ♦ xx ♣ Q 10 9xx

after a 1NT rebid or

♠ A 10x ♥ J 10x ♦ xx ♣ 10 9xxx

over the relay sequence. Why go through Stayman with an invitational hand (and therefore no major suit) and make opener describe his distribution when it can only help the opponents? If responder uses Stayman and then bids 2♥ or 2♠, he shows a weak hand, implying five of the major he has bid and four of the other major:

♠ J 10xx ♥ Q 10xxx ♦ x ♣ xxx

He planned to pass if opener had bid his four-card suit, but when he didn't, responder wants to play in the five-card major. It is also permissible to use

Stayman, planning to pass any rebid, for example with

♠ Q x x ♥ x x x x ♦ J x x x x ♣ x

or to play Garbage Stayman with

♠ J 10 x x ♥ Q 10 x x ♦ x ♣ J x x x

If opener rebids 2♦, you bid 2♥, asking partner to pass or correct to spades with two hearts and three spades.

You can carry this idea further. Since a Stayman 2♣ in these sequences shows that the responder's hand is weak, responder can bid 2♣, followed by 3♣ or 3♦ as a signoff in the minor. For this sequence, he might hold

♠ x x ♥ Q x x x ♦ J 9 x x x x ♣ x

with which he was hoping to hear a 2♥ rebid, but would bid 3♦ over a 2♠ rebid, since he prefers 3♦ to 1NT. Or he might hold

♠ x x ♥ x ♦ J x x ♣ J 10 9 x x x x

with which he wants to play 3♣ no matter what opener rebids.

Once we adopt the 1♥ relay, there is a subtle corollary we have to be aware of. If the bidding goes

Opener

1♣

1♠

Responder

1♦

responder can pass with a very weak hand. However, when the bidding goes

Opener

1♣

1♥

Responder

1♦

responder cannot pass. So when opener has a minimum hand with a five-card heart suit, the bidding cannot stop short of 1NT or the two-level. Since the 1NT rebid shows 18-19 points, opener may be in some difficulty with a hand like

♠ A J x ♥ A J x x x ♦ K x x ♣ Q x

or

♠ A x x x ♥ Q 10 x x x ♦ K x ♣ A Q

We will come back to this problem shortly, but doesn't it suggest that the maximum for opening 1♥ should be slightly stronger than a maximum opening 1♠ bid, so we don't have to open 1♣ on 15-counts with hearts?

Let's return to the pros and cons of the 1♥ relay. I already mentioned that it allows opener to rebid 1NT to show 18-19 points with a balanced hand. The 1NT rebid cancels any implication that your heart bid showed hearts. However, if your rebid is a suit rather than notrump, your 1♥ bid retroactively shows hearts. Thus after

Opener

1♣

1♥

?

Responder

1♦

1♠

a 2♣ rebid shows hearts and clubs; a 2♦ rebid would show hearts and diamonds; a 2♠ rebid would show hearts and spades (with longer hearts). Bidding 2♥ here shows good hearts, probably a six-card suit. So how would you bid with

♠ K x ♥ A x x x x ♦ A K x ♣ Q x x

Bidding 1♥ over a 1♦ response would commit you to rebidding hearts, implying a six-card suit (since you don't have 18-19 HCP, which a 1NT rebid would show), while rebidding a three-card minor would misdescribe your distribution. So, looking ahead, you should rebid 1NT over 1♦ as the least of evils. It wouldn't bother me at all to rebid 1NT with this hand, just as it wouldn't bother me to open 1NT when playing BWS. But when the hand has concentrated strength like

♠ A K x ♥ A K J x x ♦ x x ♣ x x x

the notrump rebid is much more distasteful. So you must choose among the following: (a) opening 1♣ and rebidding 1NT, showing a balanced 15-17 HCP hand; (b) opening 1♥ despite being slightly over-strength; (c) opening 1♣ then bidding and rebidding hearts, showing or implying a six-card heart suit; or (d) opening 1♣ and rebidding 1♥, followed by 2♣ with a three-card suit. My choice is to open 1♥. It is hands like these two examples that persuaded me to allow a 1♥ bid with a five-card suit and 15 points. But it is okay to open 1♣ with 15 HCP if you won't have a rebid problem.

This auction

Opener

1♣

1♥

2m

Responder

1♦

1♠

does not show extra values, and this would be an appropriate sequence with

♠ Ax ♥ KJ9xx ♦ AKxx ♣ xx

or

♠ Ax ♥ KJ9xx ♦ xx ♣ AKxx

When you make your decision whether to open 1♣ or 1♥, you do not know that partner has a weak hand. There is a slight risk of missing a good game if you open 1♥, since partner can and will pass you with quite a good hand.

Whenever you have a six-card heart suit, you can safely rebid hearts over a relay sequence. However, you should be aware that hands with four spades and five or six hearts cause a serious problem.

♠ Ax xx ♥ QJ9xx ♦ KQ ♣ Kx

If you open 1♣ and partner bids 1♦, how do you plan to rebid? If you bid 1♥, it relays to 1♠. Now what? Do you bid 2♠ when partner may hold a Yarborough with a doubleton spade? Or bid 1NT to show a balanced 18-19 points? Or violate both the system and common sense by rebidding 1NT directly over 1♦ with this off-beat distribution? The least of evils is to open 1♥ despite the 15 points. With so much of your strength in your short suits, you can devalue your hand. Even when you hold

♠ AQxx ♥ AJ9xx ♦ Ax ♣ xx

with which you have no excuse to devalue your hand, I think the best solution is to open 1♥ rather than 1♣ because of the problems created by the relay. That is another reason that I suggest raising the upper limit for opening 1♥ to 15 HCP when you have a five-card heart suit and anticipate rebid problems.

The advantages of the relay outweigh the disadvantages, but having to open 1♥ on this type of hand is a definite disadvantage since it may cause

you to miss a good game. Partner is forced to bid slightly more optimistically when you open 1♥ than when you open 1♠! The last example

♠ A Q x x ♥ A J 9 x x ♦ A x ♣ x x

gives you a close decision since it is as strong as the usual 16-HCP hand. With the same high cards and ♦ A x x ♣ x, you are definitely too strong for a 1♥ opening. Even giving you the ten of hearts instead of the nine may cause you to bid more strongly. With 16 or 17 HCP (or the equivalent with strong suits or a singleton), my suggestion is to open 1♣ and rebid 2♥ over a 1♦ response, by agreement showing 5+ hearts, four spades and a good hand. This allows you to stay at the two-level when responder has a weak hand. This sequence

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♦
1♥	1♠
2♠	

would show an even stronger hand, with four spades and five or six hearts.

To summarize: with four spades and five or more hearts, you have several ways to show your hand. With the weakest hands, open 1♥ and forget about spades unless partner responds in spades. If partner bids 1NT over your 1♥ opening, pass with 4-5 in the majors and rebid 2♥ with 4-6 shape. With a typical 15 HCP and 4-5 in the majors, open 1♥ and raise a 1NT response to 2NT to show that exact distribution and strength. With 16-17 points or the equivalent, open 1♣ and rebid 2♥ over a 1♦ response to show four spades and longer hearts. With the stronger hands, bid 1♣, go through the relay and bid 2♠ over 1♠, forcing for one round; then, if you are strong enough, bid game even if partner doesn't — maybe trying 3NT with 4-5-2-2 distribution. Of course, I have only discussed the problem sequences here. If you open 1♥ and partner raises hearts or bids spades, common sense and natural bidding will tell you what to do.

Despite the problems created when opener has a good hand with five hearts, I think that playing the 1♥ bid as a relay to 1♠ is a very good idea, since it makes other sequences possible. For example, you can bid 2NT after the relay to 1♠ to show 27-28 HCP and an immediate 2NT over 1♦ to show a balanced 24-26 HCP. This helps to narrow the range for various notrump

bids and creates a true Kokish-like situation. The immediate 2NT rebid is forcing of course, and you can play your favorite system over it — transfers, Puppet Stayman, etc. Partner's share of the outstanding points is about 5, so you will usually have at least 26 HCP, if not more. Even when you have 26 or 27 points between you, you are not a cinch to make 3NT since you will lack the entries to establish and use dummy's five-card suit; likewise, you may need two out of three successful finesses but, with only one entry to dummy, you can take only one finesse. If partner has

♠ J 10 x x ♥ x ♦ J x x x x ♣ x x x

or

♠ x ♥ 10 x x x x ♦ Q x x x x ♣ x x

four of a major may be a much better contract than 3NT. But if opener opens or rebids 3NT, there is no room to investigate alternate contracts. If you look for a major fit and don't find one, you are simply one trick higher. Consequently, it is very desirable to have a forcing 2NT bid available. So the sequence

Opener

1♣

1♥

Responder

1♦

1♠

serves at least two purposes. Opener can rebid 1NT to show 18-19 HCP, and he can make a forcing 2NT rebid to show 27-28 HCP.

Suppose that instead of 1♦, responder bids 1♥ or 1♠, showing at least 6 HCP or 5 HCP with a five-card suit. Now a 2NT rebid would show 18-19 HCP. My first thought was to use 3NT to show 24-25 points over a major-suit response, and probably jump to 4NT with 26-27, but what would you bid with

♠ x ♥ A Q x ♦ K x x ♣ A K Q x x x

over a 1♠ response? With the latter hand, I think you should rebid 3NT, just as you would when playing BWS.

One solution to the problem is to rebid 4NT (natural) after a major-suit response to 1♣ with 24-25 HCP and 5NT with 26-27. This solution has obvious flaws; there is very little room for slam invitations or for showing a second suit. Instead of playing that these auctions

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♠
4♣/4♦/4♥	

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♥
3♠/4♣/4♦	

show a splinter in support of the major, Stephen Goldstein suggested that

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♠
3♥	

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♥
3♠	

both show undisclosed splinters. If responder is interested in a slam (or would be if the splinter were in the right suit), he can make the cheapest bid to ask where the splinter is. That would allow opener to jump to 4♣ directly over the major-suit response to show 24+ with a balanced hand and a doubleton in partner's suit, or 4♦ to show the same type of hand, but with three- or four-card support. My guess is that you would have an opportunity to use this bid in about one hand out of 3000 (perhaps even less frequently); it may not be worthwhile to clutter up your mind with these specialized bids that seldom occur.

There is another type of response to 1♣ that might be helpful much more frequently. Suppose responder has a good hand (10+ HCP) with 4-4-4-1 distribution. If responder bids all three suits, opener may think responder's first bid suit is the longest — and it may not be practical to bid all three suits, especially when opener rebids 1NT or 2NT. These hands can best be shown by jumping to the three-level in the suit below the singleton. This permits opener to tell, right away, how well the hands fit. He may just place the contract in 3NT or game in one of the three suits. If he is interested in a slam and wants to know about controls, he can bid the short suit to ask (A=2; K=1, but a singleton king is not shown). The cheapest response shows 4 or fewer; the next bid shows 5, etc. There are a few other strong hands that can be shown after a 1♣ opening, but that discussion will be deferred until the chapter on 2♣ openings, since it includes a discussion of which types of hands can best be described by opening 2♣ and which by opening 1♣.

BALANCED HANDS — A SUMMARY

This is probably as good a place as any to summarize how to show the various ranges of balanced hands.

1NT opening	12-14 points, denies a five-card major
1♣ followed by a 1NT rebid	15-17 HCP
1♣ followed by a 2NT rebid	
<i>after a major-suit response</i>	18-19 HCP
1♣ -1♦; 1♥ -1♠; 1NT	18-19 HCP
1♣ -1♦; 2NT	24-26 HCP (forcing)
1♣ -1♦; 1♥ -1♠; 2NT	27-28 HCP and is forcing
2NT opening	20-21 HCP
2♦ opening, 2NT rebid	22-23 HCP
2♦ opening, 3NT rebid	suggests playing in 3NT based on a

running minor

(♠AQ ♥Kx ♦Kx ♣AKQxxxx

or

♠AQx ♥K ♦Axx ♣AKQ10xx)

You are allowed to gamble rather than wait for a sure thing.

If you like:

1♣ followed by 4♣ rebid	
over a major response	24-26 HCP with a doubleton in responder's major. The 4♣ bid leaves room for responder to bid a new suit (forcing) in an attempt to find a better fit.
1♣ followed by 4♦ rebid	
over a major response	24-26 HCP with a tripleton or conceivably four-card support for responder's major.

REFUSING THE RELAY

I stated that

Opener

1♣

1♥

Responder

1♦

relays to 1♠, and it always does when responder has a weak hand. But as we have seen, he may not have a weak hand to bid 1♦ initially if he has no four-card major. Responder might hold

♠AQx ♥AJx ♦Jxxx ♣xxx

for example. He *could* just bid 1♠ over the relay, listen to opener's rebid and attempt to place the contract. But if opener has something like

♠KJxxx ♥KQxxx ♦AQx ♣—

or

♠Kx ♥KQxxxx ♦x ♣AKQx

the hands would be much easier to bid if responder could show a good balanced hand and opener, with a distributional hand, assumed captaincy. So I suggest that responder jump to 2♠ over the 1♥ relay to show 12+ (or as few as 10 HCP, made up mostly of aces and kings and/or queens accompanied by higher honors). This bid would not be ambiguous (partner would not interpret it as a natural bid in spades) since with four or more spades and a decent hand, responder would have responded 1♠ rather than 1♦ in the first place.

Here's another problem that can be solved by one of the relay sequences. What does your intuition tell you to bid with the following hand? You hold

♠10xx ♥Kxx ♦KQ98x ♣Jx

and the unopposed bidding has gone

Opener

1♣

2♣

Responder

1♦

I made a very bad bid with this hand. I thought we belonged in 3NT, and so rather than pinpoint my weakness, I simply bid 3NT. But partner held

♠ x ♥ A Q x ♠ A 10 x x ♣ A K 10 9 x

The opponents took the first five spade tricks against 3NT when we were cold for 6♦. The obvious bid with my hand is 3♦, even though we hadn't discussed it: logically, this should show a hand not quite good enough to respond 2♦ originally. If I had bid 3♦, partner would have bid 4♠ (obviously a splinter) and, with no wasted values in spades, I would have bid 6♦. After this debacle, we then decided that after

Opener

1♣

1♥

Responder

1♦

instead of rebidding 1♠, responder should bid two of his minor with 6 or 7 HCP when most of his strength is in that long minor suit, and jump to the three-level with 8 or 9 HCP. Although opener isn't expecting any bid other than 1♠, the information conveyed is worth taking up the additional bidding room. Opener *can* pass any minor bid, but is not likely to do so, and if he rebids a minimum number of hearts responder can pass.

After

Opener

1♣

1♥

Responder

1♦

the one bid we haven't mentioned is 2♥. This bid is artificial, shows 9-11 HCP (but not a good, slammish 10 or 11) and is forcing to game. This allows opener to finish showing his distribution when he holds an unbalanced hand rather than just guessing to bid 3NT (or pass 3NT if responder bids it). It should not be difficult for opener to remember that 2♥ is not a natural bid. Since his 1♥ bid does not necessarily show hearts, the 2♥ bid can't be a three-card raise, and it isn't worth saving the bid to show precisely 4 HCP with a five-card heart suit (the minimum hand responder could have with a five-card major).

As an aside, the bidding after

Opener

1♣

1♠

Responder

1♦

is similar. Bids of two or three of a minor have the same meanings as after a 1♥ rebid. However, 2♥ is still an artificial game force (9-11 HCP), while a 2♠ bid would be natural. To show a slammish 12 HCP or the equivalent, responder must bid 3♥, the cheapest unambiguous artificial bid.

Finally, here's an example of thinking ahead, rather than just 'applying the rules'. Suppose you open 1♣ with

♠AKQ10xx ♥Jxx ♦Kx ♣Ax

and partner responds 1♦. You bid 1♠ and partner bids 3♦. It may be tempting to bid 3♠ or 4♠. Your spades are strong and neither you nor partner has indicated a stopper in hearts. But you are not sure that you don't have a spade loser. Partner could hold ♦AQJxxx and little or nothing else, in which case you are cold for 3NT unless the opponents can take the first five tricks in hearts. But neither opponent has bid hearts (both having had a chance to do so at the one-level), so it is quite likely that neither has a five-card heart suit. Assuming that the opponents cannot, or do not, take the first five heart tricks, which contract is better: 4♠ or 3NT? Partner actually held

♠x ♥10xx ♦AJ10xxx ♣Q10x

(Tsk, tsk, he should have 8-9 points and he has only 7!) You have two chances to make 3NT: the spades may run or the diamonds may run (after a finesse). As it happens, when you cash the top spades, the jack drops doubleton. It also turns out that the ♦Q is doubleton onside, so you can make whichever game you bid, but surely 3NT is superior.

QUIZ

1. Partner opens 1♣. What would you bid with each of the following hands?

(a) ♠ QJ 10 x ♥ x x x x ♦ K Q x ♣ A K [To Answer](#)

(b) ♠ Q 10 9 x x x ♥ x ♦ J x x ♣ x x x [To Answer](#)

(c) ♠ x x x ♥ A K x ♦ K Q x ♣ J x x x [To Answer](#)

(d) ♠ A Q x ♥ A K x ♦ K J x x ♣ x x x [To Answer](#)

2. The bidding has gone

Opener

1♣

1♥

Responder

1♦

?

What do you bid with the following hands?

(a) ♠ x x ♥ 10 x x x x ♦ K J x x ♣ x x [To Answer](#)

(b) ♠ Q x ♥ K x x ♦ K J x ♣ J 10 x x x [To Answer](#)

3. You open 1♣ and partner responds 3♠. What call would you make with the following hands?

(a) ♠ A x x x ♥ A Q ♦ Q x ♣ K Q x x x [To Answer](#)

(b) ♠ A ♥ A Q ♦ Q x x x ♣ K Q x x x x [To Answer](#)

4. Partner bids 1♣; you bid 1♦ and he rebids 1♠. What would you bid now with this hand? [To Answer](#)

♠ 10 x x ♥ x x x ♦ x ♣ K Q J x x x

5. You open 1♣; partner responds 1♦ and RHO bids 1♠. What call would you make with this hand? [To Answer](#)

♠ A x x ♥ K J x x ♦ Q x x ♣ A Q x

MY ANSWERS

- 1(a) Bid 1♠, not 1♥. It is dangerous to bid a bad suit with a good hand. Suppose partner has something like

♠AKx ♥Kxxx ♦Ax ♣QJxx

or

♠AKxx ♥AQxx ♦AJ10x ♣x

With the first hand, you have a 50% play for 6NT and no play for 6♥. Change partner's hearts to ♥Axxx and you have a 100% play for 6NT and a very poor play for 6♥. With the second opening hand you belong in either notrump or spades, but if you respond 1♥, you will surely get to a heart contract. [To Question](#)

- (b) Bid 2♠. This shows no ace and less than 5 HCP with a six- or seven-card spade suit. Unless he has a great spade fit, partner will usually pass. If he bids a new suit, you should pass: for this rebid he should have a singleton or void in spades and a good long suit of his own. You don't need to worry about missing game unless you have a remarkable distributional fit since his 1♣ bid has a usual upper limit of 19 HCP. While I have furnished examples where you would bid 1♣ with 20 HCP and no better bid, and have shown a few very strong hands that should be opened 1♣, you should assume a maximum of 19. If partner has one of those rare hand types, he will know what to do over your preemptive response. [To Question](#)
- (c) Bid 1NT, natural and game forcing (13-15 points — balanced, no four-card major). If partner's hand is distributional, you could easily belong in a slam, with the distributional hand as captain. The bidding will be simpler if you show your values right away. If your strength were more concentrated, say

♦AKJ ♥KQx ♦xxx ♣xxxx

you would respond 1♦, hoping for partner to rebid either 1NT, 2NT or 1♥ (a relay) so that he will probably be the declarer. Over 1♥, you would bid 2♠ to show your slammish values. [To Question](#)

- (d) Bid 2NT. This bid is forcing to the 4NT level (at least). You have a lot of tenaces and a very good hand. You hope partner will bid his suit and you will raise, expecting him to take control of the bidding.

[To Question](#)

- 2(a) Bid 1♠. Partner may not have hearts. (Remember, you are playing 'Kokish'.) If partner rebids 2♦, you should bid 3♥ because of your double fit. If he bids 1NT, showing a balanced 18-19 HCP, you should bid 2♦ to transfer to hearts. [To Question](#)

- (b) You should bid 2♥ (9-11), since you want to force to game without suggesting values suitable for slam. If partner's heart bid were natural, you would just raise to 4♥. [To Question](#)

- 3(a) Partner is showing a singleton club, and he has four spades. My suggestion is to bid 4♠ at matchpoints, which will probably make one more trick than notrump. At IMPs, I would bid 3NT. If partner has bad spades, say

♠ J x x x ♥ A K x x ♦ Q x x x ♣ x

you might go down in 4♠, especially with a 4-1 break, while 3NT is probably cold. [To Question](#)

- (b) I would bid 3NT with this hand at either form of scoring since I think it is more likely to make than is 5♦. [To Question](#)

4. I think you should bid 2♠, and that is what I bid when I held this hand. It could cause us to miss a game if partner holds

♠ A K Q x x ♥ x x ♦ Q x x ♣ A x x

i.e. when partner has strong trumps and ♣Ax or ♣Axx. But if he has weak trumps or one or two small clubs, it is unlikely that he can establish and use the club suit when his only possible side entry is in the trump suit. If you bid 2♣, there is a slight chance that partner will pass, and if he doesn't, bidding clubs and raising spades next round will probably make it impossible to stop short of game. Partner may not pass 2♠, and if he does take a bid, you can hardly bid less than game.

[To Question](#)

5. You should pass. A pass suggests that you have a balanced hand. If the 1♠ bid is passed around to partner, he should bid 1NT (played from the right side) with

♠ Q x ♥ Q 10 x x ♦ J 10 x x ♣ x x x

You would also pass over a 1♠ overcall if partner had responded 1♥ when you held something like

♠ A x x ♥ K x ♦ K Q x x ♣ A x x x

A 1NT rebid implies a double stopper in the opponent's suit with 16 or 17 HCP, or perhaps as few as 15 HCP with a double stopper if partner has responded 1♥. [To Question](#)

THE OPENING 2♣ BID



As stated in the first chapter, an opening 2♣ bid guarantees either (1) at least one five-card major (and more often a six-card suit) or (2) both majors, presumably 5-5. After an opening 2♣ bid and the almost automatic 2♦ response, a 2♥ or 2♠ rebid by opener is not forcing. Typical hands would be

♦ Ax ♥ KQJxxx ♦ AQx ♣ Kx

or

♠ AKJ10xx ♥ x ♦ AQxx ♣ Ax

or

♠ AKJxxxx ♥ — ♠ Axx ♣ Kxx

All three hands are far too strong to open 1♥ or 1♠, and somewhat too strong to open 1♣ and rebid 1♥ or 1♠. In fact, if these hands were much stronger, you would open 2♣ and rebid 3♥ or 3♠ to force to game. You don't have to wait for a sure thing to force to game. The test is whether you are more likely to gain or lose by using the stronger sequences. You have no serious problems bidding one-suited hands with a long major when your suit is strong. The problems are with strong hands with weak suits and with two-suited hands. As you may recall, if the hand is balanced, you may open 2NT, or 1♣ followed by 2NT, or 2♦ followed by 2NT, despite holding a five-

card major. You might even treat

♠ Kx ♥ KQxxx ♦ AKxx ♣ AQ

as a balanced hand. Sometimes the lesser evil is to treat 6-3-2-2 and 5-4-2-2 distributions as balanced; sometimes not.

Anyway, that covers the strong one-suited hands and most of the balanced hands. Now for the harder ones. As stated earlier

Opener

2♣

2NT

Responder

2♦

shows both majors (5-5, 6-5 or 5-6). Some of the continuations, as you will see, are a bit complicated, but if both suits are strong, they do not present a serious problem. But what do you bid with something like

♠ AJxxx ♥ AKx ♦ A ♣ AKxx

or

♠ AKJx ♥ AQ10xxx ♦ — ♣ AKJ

What would be your solution? We'll come back to this problem shortly.

Let's consider the easiest two-suited hands first. You hold

♠ Axxxx ♥ AKQxx ♦ AQ ♣ x

or

♠ Axxxx ♥ AKQxx ♦ AQ ♣ A

These hands present two problems: (1) how to force to game with the stronger hand and stop in a partscore with a weaker hand (when partner is also weak), and (2) how to pick the right trump suit. A simple solution is for responder to choose the trump suit and bid 3♥ or 3♠ over the 2NT rebid with a very weak hand, and 4♥ or 4♠ with a few values. And if he does bid 3♥ or 3♠, opener can still raise to game with the stronger hand. But this solution has two obvious defects. In the first place, the weaker hand will be declarer, and in the second, responder cannot always make an intelligent decision. Suppose his major holdings are Jx in each suit. Hearts will be the better trump suit in this example since losers in spades will be unavoidable if spades are trumps. If hearts are trumps, without a trump opening lead, declarer can ruff the third round of spades — or declarer may be able to dis-

card some of his spade losers on minor-suit winners.

So after

Opener

2♣

2NT

Responder

2♦

my recommendation (which was suggested to me by Neil Stern, the first time he played the System) is for responder to bid 3♣ to show either a preference for hearts or no preference, and to bid 3♦ with a preference for spades. When responder holds the doubleton jack of both majors, he bids 3♣ over 2NT, opener would bid 3♥ on our first example hand and responder could pass. But if opener's spades and hearts were interchanged, he would bid spades, his AKQxx suit, and with a substantial preference (like a singleton spade and three hearts), responder could overrule him, even if it meant increasing the level. This is a good, if not perfect, solution. Among other things, it allows the strong hand to be declarer most of the time.

Now let's look at hands where *opener* has a marked preference for one of the majors. Suppose opener has

♠AKQx ♥AJxxx ♦KQ ♣x

or

♠AKQx ♥AKJxxx ♦AQ ♣x

or

♠AKJx ♥AQxxx ♦AKx ♣x

With the first two hands, he prefers to play in spades if responder has four or five spades and a singleton or doubleton heart; otherwise, he wants to be in hearts. With the third hand, it is quite likely that the hand should play in diamonds or notrump rather than in a major. The first thought that should occur to you is that a 1♣ opening might work well with these hands. If you open 1♣ and partner responds in a major suit, your more serious problem is solved immediately. You will splinter and probably bid some more over partner's attempted signoff, but at least you know what the trump suit should be. And if partner doesn't bid your four-card major, you are pretty sure your four-card major should not be the trump suit. But if partner does not respond in a major, what then?

Of course, if he bids two of a minor (showing 10+) or 1NT (showing

13+), you will bid naturally, probably reaching a slam, perhaps a grand slam. If he bids 1♦, you have alternatives. With the first and third hands, you would go through the relay sequence, as described in the previous chapter:

Opener

1♣

1♥

2♠

Responder

1♦

1♠

forcing for one round (you can't use the sequence 1♣-1♦; 2♥ since it shows 16-17 points, 5+ hearts and 4 spades). With the second hand, you would rebid 3♥ over 1♦ to show a game-forcing hand with six hearts and four spades. You would bid in similar fashion with four hearts and length in spades, again jumping in your longer major:

Opener

1♣

3♠

Responder

1♦

This auction is game forcing, and your long suit should be strong enough to play well opposite a singleton.

Opener

1♣

2♠

Responder

1♦

would be non-forcing and equivalent to 2♣-2♦; 2♠, except that it would show four hearts in addition to longer spades.

So how would you bid with

♠ AKJ10 ♥ AQxxx ♦ AKJ ♣ x

or

♠ AJxxx ♥ AKQx ♦ AK ♣ AJ

You want to force to game since you need so little help from partner to make it, but when your longer major is not strong, you don't want to insist on playing in a major. Either 3NT or five of a minor would frequently be a better contract. So, when your longer suit is weak, you go through a convoluted

sequence:

Opener

1♣

1♥

3M

Responder

1♦

1♠

A jump in your longer suit here shows 5-4 in the majors, but this sequence is still forcing to game. If the hand is a complete misfit or partner has a Yarborough, you may not make game, but you will have tried everything in an effort to find the best contract. Perhaps partner will have something like

♠ x ♥ x ♦ J x x x ♣ Q J 10 9 x x x

and five of a minor will be your best hope of making game.

What should these auctions show?

Opener

1♣

2♠

Responder

1♥

Opener

1♣

3♣

Responder

1♠

These are unusual sequences since opener could have opened 2♣ or 2♦. Nor can they show a strong major with four cards in the other major, since with that hand, opener would have splintered or raised the major to an appropriate level. These jumps by opener show that, after a positive response (which opener probably has a mild fit for), opener likes his hand well enough to force to game. And though it would be rare, responder could pass a non-jump rebid. After

Opener

1♣

2♥

Responder

1♠

wouldn't responder pass with

♠ K Q x x ♥ x x ♦ x x x ♣ J x x x

or even with the queen of clubs in place of the jack? Opener would need a very strong hand to jump to three of a minor — perhaps

♠ Q x x ♥ A ♦ A K x ♣ A Q 10 x x x

over a 1♠ response.

Suppose that you have a two-suiter: a major and a minor. If the major is very strong and the minor is only a four-card suit, you can bid as though you had a major one-suiter. But if you hold

♠AKxxx ♥AQ ♦AKQxx ♣x

you are too strong to open 2♣ and rebid 2♠. Game would be almost cold opposite

♠xx ♥xxxx ♦J10xx ♣xxx

for example. The solution (suggested to me by Josh Donn, a 25-year-old expert) is to show your minor suit first since

Opener

2♣

3♠

Responder

2♦

would take up too much bidding space, besides suggesting a much better spade suit than you have. The bidding might go as follows:

Opener

2♣

3♦¹

3NT³

Responder

2♦

3♥²

1. My minor suit.
2. Showing a preference for hearts over spades.
3. Neither of my majors is very strong. If you still think a major is best, bid 4♥, which I will correct to spades when spades is my better major.

Now if responder has values in both clubs and his shorter major, he can pass; he can also choose to play in diamonds. Perhaps the hand is a complete misfit and no game will make, but you will have investigated the alternatives as well as you can.

RESPONDING TO THE 2♣ OPENING

Most of the time responder will bid 2♦ over 2♣. This bid allows opener to show which major he has at the two-level and whether he has a game-forcing or game-invitational hand. But responder does have alternatives. I can't imagine a hand with which it would be logical to respond 2NT. But if responder has a good five- or six-card suit which will run opposite a doubleton high honor (like AQJxx or KQxxxx) *and* a side ace or king, he should bid his long suit. There is a remote chance that it will be chosen as the trump suit, but the main advantage is that opener may be able to take control of the bidding knowing about the source of tricks. With

♠ x ♥ AKQJxxx ♦ Kx ♣ Axx

opener could bid Blackwood over a 3♣ or 3♦ response and bid 6♥, or 7♥ or 7NT, depending upon the response.

Responder's more usual problem is what to bid on the second round.
After

Opener

2♣

2M

Responder

2♦

responder should bid 2NT (an Ogust-type enquiry) to *invite* game. Opener bids in steps:

- 3♣ bad hand, bad suit
- 3♦ bad hand, good suit
- 3♥ good hand, bad suit
- 3♠ good hand, good suit

Of course, what is a good suit or good hand is quite different when opener starts with 2♣ as compared to opening a weak two-bid! Also, since there is no need to use a raise of opener's suit as a preempt, responder's raise to 3♥ or 3♠ should show slam interest and ask opener to show a singleton if he has one. That allows responder to discover how well the hands fit.

If the bidding commences

Opener

2♣

3M

Responder

2♦

opener's hand is unlimited. So responder should cuebid an ace, or with two aces (or the king of trumps and an ace), he should jump in the cheapest (or only) suit in which he has an ace. With no aces but at least one king, he should bid 3NT. With no aces or kings, he should raise the major — the weakest bid he can make. Occasionally, opener will have a hand like

♠ x ♥ AKQJxxxx ♦ KQJx ♣ —

where all he needs from his partner for a sure slam is the ace of diamonds, and he is willing to gamble on bidding a slam if he shows the ace of spades. Or opener may hold

♠ AJ ♥ AKQ10xxxx ♦ x ♣ Ax

Opener

2♣

3♥

Responder

2♦

4♦

Now he can bid 4♠ (the cheapest non-heart suit) to ask for specific kings (although in this case, any king will be enough for six).

QUIZ

Partner opens 2♣ and rebids 2♥ over your 2♦ response. How would you respond with each of the next two hands?

(1) ♠Kx ♥xxxx ♦xx ♣J10xxx [To Answer](#)

(2) ♠Kx ♥Qxx ♦xxxx ♣AJxx [To Answer](#)

Partner opens 2♣ and jumps to 3♥ over your 2♦ response. What would you bid with the following hands?

(3) ♠xx ♥x ♦Axx ♣Jxxxxxx [To Answer](#)

(4) ♠xxx ♥Kx ♦Qxxxx ♣xxx [To Answer](#)

Partner opens 2♣ and rebids 3♦ over your 2♦ response. What would you bid now?

(5) ♠xx ♥xx ♦Qxxx ♣Jxxxx [To Answer](#)

(6) ♠x ♥Qx ♦Qxxxx ♣Jxxxx [To Answer](#)

MY ANSWERS

- (1) I think you should respond 2NT (Ogust) to invite game. Remember, a raise to 3♥ would show an interest in slam while you barely have enough to invite a game. In deciding whether his hand is good or bad, partner doesn't just count his points: a balanced hand with 19 points may not be as good as an unbalanced hand with 16 — for example,

♠ A Q J ♥ A Q J 9 x x ♦ K J ♣ J x

as compared with

♠ A x ♥ A K 10 9 x x ♦ A J 9 x ♣ x

[To Question](#)

- (2) You should raise to 3♥ and give partner a chance to show a singleton or void. If he bids 4♦, you can use Blackwood, followed by bidding a slam unless you find you are missing two controls. If partner bids anything else, you *may* have a good slam, but it will be hard to tell, and I suggest signing off in 4♥. [To Question](#)
- (3) Partner is unlimited, so you should bid 4♦ to show the ace. Perhaps partner has

♠ A K ♥ A K Q 10 x x x ♦ K Q x ♣ x

If the ace of diamonds isn't enough for partner to bid a slam, he can rebid 4♥ or perhaps make a further try (which you would reject). Since you have to get to game anyway, it costs nothing to show your ace.

[To Question](#)

- (4) Just bid 3NT. With

♠ x x ♥ K x x ♦ Q J x x x ♣ A 10 x

you would bid 5♣ to show the ♣ A. But partner doesn't have to have ten sure tricks in his own hand, so you don't want to risk bidding past game

without some extra values. Your 3NT bid denies aces but promises at least one king. Let partner take it from there. [To Question](#)

- (5) Partner has a major suit and secondary diamonds. With this hand, you should bid 3♥. Partner might bid 4♥ with a reasonably good heart suit, and if he does, you will pass. If he bids 3♠, you will bid 4♦, giving him a choice. If he bids 3NT, denying a strong major suit, you will bid 4♦. [To Question](#)
- (6) You should again bid 3♥. But if he then bids 3♠ or 3NT you will bid 5♦, while if he bids 4♥, I think you should jump to 6♦. His most likely distribution would be 3-5-5-0 or 2-5-5-1. [To Question](#)

POSTSCRIPT

Since this is a chapter on the 2♣ opening bid, it may seem strange to refer to opening 1♣ bids. I delayed the discussion of some of these bids till now so that you can see what the problems are with 2♣ opening bids. The following is an outline, summarizing how to show various distributions and strengths with a strong hand and one or two long major suits. Although I state strengths in high card points, they are only approximate; you may treat hands as weaker or stronger than their actual point count.

- (1) With 10-14 HCP and 6-4 in the majors, open one of the longer major and avoid forcing the bidding beyond the two-level unless partner bids your four-card major.
- (2) With 5 spades, 4 hearts, and 15-18 points, open 1♣ and rebid 1♠ unless partner responds 1♥.
- (3) With 5-5 in the majors and 15-16 points, open 1♣ and rebid 1♠, hoping to get a chance to show hearts next round.
- (4) With 4 spades, 5 hearts and 16-18 points, open 1♣ and rebid 2♥ over a 1♦ response. This sequence guarantees 4 spades.
- (5) With 4 spades, 5+ hearts and 19+ points, open 1♣, rebid 1♥ (relay) and over 1♠ bid 2♠, forcing for one round.
- (6) With 5+ spades, four hearts and 19-21 points, open 1♣ and rebid 2♠ (non-forcing).
- (7) With a game-forcing hand, a good six-card major and a four-card major, open 1♣ and rebid 3♥ or 3♠, whichever is your longer major.
- (8) With a game-forcing hand and no long, strong suit, go through the relay sequence (1♣-1♦; 1♥-1♠, and then bid 3♥ or 3♠ (your longer major).
- (9) With a good six-card major and 18-21 points, open 2♣ and rebid your major at the two-level (non-forcing).

- (10) With 22+ HCP and a strong major suit, open 1♣ and rebid your major at the three-level (game forcing).
- (11) With 18+ HCP and 5-5, 6-5, 5-6 or 6-6 in the majors, open 2♣ and rebid 2NT. This is not necessarily forcing to game, but of course, partner can't pass your artificial 2NT bid.
- (12) With a game-forcing hand including a long major and a secondary minor, open 2♣ and rebid your minor suit, saving your major till a later round.

THE TWO DIAMOND OPENING



The remaining non-preemptive opening bid is 2♦, which shows 22+ points if balanced and 20+ if unbalanced. Only when opener rebids notrump, showing a balanced hand, can he hold a five-card major (which responder may enquire about through Puppet Stayman). What should opener do with a semi-balanced hand and 20 or 21 points? With

♠ Jx ♥ Ax ♦ AKQxx ♣ KQJx

he should either open 2NT or choose my preference, which is to open 1♣ and plan to bid both diamonds and clubs later. Although 19 points is the usual maximum for a 1♣ opening (unless opener has a major two-suiter or 24+ balanced) the lack of a fit for partner's potential major and the doubleton without a stopper are both negative factors. Even if partner has enough strength to make a positive response to 1♣, you are still not sure of making game in either notrump or a minor suit. Don't forget that you are allowed to use judgment in your hand evaluation. Another factor to consider is that an opening 2♦ bid with an unbalanced hand is not a very efficient bid.

There is not much room to investigate whether you belong in game and to find a fit at the same time. But no one has suggested a more efficient way to describe hands such as

♠AKx ♥x ♦AKQx ♣AQxxx

or

♠AKQx ♥A10xx ♦AQJx ♣J

The 2♦ bid on 20+ points will sometimes get you too high, but if responder has his fair share of the outstanding strength (6-7 points), you will probably have a reasonable play for game. If you get to a hopeless contract, you will usually have lots of company.

An opening 2NT bid shows 20-21 HCP and a balanced hand (possibly with a five-card major). So you should play some form of Puppet Stayman. I prefer my own version, but it is somewhat complicated, and you may find a simpler form adequate. Although it is not an essential part of the System, my version is explained in Appendix 1. I think it is desirable to open 2NT with 5-3-3-2 distribution and subsequently to have a way to discover the five-card major. The advantage of this is that it removes balanced distributions from sequences starting with 2♣ followed by 2♥ or 2♠. This is especially useful when the five-card suit is weak and you don't want to play in it unless partner has at least three-card support.

After a 2♦ opening and a 2NT rebid by opener, you use the same responses and rebids (including Puppet Stayman), except for range, as after a 2NT opening. When opener does not rebid 2NT, he must bid a four-card major if he has one. Consequently, responder does not bid a four-card major, himself, as a natural bid (except in one unusual situation). A 2♥ response to 2♦ is negative, denying 6 points or 5 points including an ace. A 2♠ response is an artificial positive, showing at least 6 points or 5 points including an ace. Bidding 2♠ denies holding a five-card major and also denies a five-card minor unless it is very weak. All bids at the three-level are natural: they show at least a five-card suit with 6+ HCP or 5 HCP with an ace.

Over a 2♥ negative response, opener must bid 2♠ with a four-card spade suit or 3♥ with a four-card heart suit. If opener bids 2♠, responder can raise spades with four or more spades, bid 3♥ with five or more hearts, bid 3♣ with four or more clubs or, lacking four clubs, can bid 3♦ with four or more diamonds. He should avoid bidding notrump since, if notrump is the final

contract, it is better for the strong hand to be declarer. Either opener or responder may pass a bid below game if game seems improbable. At opener's next turn (after first rebidding 2♠), if he started with 4-4-1-4, 4-4-4-1, 4-4-0-5 or 4-4-5-0 distribution, he must bid 3♥. (He can't have 4-4-3-2 distribution, or he would have rebid 2NT.) Here's a typical auction:

Opener

♠ AK 10 x
♥ A Q J x
♦ AK x x
♣ x

2♦

2♠

3♥

Responder

♠ J x
♥ 10 x x x
♦ J x x x
♣ x x x

2♥

3♦

4♥

Yes, 4♥ is not a great contract, but it is reasonable. What contract would you reach with BWS?

Let's leave opener with the same hand and change responder's hand. Can you guess how the bidding would go now?

Opener

♠ AK 10 x
♥ A Q J x
♦ AK x x
♣ x

2♦

3♥

4♠

Responder

♠ Q x x x
♥ x x
♦ J x x x
♣ A x x

2♠

3♠

This is the one exception I referred to earlier where responder would bid a four-card major. Since the 2♠ bid showed at least 6 points (or 5 with an ace), responder would have bid 3♠ as his first response if he had five spades, so opener knows he has only four when his second bid is 3♠. The reason for bidding 3♠ (rather than 3NT or 4♦) is that it permits opener to bid 3NT with a different sort of hand, lacking four spades, such as

♠ K ♥ A Q J x ♦ A K Q x x ♣ K J x

or

♠ A ♥ A K Q x ♦ Q x ♣ K Q J x x x

I mentioned the possibility of stopping short of game. Suppose the bidding has gone

Opener

2♦

3♥

Responder

2♥

and responder holds

♠ x x x ♥ x x x x ♦ J x x ♣ J x x

Surely there will be no better denomination than hearts, so the only question is whether to bid 4♥ or pass. I think the percentage action is to pass. With

♠ J x x x ♥ x x ♦ x x x ♣ J x x x

since you know that 3♥, on a 4-2 fit, will be a terrible contract, you might try 4♣, hoping that partner will pass with clubs or bid diamonds with five or six diamonds (which you would pass). With 4-3-3-3 distribution (your four-card suit being spades), you should probably pass. Played by you, 3NT does not look very promising, and it might be doubled.

A 2NT response to 2♦ shows 10 or more points and is forcing to at least the 4NT level. Both hands should bid naturally over the 2NT bid.

QUIZ

(1) You open 2♦ with

♠ A Q 10 ♥ A K Q x ♦ A Q x ♣ Q x x

and partner responds 2♠. What do you rebid? [To Answer](#)

(2) You open 2♦ with

♠ A Q x x ♥ A K x ♦ A K J x x ♣ x

and partner responds 3♣. What do you rebid? [To Answer](#)

(3) You open 2♦ with

♠ A Q x x ♥ A K Q x ♦ A K J x ♣ x

and partner bids 2♥. You bid 3♥ and partner bids 3♠. What do you bid now? [To Answer](#)

(4) You open 2♦ with

♠ K Q x ♥ A Q 10 x ♦ x ♣ A K Q x x

Partner bids 3♠. What do you rebid? [To Answer](#)

MY ANSWERS

- (1) You should rebid 2NT, just as you would if he had bid 2♥. There is no reason to do anything different. [To Question](#)
- (2) You should rebid 3NT. This doesn't necessarily show the same kind of hand with which you would rebid 2NT over 2♥ or 2♠. You can't afford to bid past 3NT when partner may have ♣AJxxx and nothing else. [To Question](#)

- (3) Just bid 4♠. Yes, partner *could* hold something like

♠ K x x x ♥ x x x ♦ Q x x ♣ x x x

in which case all you need is a 3-2 trump break for a slam, and he would bid it if you splintered by bidding 5♣. However, he could also hold

♠ 10 x x x ♥ x x x ♦ x x x ♣ K Q x

in which case even a contract at the four-level would be in grave danger.

[To Question](#)

- (4) Bid 5♦. Yes, again the five-level is not necessarily safe, but partner doesn't have to have an absolute minimum for his bid. With Hand (3), in order to make a slam, he needed a maximum, and the right maximum besides. This time there is no reason why partner shouldn't hold

♠ A J x x x ♥ K x x ♦ J x x ♣ x x

and partner could do nothing but pass if you just bid 4♠. [To Question](#)

THE OPPONENTS COMPETE



When the opponents overcall or make a takeout double, you *could* bid in similar fashion to the way you play BWS, but I think you would lose many of the advantages of the System. Let's start with a general observation. In BWS there are two problems: (1) how to bid to the best probable contract if your bid is going to end the auction, and (2) how to help partner decide what to do if there is more bidding. In the System, the first goal is often more important than the second. Why? Because the opening bid is limited and frequently there will be no more bidding by your side, at least when you raise partner's suit or make some other type of limit bid.

THE (NEGATIVE) DOUBLE

Suppose the bidding starts with a 1♠ bid and a 2♥ overcall. Responder holds

♠ Q x ♥ J x ♦ A J x x x ♣ Q x x x

He shouldn't pass since it is likely that both sides can make a partscore at the two-level. Standard bidders would make a negative double, but our responder knows his side doesn't belong in game unless his partner has a seven-card spade suit or a very unbalanced hand — and probably not even then. Even *if* you find an eight-card minor-suit fit (and you may not), it is unlikely that three of a minor will be a better contract than 2♠. So why not just bid 2♠? In BWS, this would be risky. Partner might compete to the three-level with a good hand but only a five-card suit, or jump to game expecting better trump support. Playing the System, however, the raise is fairly safe

since partner will seldom have a hand justifying a game bid or game try — at most he might make a competitive bid to the three-level with a long suit or a very unbalanced hand. If responder makes a negative double with these cards, opener will have to guess whether to bid 2♠ or 3♣ when holding

♠ KJ9xx ♥ Axx ♦ xx ♣ Kxx

As it happens, neither contract is very good, but 2♠ is safer and less likely to be doubled or to go down two or three tricks. With the ten of spades in place of the nine, 2♠ might easily be made, and you have very poor defensive prospects against 2♥.

So let's think about the implications of preferring to bid 2♠ rather than make a negative double with this hand in this auction. If you wouldn't make a negative double with

♠ Qx ♥ Jx ♦ AJxxx ♣ Qxxx

when should you make a negative double at the two-level? The answer, when both majors have been bid — and this would include the auction 1♥-(2♠) — is *never*! Optional penalty doubles would be more effective.

Let's look at how we penalize them after they overcall. The traditional way to play is that opener must reopen with a double when short in the opponent's suit and responder can leave in the double when he has an old-fashioned penalty double. That is fine over 1♠-(2♥) when responder has

♠ x ♥ KJ10xx ♦ Axx ♣ Qxxx

or even

♠ x ♥ KJ10x ♦ Axx ♣ Qxxxx

But how often will responder have such a good defensive hand? For every time responder is drooling at the mouth, hoping for a reopening double, there will be at least five hands where you could nip the opponents for a two-trick penalty in a cooperative situation where responder has less defense and opener has more, like

♠ AQxxx ♥ xxx ♦ QJx ♣ Ax

opposite

♠ x ♥ KJx ♦ Kxxx ♣ KJxxx

or

♠ J ♥ Q 10 x x ♦ A 10 x x ♣ Q x x x

Even when you think you want to defend, danger lurks. Recently, playing BWS at IMPs, my partner held

♠ A Q x x x x ♥ x ♦ x x ♣ A Q x x

and made a reopening double after a 2♥ overcall by LHO was passed back to him. With both sides vulnerable, I passed with

♠ x x ♥ K 10 8 x ♦ J x x ♣ K J x x

and the opponents made an overtrick. To be sure, we were somewhat unlucky in that we had duplication in clubs so that ♣AQxx opposite ♣KJxx was worth only one defensive trick. Partner didn't like my pass, and nor did anyone else, but I didn't like his double (I would have rebid 2♠). Most people thought I should not have passed, but I was faced with a dilemma. Partner could have a better defensive hand and a worse offensive hand (with only a five-card spade suit) and my hand figures to take three tricks on defense. If we could set them one trick, that would be 7 IMPs better than bidding 2♠, which was quite likely to be down one if partner had only five spades. Who was right?

In principle, I would rather defend with these cards than let my partner declare, but the double changed the odds. Instead of being +100 most of the time when defending an undoubled contract, we were going to be +200 (or occasionally +500) but -670 about one time out of four or -870 this time. I have heard many people say that you should reopen with a double whenever you are short in the opponents' suit and would have passed a penalty double, but that is not a realistic test. There is a big difference between passing when partner says he can set the contract unless you have freakish distribution, and doubling just in case partner has some kind of penalty double himself. Too often partner is faced with a dilemma like mine: you gain IMPs if you can set it or lose about twice as many IMPs when you can't. If you can set the contract more than two-thirds of the time, and can't make a contract of your own, in the long run you may do better to pass. But you would prefer to defend the contract undoubled.

If there is no unbid major in which you might find a fit, I think a double by responder at the two-level should say, 'I have a singleton or void in your suit (or possibly a worthless doubleton with exceptionally good defensive

values). I also have 9+ HCP with four of the opponent's trumps or 10+ with three good trumps (like KJx).⁷ With three of their suit and a balanced hand or a good defensive hand with a doubleton honor in their suit, opener can pass the double. With a six-card major suit, opener should rebid it (unless it is something like Axxxxx with an ace and a king on the side plus a doubleton honor or three of the opponent's suit). With only a five-card suit and shortage in their suit, opener should run to a four-card (or longer) minor. The only time he will have a serious problem is with 5-2-3-3 distribution, in which case he must guess what to do.

Notice that you can be too strong for the optional penalty double. If you hold

♠ x ♥ KJ 10 x x ♦ A x x ♣ K x x x

you should not double the 2♥ overcall. Partner will not have the type of hand where he can leave the double in. So you must pass and hope that he will reopen with a double (which he can afford to do with a good 12 to 14 points and 5-1-4-3 or 5-1-3-4 distribution in an effort to get to a good partscore contract). Since partner has, at most, 14 HCP, he knows you won't pass his reopening double unless you have a very good defensive hand with four or more defensive tricks. You may miss a big penalty occasionally, when opener has a doubleton in the opponents' suit, but you will have many two-trick sets with your cooperative penalty doubles which will more than compensate for the rare bad result.

Like most decisions, this won't always work out favorably, but it will do very well at matchpoints and succeed often enough at IMPs to come out ahead. When there is an unbid major, you will revert to standard negative doubles at the two-level. However, all doubles at the three-level or higher should be primarily for penalty. That doesn't mean opener should pass with a solid suit and a void, and perhaps not with a singleton if he has a poor defensive hand and a safe rebid.

To test your visualization, what would you do with the following hand? You are dealer with

♠ A Q 8 7 5 ♥ — ♦ 8 ♣ A 10 9 8 6 5 4

Since a 1♦ bid would deny a five-card major, you open 1♠. LHO overcalls 2♥ and partner doubles. Next hand passes. What would you do? I assume you remember that the double is a tentative penalty double, which you could

leave in with three hearts and a balanced hand, or possibly with good defense and a doubleton honor. Partner should have a singleton or worthless doubleton in your suit and either three or four hearts.

A typical distribution for partner is 1-4-4-4. If partner has four clubs, your hands can take a lot of tricks in a club contract. Suppose he holds

♠ x ♥ KJx ♦ Axxxx ♣ Qxxx

If clubs split 1-1, you have no trump losers. If LHO has a club void, you can probably ruff four spades (if necessary), or the king of spades may come down in three rounds when you are ruffing. I think you should bid 4♣, invitational, and partner will know you are very distributional. He won't value any high cards in the red suits other than aces. And he surely won't take you back to spades.

WHEN 1♦ IS OVERCALLED

When the opening bid is 1♦ and an opponent overcalls, you are at a slight disadvantage since you don't know which minor partner has. Responder's primary objective is to find the best trump suit rather than try for a penalty. With four cards in an unbid major and enough strength to compete, he should make a negative double (or bid his four-card major at the one-level). After a 1♠ or two-level overcall, with five of a major and about 9-11 HCP, or a six-card major and about 7-10 HCP, he can bid the major at the two-level, non-forcing. In other words, after a diamond opening and an overcall, you should play negative free bids. With 6-3-2-2 distribution and a doubleton in responder's suit, opener would normally pass; with three-card support, he would raise to the three- or four-level, depending on his high-card strength, and almost always would raise to game with three-card support and a singleton. Holding a singleton or void in responder's suit, he should bid his long minor suit. (With 4-4 in the minors, he would have to have four of the unbid major and would either bid it or pass the double if that was his four-card suit). With an exceptional hand, he might even rebid 3NT with a stopper in the opponent's suit and a long running minor (2NT should show both minors). If responder wants to make a forcing response, he doubles and bids his suit on the next round. Opener should not pass the double unless the opponents have bid his longest suit (or his strong four-card suit).

If responder lacks a major suit, he can bid 2♣ (pass or correct) as a simple raise. A 2♦ bid is forcing since opener is forced to the three-level if his minor suit is clubs, and it should be forcing to the same level even if his suit is diamonds. Both 3♣ and 4♣ are preemptive raises in either minor (usually with 5-5 or at least 5-4 distribution in the minors). A cuebid is a forcing raise in either minor, implying an interest in 3NT if opener has a stopper in the opponents' suit.

Suppose partner opens 1♦ and RHO overcalls 1♠. What would you bid with the following hands?

(1) ♠ x x ♥ K 10 9 x x ♦ A x x x ♣ K x

(2) ♠ x x ♥ A Q x ♦ K x x x ♣ Q x x x

(3) ♠ x x ♥ A Q x ♦ K x x x x ♣ Q x x

(4) ♠ A x ♥ K 10 9 x ♦ A K x x x x x ♣ —

With (1), bid 2♥, non-forcing. If partner bids 3♣ or 3♦, you will pass. If he bids 3♣, he is quite likely to have a six-card club suit. Also, he probably has a singleton heart, so the hands won't fit very well.

With (2), bid either 2♦, forcing, or 3♣: bidding 2♦ implies more high cards than 3♣, which could be based more on distribution. An immediate 2♦ bid is not game forcing in competition, and you will pass if partner bids 3♣ or 3♦. In effect, you have shown almost a game-forcing hand if partner has diamonds and probably enough strength to make 3♣ if his longer suit is clubs. Partner should take a stronger action (cuebid or bid 2NT, 3NT or four of a minor) if he has a good hand. Remember, he can have as many as 16 points if he doesn't have a four-card major.

With (3), bid 2♦. It will be a skimpy limit raise if partner has clubs, but it comes closest to describing your hand. Frequently, when partner's longer minor is clubs, he will have six of them.

With (4), make a negative double. The actual opening bid at the table, facing this hand, was

♠ K x ♥ A Q x x ♦ — ♣ Q J 8 x x x x

This was before we 'perfected' the System and, through a series of misunderstandings, we got to 6♣, our only losers being four trump tricks! A negative

double would have enabled us to find our heart fit. If there had been no heart fit, we would probably still have gotten too high, just as our opponents did on this misfitting hand — although they didn't get as high as we did.

Suppose you have this latter hand

♠ K x ♥ A Q x x ♦ — ♣ Q J 8 x x x x

but your RHO's overcall over partner's 1♦ opening is two levels higher: 3♠. I think you should bid 4♣, *non-forcing and not asking partner to pass or correct!* Of course you wouldn't bid at this level unless you thought there was a good chance of making game, but if partner has a misfit for clubs, you are unlikely to make anything, not to mention a game. But a final contract of 4♣ is not likely to be doubled. Here, the overcall has helped you, as you can now show a single-suited minor hand easily. With support for both minors — and enough strength to force partner to bid at this level — you would make a negative double instead of bidding 4♣.

The following is a similar sequence. You hold

♠ Q 9 x x x ♥ x ♦ J ♣ A K 10 9 x x

and the auction goes as follows:

LHO	PARTNER	RHO	YOU
	1♦	1♥	1♠
3♥ ¹	pass	pass	?

1. Preemptive.

I could be off by several tricks, but my guess is that 3♥ will either make or be down one, while 4♣ will either make or be down one. At matchpoints, I would be inclined to pass and just hope for a plus score on a hand that is probably a misfit. At IMPs, I wouldn't like to risk a 7-IMP loss where both sides can make a partscore, and conceivably we might even make 5♣. So I think you should bid 4♣, constructive, but non-forcing. Why wouldn't partner think you meant for him to pass or correct to diamonds? Because, again, at this level, you could double with something like

♠ A J x x x ♥ x ♦ Q x x ♣ K x x x

With a similar two-suited hand, except that your second suit was diamonds, you would bid 4♦, also non-forcing and not asking partner to correct to clubs.

COMPETITION OVER OUR 1NT OPENING

After a 1NT opening bid and an overcall, my inclination is to play a double for penalty. Partner knows your approximate strength and distribution. Besides, if you pass, it is too dangerous for partner to make a reopening double with a maximum, as you can when playing strong notrumps with 17 points and a doubleton in the opponent's suit. Perhaps the rules should be modified so that opener, with only a doubleton in the opponent's suit, is allowed to pull the double to a five-card minor suit or to a good four-card major at the two-level.

MORE ON (NEGATIVE) DOUBLES

After an opening 1♥ or 1♠ bid, a new-suit bid at the two-level in competition is forcing, but does not promise a rebid. Since the opening one-bids in diamonds, hearts and spades are limited, responder should be somewhat conservative with a balanced hand. I dread situations (whether playing Standard or the System) where partner makes a negative double and I hold 5-3-3-2 distribution. Should I rebid my ragged five-card suit or one of my three-card suits? When responder holds four or more of an unbid major, the negative double is worthwhile, but not when there are only minor suits left — which is why I like to play optional penalty doubles as described earlier after 1♠-(2♥) or 1♥-(2♠).

In BWS, 9 or 10 points in responder's hand may be enough for game when opener has extra values, so he likes to show some strength to avoid missing game. In the System, when the opening bid is a major and responder has 9 or 10 points, with a singleton or doubleton in opener's major, he knows that any game is unlikely, and he has no assurance that he will find a fit if he makes a negative double. So he should tend to be conservative. If opener has a good six-card major, he will often rebid it without encouragement, or if he has a two-suited hand, he will usually show the second suit. Bidding may be dangerous, but at least responder won't expect much extra strength since the opening bid was limited.

Suppose opener holds 5-4-3-1 distribution and opens his five-card major. LHO overcalls his singleton. While responder can bid a new suit at the two-level with length and about ten points (not promising a rebid),

7-9 points with a five-card suit is hardly enough. As already mentioned, opener can safely reopen with a double with 13 or 14 points, or even a good 12, not expecting responder to leave it in more than one time out of ten, but allowing him to bid his other suit when there is a 5-4 or 4-4 fit. The ‘safety factor’ is that responder knows opener doesn’t have a good hand, so he won’t be optimistic about leaving the double in, especially when he knows opener usually has a singleton rather than a doubleton. Nor will responder make a jump bid to show a maximum for his previous pass since game is unlikely. After the double, there has to be a strong probability of finding at least an eight-card fit since the reopening double almost guarantees that opener has a singleton in the opponent’s suit and probably only a five-card suit of his own.

Things are somewhat different after a minor-suit opening. Negative doubles and negative free bids are useful. After 1♦-(2♣) responder should double with

♠Kxxx ♥Axx ♦Kxxx ♣xx

If opener bids 2♠, responder will happily pass, since, with a four-card major, opener can’t have more than 14 points. If he bids 2♥, responder will correct to 3♦ (when the opponents overcall a minor, you assume partner has the other minor). You don’t need to worry that partner will bid 3♥ or 4♥ over your double, since opener is severely limited if he has a four-card major. You also don’t need to worry about a penalty pass since opener will not pass with fewer than four good clubs. If responder holds

♠Kx ♥AQxxxx ♦AJx ♣xx

he should also make a negative double, planning to bid hearts next round (forcing). Again, there is little risk of opener passing the double. Weaken responder’s hand to

♠Kx ♥AQxxxx ♦Jxx ♣xx

and he should bid 2♥ (non-forcing). With three- or four-card heart support, opener will raise to either 3♥ or 4♥, depending on whether he has wasted values in clubs, etc. With a singleton heart, opener will bid 3♦ (in the unlikely event that his suit was clubs, he would have passed the double). Opener will seldom have a doubleton heart (he might with 3-2-6-2 or 4-2-5-2 distribution) but if he does, he should pass your 2♥ bid.

After a 1♣ opening and an overcall at the one-level, a pass denies a hand with 6 points and a four-card major that could be bid at the one-level, or 9+ points and any five-card suit that could be bid at the two-level, or any 7+ points with a balanced hand. Of course, you could also have a stack in the opponent's suit and be hoping for a reopening double! These requirements are somewhat arbitrary and you may prefer different ranges or different meanings. When the overcall is at the two-level, any suit bid is forcing for one round and should show 7+ points and a decent suit (at least five long). With a longer suit, the point requirements should be reduced. Just as in uncontested auctions, most responses to 1♣ should not be forcing to game. They should, however, promise a rebid (most of the time) if opener bids a suit at the cheapest level, but not when he bids any number of notrump.

Earlier I said that after 1♣-1♦ or 1♣-1♥, a rebid of 1♥ or 1♠ by opener showed at least a five-card suit. If the bidding goes

OPENER	LHO	RESPONDER	RHO
1♣	1♠	dbl	pass
?			

should a 2♥ bid guarantee a five-card suit? I don't think so. The double implies support for an unbid major, although it does not guarantee it. So I think opener can bid a four-card major, and responder will probably bid another suit with a good hand and less than four-card support. And if opener has extra values, he should probably cuebid with only a four-card suit and jump with a five-card or longer suit. Admittedly, interference can create problems for us just as it can for Standard bidders.

Doubles of high-level bids should show general strength, not a stack in the opponents' trump suit. What do you do with this hand

♠ — ♥ A Q x x x x ♦ K x ♣ Q 8 x x x

if you open 1♥, next hand bids 4♠ and partner doubles? I think you should pass. A typical hand for partner's double is

♠ K x x ♥ x x ♦ A J x x x ♣ K x x

or

♠ x x x ♥ K x ♦ Q J 10 x ♣ A x x x

Partner may even have two spade tricks, but wherever his high cards are, you can probably set 4♠. If your clubs were headed by the QJ10, you could probably make 5♣ when partner held ♣Kxx (plus other high cards), but with such a weak suit, you need to find a very good fit to make any contract at the five-level. Rather than take a probable minus score, I prefer to gamble that we can set 4♠.

Since the 1♣ opening has an upper limit of 19 or 20 points (with a few exceptions) and powerful distributional hands are usually opened 2♣ or 2♦, the opponents have less to gain and more to lose by preempting over the limited 1♣ than over a Precision club. Admittedly, however, there are a few sequences that cause problems. For example:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	1♠	pass	3♠
?			

when holding

♠ x ♥ AKxxx ♦ AKxxx ♣ Kx

With 18 or 19 points and a balanced hand, you should just pass. With the hand shown, no bid is safe but you don't need to find partner with much to make a contract at the four-level. I have been told that Meckstroth and Rodwell double with hands like this to show they have more than one place to play. The conservative approach is to double and bid 4♦ if partner bids 4♣ — and to pass if he bids 4♦. (Partner will probably pass the double with a balanced hand.) The more aggressive approach is to double and then bid 4♥ over either minor-suit response. That would definitely be my choice if the heart suit were slightly stronger (say ♥AKQxx or ♥AKJ10x). If your hand were

♠ x ♥ AKxx ♦ AKJxxx ♣ Kx

you would have no alternative to bidding diamonds over clubs or passing if partner bid 4♦. Since the double shows more than one place to play, you have to have at least four hearts to double since with both minors and enough strength to bid — say

♠ x ♥ Ax ♦ AKxxx ♣ AQJxx

— you would bid 3NT, which could hardly be natural.

Finally, after a 2♣ or 2♦ opening, a double of an overcall is for penalty, as it is after an opening weak two-bid in a major. In the latter case, opener has described his hand and usually has nothing more to say.

MORE ON OVERCALLS

That is about all I have to say about doubles, but I do want to take the discussion of overcalls a little further. You may recall that, in an uncontested auction, a 2♥ or 2♠ response to 1♣ shows a very weak hand with a long major. Bidding two of a major in response to a 1♦ opening shows a good hand with which standard bidders would bid 1♥ or 1♠, then jump to 3♥ or 3♠ next round. I haven't actually discussed 1♥-2♠, but that should probably also be weak. But when the opponents overcall at the one-level (as distinguished from making a takeout double), I think the priorities should change.

Playing BWS with Michael Schreiber one time, I held something like

♠ Qx ♥ KJxxxxx ♦ xx ♣ Jx

Michael opened 1♣, RHO bid 1♦ and I bid 1♥, since I thought I was too strong for a preemptive bid. LHO bid 3♦ and everyone passed. Partner had something like

♠ Axxx ♥ Ax ♦ xx ♣ AQxxx

He couldn't bid 3♥ with a doubleton when I might have held only a four-card suit; yet we belonged in 3♥ and had a play for 4♥. Michael suggested that when I had the sort of hand on which I would bid 1♥ followed by 2♥ next round, it would be better to bid 2♥ immediately. Then he could have competed to 3♥ with his hand. For the 2♥ bid, one could also hold a six-card suit in a hand like

♠ Ax ♥ QJ10xxx ♦ xx ♣ Jxx

Perhaps it wouldn't work on the original example hand, but with some hands, the 2♥ bid might shut the opponents out of the bidding or force the overcaller to guess whether a bid by his partner was weak or strong. Rather than save a jump to the two-level for a hopelessly weak hand, it would be better to bid it as a sort of weak, limited hand, so as to find your 6-2 or 7-2 fit before the opponents could foul up your bidding with a preemptive raise.

Besides, when the opponents overcall, partner often has a singleton in their suit, which makes it slightly less likely that he has a singleton in your long suit. So there is less risk in bidding 1♠ followed by 3♠, for example, with an invitational hand.

I think the same approach should apply after other one-level openings. After an overcall, instead of jumping to the two-level to show a very weak hand after a 1♣ bid or a 1♥ opening, or a good hand after a 1♦ opening, it would more often be useful to have the jump show a long suit with a limited hand. I wouldn't blame you if you decided to reject this suggestion since it would be just one more complication to remember and only marginally better than playing the same as in an uncontested auction. But in an attempt to achieve perfection, I am compelled to recommend what I believe is best.

The following is an interesting theoretical question. Partner opens 1♣, next hand passes and you bid 1♥. LHO bids 1♠ and partner makes a support double. What should your various bids mean?

LHO	PARTNER	RHO	YOU
	1♣	pass	1♥
1♠	dbl ¹	pass	?

1. Support double — three hearts.

With five or more hearts, you will probably bid 2♥, 3♥ or 4♥, depending upon how strong your hand is. However, with a hand in the possible slam range, you are too strong to bid 4♥, which will end the auction. If you have only four hearts and 9+ points, it is quite likely that you belong in 3NT or, if neither of you has a spade stopper, perhaps 4♥ on a 4-3 fit, or five of a minor. Obviously, a jump bid in a new suit or a cuebid should be forcing. But what would 2♣ or 2♦ show? Should these bids be attempts to sign off, perhaps with a five- or six-card side suit? Or should they create a one-round force? That is the question.

If LHO had not overcalled, and partner had raised to 2♥ with three-card support, you wouldn't have any alternatives to passing with a minimum response. If your 2♣ or 2♦ bid is an attempt to play there, and partner has three hearts and a doubleton in your minor, should he pass or take you back to hearts? If he does bid 2♥, the hand will be easier to defend than if you had just bid 2♥ over his support double. I think trying to find a safer partscore at the two-level is less important than being able to show where

your side values are. Not only does this apply to mediocre hands where you are looking for the best game or possibly stopping below game when partner has an unsuitable hand; it also applies to strong hands with a long heart suit, with which responder wants to investigate a slam. So my recommendation is to play all new suits as forcing and give up on finding a better partscore contract at the two-level than 2♥.

THE SYSTEM IN ACTION



First, I'll mention some practical tips when playing the System. The opponents are entitled to know what you are playing. They should not have to study your convention card from beginning to end, but can assume that if you are doing something unusual, you will tell them. My suggestion is to say, before everyone pulls their cards out of the board, 'We play light opening bids in the majors; also a forcing, but usually limited, one club opening. Our 1 ♦ opening shows an unbalanced hand, not necessarily with a diamond suit, but denies a five-card major.' Some opponents will ask, 'How light are your major openings?' In that case, say, 'The normal range is 10-14 high card points, but possibly as few as 8 or 9 with a long suit and a good playing hand.' If they ask about the one club opening, say, 'Usually 15-19 points, but occasionally much stronger.'

Your pre-bidding announcement doesn't relieve you of the obligation to alert almost any opening bid and to give a brief explanation if asked. The opponents may be concentrating on other things, and they may have forgotten your original announcement. I don't think it is enough to say, 'It may be short,' when asked about the one diamond opening. You should say, 'It is artificial and may be *very* short. It denies a five-card major. The range is

usually 11 to 14 but it can be as many as 16 HCP without a four-card major. It also shows an unbalanced hand.' Upon hearing your pre-alert, the opponents may decide to overcall 1NT a bit lighter over your major openings, or they may agree to play (or not play) the same defense over your strong, but usually limited, 1♣ as they do over an unlimited strong club. Or they may decide to play a 2♦ overcall of your 1♦ bid as natural and a 2♥ overcall to show a weak hand with both majors (my recommendation if they ask for it). That is why you should make an announcement in advance. If you are playing the System locally, after two or three occasions, the opponents will probably ask you to skip the pre-announcement but alert the unusual bids when they come up. That includes all two-over-one responses to one of a major. Tell them that a 2♣ response usually, but not always, shows a club suit, and it is forcing to game; that 2♦ could be bid with only a three-card suit and an invitational hand since 2♣ is forcing to game; that 2♥ over 1♠ is natural but is not forcing, even for one round.

I hate it when someone hands me 60 or 70 pages of notes of a system he wants me to play with 20 to 30 bidding sequences on each page. My rote memory was never very good, and it is far worse now that I am getting old. But I can still remember things when they seem logical to me or when they follow a pattern. That is why, instead of just giving you a lot of sequences to remember, I try to explain the reasons for whatever I suggest. Also, I try to create a pattern by having similar meanings for similar sequences. For example, a 2NT opening, a 2NT rebid after a 2♦ opening, and a 2NT rebid after 1♣-1♦ or 1♣-1♦; 1♥-1♠ all have the same system of responses and rebids, including Puppet Stayman since in none of these sequences does opener deny a five-card major. After 1♣-1♦; 1♠ or 1♣-1♦; 1♥, two or three of a minor has a similar meaning (natural but 6-7 HCP for the two-level and 8-9 HCP for the three-level). When there are differences in similar-sounding sequences, there is a logical reason: 1♣-1♥; 2NT is virtually identical to 1♣-1♠; 2NT, but both of these sequences are different from 1♣-1♦; 2NT. Why? Because a major-suit response guarantees 5 or 6 points while a 1♦ response could be made with a Yarborough. After a 1NT opening, responder can invite game by using Stayman, followed by bidding 2NT; if he used Stayman and follows it with a minor-suit bid at the three-level, it is forcing. After 1♣-1♦; 1NT, an immediate raise to 2NT is natural and invitational; a transfer to a major is weak, and Stayman is the beginning of a signoff sequence. Why? Because if responder has a major suit, he cannot

have a good hand. So there is a reason for every deviation from the meanings of similar-sounding sequences.

Although there are many sequences that have specific meanings, there are ample opportunities to use your imagination and to draw inferences from what partner *didn't* do. The bidding goes

You	Partner
1♣	1♦
1♠	3♦

and perhaps you can't remember whether 3♦ is forcing. If partner had five or more diamonds, with or without a four-card major, and enough strength to force to game, he could have responded 2♦ initially; therefore this sequence must be invitational rather than forcing.

Let's consider some hands where you need to use your imagination. You open 1♠ with

♠ A x x x x ♥ x ♦ A K Q x x x ♣ x

LHO doubles and partner bids 3♣; RHO bids 3♥. What should you do?

LHO	PARTNER	RHO	YOU
			1♠
dbl	3♣	3♥	?

It is very tempting to bid 4♦ to show your suit, and it looks safe to do so. But it is not! Partner's 3♣ bid over the double must be preemptive in the System for the same reasons it would be preemptive in BWS. It sounds as though the opponents have a slight balance of strength and, unless the opponents have ten hearts between them, partner must have at least three hearts. I think the odds are almost 2 to 1 that partner has ten cards in hearts and clubs. And you can't expect spades to break well. The takeout doubler should be short in spades and partner is also short in spades, which leaves a lot of spades for RHO to hold. My partner bid 4♦ and was set 1100 (not vulnerable!) when I took him back to spades with two spades and a singleton diamond, since both spades and diamonds split 6-0. He could hardly anticipate quite so bad a break but, if he had tried to visualize the probable distribution of all the hands, he would have realized that 4♦ had almost no chance to gain, and it could result in a disaster. I held

♠ x x ♥ Q 10 x x ♦ x ♣ K J 10 9 x x

and I probably should have passed 4♦ since I knew we were in trouble and hadn't been doubled yet. The takeout doubler passed 4♦ with

♠ — ♥ A Q x x ♦ J 10 9 x x x ♣ A x x

because his diamonds were so good, and he didn't think it possible that we would stay in diamonds. (I think he should have doubled.)

Here are some more hands from actual play that require you to use your imagination.

West

♠ —

♥ A 10 x

♦ A Q J x x x

♣ Q J 10 x

1♦

2♦

4♣

4♥

East

♠ A 10 x x x x

♥ x

♦ 10 x x x

♣ A x

1♠

3♥

4♦

6♦

My (East's) only problem was whether partner would interpret 3♥ as a splinter bid. This was the first time partner had played the System. *But why shouldn't this bid be a splinter?* Remember, if there is no good reason for playing differently, you should assume undiscussed sequences have the same meaning as in BWS. Horrors! I am not sure that 3♥ is officially a splinter in BWS, but most of the players I know play it that way.

West

♠ J x x x x

♥ A Q

♦ —

♣ A K Q 10 x x

1♣

5♠

East

♠ K 10 9 x x

♥ K x x

♦ J x x

♣ x x

1♠

6♠

The 5♠ bid is a bit of a gamble, but what are the alternatives? Responder could have held ♠Axxxx or even ♠Axxx for his acceptance of the invitation. The former should give you an excellent play for slam and the latter an adequate play. From your point of view, there should be no losers outside spades unless the opening lead is a heart through your A-Q; in that case, you may need the heart finesse. But if hearts are not led (and there was no indication of your distribution from the bidding since the opening bid was artificial), partner should be able to discard any heart losers on the club suit. There is also the chance that partner will hold the king of hearts or perhaps the ace of diamonds for a quick discard. Since you didn't give partner an opportunity to show whether he had losers outside the trump suit covered, you must believe (or hope) that there are no losers outside trumps, and that only responder's trump holding is crucial. On the actual deal, the odds favor holding the trump losers to one. The queen of trumps could be onside, or North could hold the singleton ace. A good partner would certainly bid 7♠ with the three top trumps, and probably should even with ♠AKxxx, no matter what else he did or didn't have.

West

♠ x
♥ AKxx
♦ J10x
♣ KJxxx

1♦
1NT
2♥
4♣

East

♠ xxxxx
♥ x
♦ AKQ
♣ A Qxxx

1♠
2♦
3♣
6♣

There are several interesting features about the bidding. Normally, with a good hand and a bad suit, it is a mistake to show your bad suit for fear that partner will bid a slam in that suit. But this is an exceptional case. After opening 1♦, opener cannot be strong enough to take control of the bidding and drive the auction to 6♠. Ironically, the worse his spade 'fit' is, the better your prospects for slam. If he has a singleton or void in spades, you almost certainly belong in slam, while if he has two or more spades, you probably

just belong in game. The best way to find out how many spades opener has is for responder to bid 1♠.

By rebidding 1NT, opener showed either a singleton or doubleton spade. No club bid by responder would be forcing, so he bid 2♦, forcing either to game or four of a minor. This call also asked opener to clarify his distribution. The 2♥ bid showed four hearts and a singleton spade (since with 2-4-2-5 or 2-4-5-2, opener would have rebid 2♠ to show a doubleton, having already denied three spades). Opener could have held 1-4-4-4, 1-4-3-5 or 1-4-5-3 distribution, but the subsequent 4♣ showed greater length in clubs; presumably with 1-4-4-4, he would have bid 3NT. If opener had shown two or more spades, a slam would have been very unlikely and almost impossible to bid, and the final contract would have been 3NT or five of a minor.

In an earlier chapter, I gave an example where partner opened 1♦, RHO bid four of a major and you wanted to play five of partner's minor. It was logical to bid 4NT to ask partner to choose a minor. A somewhat similar sequence is the following: partner opens 2♣ and an opponent bids 5♣. If you hold

♠xx ♥xx ♦Kxxxxx ♣Q10x

you are going to double for penalty. With something like

♠Kxx ♥Jx ♦KJxxxx ♣xx

you would pass, at least if you were vulnerable and the opponents were not. You don't want to discourage partner from bidding if he is both strong and distributional, although it is likely that he will simply double and you will pass. But suppose you hold

♠Qxx ♥Kxx ♦Axxxxx ♣x

You want partner to play at the five-level (or possibly the six-level) in his major, but you don't know which major he has. So you should bid 5♥. Which is more likely: that you have a great heart suit and want to play in hearts no matter which major partner has, or that you want to play in five of partner's major? Based on frequency, I would say the latter.

QUIZ

The following is a very difficult quiz. Unlike the previous quizzes, I am not at all confident that my solutions are the best, but they will at least provide food for thought.

1. The bidding has gone

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	4♥	4♠	1♥ ?

You hold

(a) ♠KQ ♥AKxxx ♦Qxx ♣xxx [To Answer](#)

(b) ♠xxx ♥AKxxxx ♦KJxx ♣x [To Answer](#)

(c) ♠xxx ♥AQJxxx ♦x ♣KQx [To Answer](#)

2. The bidding has gone

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	pass	2♠	1♣ ?

You hold

(a) ♠xxx ♥AKQxxx ♦Ax ♣Qxx [To Answer](#)

(b) ♠Ax ♥AJxxxx ♦Ax ♣QJx [To Answer](#)

3. The bidding has gone

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♣	1♦	?

You hold

(a) ♠ x x ♥ K Q x x x x ♦ x x ♣ Q x x [To Answer](#)

(b) ♠ J x x x x ♥ K Q x x ♦ x x ♣ J x [To Answer](#)

4. The bidding has gone

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♣	2♠	dbl
pass	3♥	pass	?

You hold

(a) ♠ x x ♥ K x x ♦ K J x x ♣ J 10 x x [To Answer](#)

(b) ♠ x x ♥ K x x ♦ K Q x x ♣ J 10 x x [To Answer](#)

5. The bidding has gone

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♦	2♣	?

You hold

(a) ♠ x ♥ K J 10 x x x ♦ K 10 x ♣ x x x [To Answer](#)

(b) ♠ K Q J x x ♥ A x x x ♦ x ♣ x x x [To Answer](#)

6. The bidding has gone

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2♠	dbl	3♠	1♦
pass	4♣	pass	pass
			?

You hold

(a) ♠ Qxx ♥ Kx ♦ AQJ10xxx ♣ x [To Answer](#)

(b) ♠ xxx ♥ Kxx ♦ AJxxxx ♣ Ax [To Answer](#)

7. The bidding has gone

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	2♣	4♦	?

You hold

(a) ♠ Kxx ♥ J10 ♦ Jxx ♣ Qxxxx [To Answer](#)

(b) ♠ Qxx ♥ J10 ♦ x ♣ AJxxxxx [To Answer](#)

8. The bidding has gone

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	2♦	3♠	?

You hold

(a) ♠ xxx ♥ Jxx ♦ 10xxx ♣ xxx [To Answer](#)

(b) ♠ J9xx ♥ Axxx ♦ Jx ♣ xxx [To Answer](#)

MY ANSWERS

- 1(a) Double. You have one sure trump trick and only a five-card suit with a balanced hand, which means that you are fairly sure of two tricks in the majors, possibly three. If partner has a balanced hand, it won't matter whether you double or he doubles, but if he has something like

♠ x ♥ QJxx ♦ AJx ♣ K10xxx

he will probably bid 5♥ if you pass. If partner is extremely distributional, he may pull your double, but you should make a strong suggestion that your side defend. [To Question](#)

- (b) Pass. The pass suggests that partner should bid 5♥ with a distributional hand. Not only are you better on offense than with Hand (a), but you also have less defense. Even if you don't make 5♥, it may be a good sacrifice over 4♠. But you shouldn't bid 5♥ yourself. Incidentally, 'forcing passes' do not apply to sequences such as this. [To Question](#)
- (c) This time you have the rare hand with which you should bid 5♥ yourself. Partner is almost certain to be short in spades, and he needs very little else for you to make 5♥. If you are down one in 5♥, it is unlikely that you can set 4♠. [To Question](#)
- 2(a) You should bid 3♥. There is a slight danger that partner will play you for a better hand and raise to game, but if you pass, what can partner do? Since you have a strong suit, it is unlikely you will be doubled, even if partner has a Yarborough. It is likely that you can take nine tricks in hearts and the opponents can take eight or nine tricks in spades. Passing risks losing 6 IMPs, while bidding 3♥ is not likely to cost more than three or four. At matchpoints, also, you have more to gain than to lose by bidding. [To Question](#)
- (b) It hurts to pass, but bidding 3♥ is very dangerous; you are simply gambling on finding heart support. If you had bid hearts earlier, you could double now to show extra values and give partner the option to pass, bid a new suit or raise to 3♥. But if you double in this situation, partner will have no idea what to do. He will probably bid his longer minor and get a minus score instead of a plus. [To Question](#)

3(a) I think you should bid 2♥ so that partner will know what to do over a 3♦ bid (which is extremely likely to follow). In competition, 2♥ does not show a hopelessly weak hand in the System. [To Question](#)

(b) I would double, but there are pros and cons to making a negative double with unequal lengths in the majors. With a somewhat stronger hand, you would bid 1♠ and plan to bid hearts later. It is not clear whether you can afford to bid spades now and hearts later, so I like a negative double in anticipation of a preemptive raise in diamonds. [To Question](#)

4(a) Pass, but in my opinion, this is a very close decision. Partner may have a five-card heart suit with near-minimum values, or he may have only a four-card suit. With a five-card suit and extra values, he should have jumped to game; with a four-card suit and extra values, he might have cuebid. If you bid anything, it should be 3♠ in an attempt to get to 3NT, but I think the percentage bid is to pass. Give partner something like

♠Ax ♥AQxx ♦Axx ♣Qxxx

and you would have a very poor play for any game. [To Question](#)

(b) This hand is marginally better than the one in part (a), and now I would bid 3♠. Your hand still wouldn't provide a good play for any game opposite the example hand shown above, but it would provide a good play opposite the right minimum hand with five hearts, like

♠Axx ♥AQxxx ♦Axx ♣Qx

or even

♠Ax ♥AQxxx ♦Axx ♣Qxx

[To Question](#)

5(a) I think you should bid 3♥, no matter what range this is supposed to show. The opponents must have at least eight spades between them, and more likely nine or ten, so it is important to shut them out, if possible. If partner has

♠Axx ♥Ax ♦AJxxxx ♣xx

you belong in 4♥, while the opponents have a cheap sacrifice in spades. If partner has

♠Jxx ♥Qx ♦AQJxxx ♣Kx

the opponents can probably make 4♠ (despite both sides having 20 HCP), and it is even more important to shut out a spade bid.

[To Question](#)

- (b) I think you should pass. If you belong in spades, partner may reopen with a double. If you bid 2♠ and partner has a singleton spade, which is quite likely, he will bid 3♦ and you will probably go minus instead of plus.

[To Question](#)

- 6(a) You have a very close decision whether to bid 4♦ or pass. Partner, by bidding 4♣, has warned you not to bid diamonds, so if you bid them anyway, he knows you must have a very strong suit. The question is not which is the better suit, your diamonds or partner's clubs; the question is whether you can use his hand better than he can use yours. Again, the decision is close, and I make no recommendation either way.

[To Question](#)

- (b) I think you should bid 4♥! Partner may hold a hand like

♠ x x ♥ A Q J x x ♦ x ♣ K Q x x x

with which he hoped to bid 3♥, forcing, on the second round (since 2♥ directly would have been a negative free bid). Even if partner has four hearts and six clubs, 4♥ might be the best contract. Besides, if partner has four mediocre hearts, over your 4♥ bid, he can bid 5♣ (with six clubs) since he would have expected you to bid 4♥ over 3♠ with a four-card heart suit, almost regardless of strength. [To Question](#)

- 7(a) You should pass. If partner has a game-forcing hand or a very strong suit with distribution, he will probably bid four of his major. With 6-3-2-2 distribution (the six-card suit being a major), most of the time he will double and you will pass. A double by you would discourage him from bidding.

[To Question](#)

- (b) I think you should bid 4♥. You don't know which major partner has, but you are more likely to be bidding 4♥ to say 'pass or correct' than you are to have an independent major suit of your own. [To Question](#)

- 8(a) You should double, since if you pass, partner is bound to do something. What you want him to do is to pass. You could have a Yarborough, or you might have values in the opponent's suit. [To Question](#)

- (b) You should pass and hope that partner can bid a four-card major. With most hands he will double, and you will leave it in rather than speculate on finding a fit at the four- or five-level. [To Question](#)

A COMPARISON OF SYSTEMS



If you are used to a Standard bidding structure, you will have found the System very different. In this chapter, I am going to summarize the major differences, and talk about the pros and cons of each approach. First, though, let me warn you: it is very difficult to be objective about one's own system. But I shall do my best.

The following are the major differences between Bridge World Standard and the System:

BWS	THE SYSTEM
1. Strong notrumps (15-17).	Weak notrumps (12-14).
2. Wide limit opening bids.	Narrow limit opening bids.
3. Most 2/1 sequences are forcing to game.	Most 2/1 sequences are not forcing to game.
4. 1NT over a major semi-forcing.	1NT over a major not close to forcing.
5. A diamond opening shows diamonds.	A diamond opening shows an unbalanced hand, not necessarily diamonds.
6. A 1♣ bid is natural.	1♣ is artificial and strong but somewhat limited (usually).
7. 2♣ is the only strong opening bid.	Multiple strong bids.

Let's look at each of these in turn.

1. NOTRUMP RANGE

The first difference is not revolutionary. Since the beginning of contract bridge, players have adopted various ranges for an opening 1NT bid, the currently popular 15-17 being only the most recent. Even today, many experts prefer weaker notrumps or like to play ranges that vary with the vulnerability or position. I think the weak notrump is good, in itself, but the major question is how it affects other bids. Does it create too large a range for other notrump-type hands, such as raises of notrump responses or reopening notrump bids? The answer is clearly 'No'. However, when not playing the System I usually play a strong notrump. Why?

If I were to open one of a suit, intending to rebid notrump next round to show 15-17 HCP, LHO might overcall. If this bid is followed by two passes, even if the overcall is at the one-level, can I afford to rebid 1NT with 15 points? No, because it is too dangerous. LHO may double now to show extra values and RHO may leave it in. But the main problem is that it leaves partner in the dark. Does my rebid show 15 or 19 points? Should he ever raise?

Next case: suppose I open one of a suit and partner responds 1NT. Should I raise with a balanced 16 or 17 points? If I don't, we may miss game. If I do, we may be too high opposite his 6-or 7-point hand. Suppose I hold

♠ Kx ♥ AQxxx ♦ KQx ♣ Q10x

or

♠ Kx ♥ AQxxx ♦ Kxx ♣ 10xx

Playing strong notrumps, I would open the first hand with 1NT to avoid rebid problems. But if playing weak notrumps, what would 1♥-1♠; 1NT show — 12-14 HCP or 15-17 HCP? These problems are not insuperable, and many experts like weak notrumps in spite of them. If the problems are eliminated, as they are in the System, which calls for a 1♣ opening on strong notrump hands, then that makes the weak notrump even more desirable. Based on frequency of occurrence and its preemptive effect, I think the weak notrump, as part of the System, is a big winner.

2. OPENING BID RANGES

Putting an upper limit on the opening 1♥ and 1♠ bids must be an advantage for several reasons. Precision does much the same thing, but theoretically, the System's range for one of a major is one point lower at both the top and bottom than Precision's. As a practical matter, in fact, it is almost the same range as is actually used in Precision by many players. While limiting the range of opening bids is an advantage, the question again is how it affects other bids (primarily the club openings which are no longer natural). So we shall defer further discussion on the subject until we discuss the 1♣ opening.

3. & 4. THE 1NT RESPONSE AND 2/1 AUCTIONS

Not playing a forcing notrump response to one of a major is a slight (but very slight) disadvantage. However, the latest version of BWS plays the 1NT response only as semi-forcing (although that seems to me to be a mistake), so comparing semi-forcing responses to natural, non-forcing responses is a virtual tie. Playing the 1NT response non-forcing or semi-forcing changes the rules on two-over-one responses, but a forcing or almost forcing to game two-over-one is not really needed when the opening bids are so limited. In the System, responder no longer needs several rounds of bidding to find out about opener's strength and distribution. Besides, if we want to force to game, we have one sure way to do it: by responding 2♣.

5. THE 1♦ OPENING

Using the diamond opening to show an unbalanced hand (and defining its range as 11-14 points when there is a four-card major, 11-16 points when there is not) is very radical and controversial. It definitely requires a different kind of hand evaluation by the responder and even a certain amount of guesswork in a few sequences. However, while the opening 1♦ bid itself is ambiguous, opener's distribution is usually clarified after the second round of bidding, and responder knows more at that stage than do Standard bidders. When opener shows a four-card major, it often makes the bidding easier, allowing responder to detect misfits and pass at a safe level. Also, the 1♦

opening is a bit harder to compete against since the opponents don't know, at least immediately, whether opener's longer minor is clubs or diamonds. Can it be right to make a takeout double of a System 1 ♦ opening with this hand?

♠ A x x x ♥ K x x x ♦ K Q J x ♣ x

The player holding this hand is pretty sure your suit is clubs, but will his partner know? If he passes now, will he be able to recover later by competing at the two-or three-level? I think it is an advantage for responder to know that opener has an unbalanced hand. I think the diamond opening might have a very slight disadvantage as compared to BWS, but it has a definite advantage over Precision where the 1 ♦ opening is even more nebulous. Actually, on second thought, I take back part of that concession: the more I play the System, the more I think that the advantages of the diamond opening outweigh its disadvantages.

6. THE 1♣ OPENING

Artificial club openings are probably more popular in Europe than in North America. However, not everyone who uses an artificial club plays it as a strong bid. In the Polish Club and the Swedish Club and some of the Italian systems, a one club opening can show either a near-minimum balanced hand or a strong distributional hand. But except for Katz and Cohen (many years ago), I don't know of anyone who suggested placing a top limit on the strong, artificial club bid. In the original version of the System, the 1♣ bid was not even forcing! (At that stage in its development, the System also called for intermediate opening two-bids on hands with strong major suits like

♠ A x x ♥ K Q J 10 x x ♦ K J x ♣ x

to avoid playing in 1♣, down two or three, vulnerable, when there was *known* to be a better contract.) Responder was required to bid over 1♣ with 5 or more points. Even when responder had 4 points or less, the club bidder's left-hand opponent would frequently take a bid, and fourth hand would only pass the hand out with a good club suit. Considering everything, I estimated that the 1♣ bid would be passed out only 4% of the time. Would you refuse to make a preempt (or any other bid) if the odds were 1 in 25 that it could work out badly? Of course not.

But many of my friends and partners were appalled by the idea of a non-forcing, artificial, strong club. I was finally convinced to tinker with the 1♦ response, and Stephen Goldstein suggested the Kokish type of 1♥ rebid by opener. So the 1♣ bid is now forcing, and the hands that fit the former intermediate two-bids are now opened 1♣ on the theory that a good six- or seven-card major is equivalent to an extra HCP or two. The reason for not playing 1♦ as a negative response, or playing other bids as forcing to game, is that I believe a natural response of 1♥ or 1♠, with less than game-forcing values, makes both game bidding and slam bidding more accurate than Precision-type responses. Responder can pass on the second round when he has a near-Yarborough after a 1♦ response (except when opener's rebid is 1♥, 3♥ or 3♠), or when he has a bare minimum for a 1♥ or 1♠ response.

Here's one rationale for my contention that natural responses are better than Precision-type responses to 1♣. Suppose you (responder) hold

♠ Kx ♥ KJxx ♦ xxx ♣ xxxx

Partner opens a Precision 1♣ and you respond 1♦ to show less than a positive (game-forcing) response. Partner bids 1♠ and you can't bid 2♥ since that would show five or more. So you bid 1NT, which has two disadvantages. First, if you play in a notrump contract, you will be the declarer, when it is better for partner to be declarer. The other disadvantage is that you haven't been able to show your strength — just slightly less than a positive response. If partner continues with 2♣ or 2♦ over your 1NT rebid, you will probably bid 2♠ and never show your heart suit. If partner holds

♠ A10xxx ♥ AQx ♦ AQJx ♣ x

he will pass 2♠ since you could hold a much worse hand for this sequence. And no one ever bids hearts, which is in fact your best denomination. Let's make your (responder's) hand slightly better:

♠ Jx ♥ KJxx ♦ Axx ♣ xxxx

Over 1♣, playing Precision, you would either bid 1NT or make some other bid showing a balanced hand strong enough for a positive response. If the other bid was 2♦ (the most popular choice) and partner bids 2♠, could you bid 3♥ now to show a four-card heart suit, or would it just show a concentration of strength, a hand like

♠ Qx ♥ AKx ♦ xxxx ♣ xxxx

Now, of course, one can design hands that will show any system at its worst, but I think natural responses, even when responder is not strong enough to force to game, are far superior to a semi-automatic 1♦ response with less than game-forcing values. But you do need some way to show a weak hand. If that way is to bid 1♦, what can you bid with these hands?

♠xxx ♥Axx ♦AJxx ♣xxx

or

♠xx ♥xxx ♦AKJ ♣Jxxxx

Which do you prefer — 1NT, 2♦ or 2♣? In the System, the 1♦ response shows a *potentially* weak hand. With 18-19 points and a balanced hand, opener can bid 1♥, transferring to 1♠, and then bid 1NT. After doing his duty by keeping the bidding open, responder can pass almost any bid opener makes, knowing that there is no game possible opposite his near-Yarborough. A 1♦ response to 1♣ denies a four-card major unless the hand is very weak — less than six points. So, with a strong hand like

♠AQxx ♥x ♦AK10xxx ♣Qx

with which responder plans to bid his major later, a 2♦ response is necessary so that when he bids spades later, partner will know that he has a good hand with diamonds and spades.

7. STRONG OPENINGS

The idea of using an opening 2♣ bid to show a strong hand with a five-card or longer major is the brain child of John Hancock, a very fine player who mostly retired from bridge in the 1960s. It was his concept that a major-suit rebid at the two-level after a 2♣ opening would be non-forcing. It was also his idea that an opening 2♦ bid would show a powerful hand without a five-card major. The idea of using various limit bids for opener was his concept, one which I carried (in his opinion) to a ridiculous extreme. He prefers simplicity, while I don't mind complications. Although we started working on the System together, we parted ways on an amicable basis.

The partner with whom I have had the best success playing the System is Stephen Goldstein, who made various suggestions, many of which I adopted. We won the first four team games in which we played as partners (two

at Regionals, two at Sectionals), and did pretty well at the Nationals. (I should point out that my idea of ‘pretty well’ is different from Hamman’s, Meckwell’s, Zia’s or Rosenberg’s.)

So much for what I see as the various advantages of the System. If I am going to be honest, I should also mention a few weaknesses. There is an obvious issue with the ambiguous 1♦ opening. When the bidding goes

LHO	PARTNER	RHO	YOU
	1♦	1♠	dbl
pass	1NT	pass	?

and you hold

♠xxxx ♥Axix ♦Axix ♣x

you know that if partner has a diamond suit, or is 5-4 in the minors, you belong in diamonds, but he is much more likely to have a club suit. So you don’t dare to bid 2♣ for fear partner will pass, and you don’t want to bid 2♦, forcing, which may land you in an even worse contract at a higher level when partner has a shortage in diamonds. So you will probably pass partner’s 1NT bid and be sorry if he really has diamonds.

When partner opens 1♦ and you have a strong hand with a long club suit, you can’t respond 2♣, since that just shows a single raise of either clubs or diamonds. So you have to bid 1NT and do something strange later to show that you have clubs. Most of the time you can find a way to solve the problem, but simplest is usually best. Recently, my partner opened 1♦ and I held

♠— ♥AKix ♦AJx ♣Axxxxx

In BWS, I would bid 2♣, followed by rebidding hearts, followed by raising diamonds to an appropriate level. Except for the fact that partner couldn’t tell whether I had a singleton or void in spades, this would describe my hand quite well, showing a good hand with longer clubs than hearts, plus diamond support. Playing the System, I responded 1♥ since 2♣ or 3♣ would ask partner to pass or correct to diamonds — and would deny a four-card major. Partner rebid 1♠ and I bid 2♦ (forcing). Partner bid 3♦. If partner had as much as six diamonds to the king-queen, we should have a play for 7♦. My

♥AK and ♣A would take care of his losers in hearts and clubs, and he could probably establish the club suit by ruffing. If he had the king of clubs too, he should make 7♦ easily. If he had the queen of hearts along with his good six-card diamond suit, he would have at least a play for seven. So I bid 5NT, the grand slam force. Partner held

♠KJxx ♥— ♦KQ109xxx ♣Kx

and he bid and easily made 7♦ by ruffing two spades and discarding two spades on the hearts. But we were just lucky. With some hands, we would need a 2-2 diamond break or 3-3 club break to make seven, and if he had something like

♠AQxx ♥xx ♦KQ10xx ♣Jx

we would have no play for 7♦. (Perhaps with the latter hand he should bid 2♥ over 2♦ to show a 4-2-5-2 or 4-2-2-5 distribution, although he might bid the same way with

♠AQxx ♥xxx ♦x ♣KQxxx

However, with three hearts he would normally raise to 2♥ immediately.) Of course, this wouldn't be an easy hand to bid in BWS or Precision either, but I'd feel much more comfortable if I could start out with a natural 2♣ bid.

Along with the difficulties inherent in the 1♦ opening, I have already pointed out the issues that follow due to the lack of any natural club openings. I gave you a hand earlier where you had five spades and seven clubs. You opened 1♠, LHO overcalled 2♥ and partner made an optional penalty double. I had you bid 4♣, expecting partner to have something like 1-4-4-4 or 1-3-5-4 distribution. Actually, when this auction occurred, partner had forgotten the System and held

♠xx ♥QJ109x ♦AJxx ♣Qx

He remembered me saying this was a penalty double but forgot the 'optional' modifier. That isn't the fault of the System — or is it? The System contains many things to remember that will have dire consequences if forgotten. And having to open a five-card major with a longer minor can create problems. I previously mentioned a hand where partner, as dealer, bid 1♠ with

♠A10xxx ♥x ♦AKQxxx ♣x

and got to 4♠ doubled, down five tricks. In my opinion, he had sufficient warnings to avoid bidding at the four-level, but if he could have opened 1♦, as in Standard, he probably would not have gotten so high. (In any case, I contributed to the disaster by taking a preference to spades at the four-level with two spades and a singleton diamond.) On the other hand, if you open 1♠ with

♠ A 10 x x x ♥ x ♦ A K Q x x x ♣ x

and partner raises spades, you may make a game by bidding 4♠; the opponents will have no idea how to defend since you haven't shown your six-card side suit. They may let you steal a trick by ducking when you lead your singleton heart toward ♥KJx. Or you may be down one in 4♠ when the opponents are cold for a game in hearts since your spade bid and partner's raise preempted them and neither of them could bid hearts. Or partner may respond 1NT and you could raise to 2NT or 3NT. You might steal a game with a total of 20 points and a favorable lead. So you win a few and lose a few.

I have covered numerous bidding situations in this book, but it is impossible to anticipate everything that might happen. It would take 1000 pages to try to analyze each one. A good rule to follow in sequences not discussed is to play BWS unless there is some systemic reason why doing so would not be logical. The general rule is to assume a bid has its standard meaning.

A RECAPITULATION



I have discovered that certain parts of the System are easy for people to remember when learning to play it: the easy-to-remember parts consist of limited bids of one of a major; the weak notrump, the ‘funny’ one diamond opening, and the strong 2♣ and 2♦ openings. But some of the other auctions, especially the responses and rebids after the 2♣ and 2♦ opening bids, are hard to remember, probably because they do not occur very often. So I shall list here some of the easy-to-forget sequences with a brief reminder of why they are part of the System.

1. The non-forcing notrump response to one of a major and the effect it has on two-over-one responses.

(a) A 2♣ response to one of a major is forcing to game. It is assumed to be natural, but there are three exceptions. The first is when responder has a game-forcing 2♥ response, in which case he must respond 2♣ and bid hearts next round. The second is when responder wants to create a game-force when he is interested in slam. Suppose responder holds

♠ K x x x x ♥ A Q x ♦ K J x ♣ A x

and his partner opens 1♠. He might bid 2♣, followed by 3♠ (the jump shows good spade support, not three to an honor with lots of high cards on the side), with cuebids to follow. The third is when responder wants to offer a choice of games.

The Reasons: The purpose of 2♣ followed by a heart bid to show hearts, not clubs, is to have a way to show both an invitational 2♥ response (by bidding 2♥ over 1♠) and a forcing 2♥ response (by bidding 2♣ first). As well, there must be some way to invite slam or offer a choice of games without risk of being dropped along the way. A sequence starting with a 2♦ response, for example

Opener	Responder
1♠	2♦
2♠	3♠

would not be forcing, but this sequence

Opener	Responder
1♠	2♣
2♠	3♠

would be forcing, probably showing an interest in slam, and definitely showing slam interest after the cuebidding starts. It is also logical to respond 2♣ with game-forcing balanced hands. Then you can bid 2NT next round, or two of partner's major, and there is still room to find out more and choose the better game contract.

(b) A 2♦ response guarantees a rebid unless opener rebids 2NT or raises diamonds.

Reason: There needs to be a sequence allowing responder to invite 3NT or four of opener's major while stopping below game when opener has 10-12 points. So

Opener	Responder
1M	2♦
2NT	

shows a maximum of 12 bad points and can be passed. Similarly, in these auctions

Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
1♠	2♦	1♥	2♦
2♥/2♠	?	2♥	?

2NT by responder can be passed. The following auctions are also invitational and can be passed:

Opener	Responder	Opener	Responder
1♠	2♦	1♥	2♦
2♠	3♠	2♥	3♥

Rebidding the original major shows 6+ cards in the major and responder's raise of the six-card suit probably shows a doubleton with invitational strength; a raise of opener's second major shows four-card support with only invitational values. With an invitational hand, responder may bid 2♦ with fewer diamonds than clubs since a 2♣ response would force to game.

(c) A 2♥ response to a 1♠ opening is not forcing, even for one round.

Reason: Responder needs a way to invite a heart game. He may also have a hand that is worthless except when hearts are trumps, like

♠ x ♥ KJ 10 9 x x x ♦ Q 10 x x ♣ x

- While a 1NT response to a major is non-forcing, a 1NT response to 1♦ is forcing, and it may be made with a game-forcing hand.

Reason: Since a 1♦ opening shows an unbalanced hand, opener would never want to pass 1NT anyway. Also, the 1NT response, purportedly denying a major suit, lets opener show which minor he has and whether he has extra strength. With five or more of both minors, opener rebids 2NT. When the bidding starts

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♠
1NT	2♦

opener rebids 2♠ with a doubleton spade, to show 2-4-5-2 or 2-4-2-5 distribution. Any other bid is natural and shows a singleton spade (with 0-4-5-4 or 0-4-4-5, he would have bid 2♥ over 1♠).

However, a 1NT response by a passed hand is not forcing (opener can pass with 4-4-4-1 distribution). Also, in competition, neither a 1NT nor a 2NT response is forcing, because there are additional options

available. Now the 1NT response shows values in the opponent's suit and a negative double tends to show values elsewhere.

When there is no competition, a response of 2♥ or 2♠ to 1♦ shows a good hand — one with which BWS bidders would bid one of the major followed by three of the same major. Since opener is likely to have a singleton in responder's long suit, it is better to show this type of hand at the two-level. But after an overcall, a jump to two of a major shows a long suit with about 6-8 points on the theory that responder needs to show this frequent hand type before LHO can make a preemptive raise of the overcall. This jump to the two-level in a major in competition is the same whether the opening bid was 1♣, 1♦ or 1♥.

3. After a diamond opening, if opener shows a four-card major, he denies more than 14 HCP.

Reason: With 15+ HCP and a four-card major, opener would have opened 1♣.

4. After a 1♦ opening and a major-suit response, a 1NT rebid usually shows a singleton in responder's major.

Reason: The opening bid shows an unbalanced hand. With a six-card minor, opener would bid it. With a singleton in a suit other than responder's major, he would not rebid 1NT. Notice that 1♦-1♠; 2♥ guarantees 0-4-5-4 or 0-4-4-5 distribution. Responder is usually captain, and it is often important for him to find out opener's exact distribution.

5. After a 1♦ opening, most club bids by responder (until opener has been able to show which minor he has) mean 'pass or correct'.

Reason: Since responder does not know which of opener's minors is longer, he must have some way to show hands with support for both minors. However, there are exceptions in competition when the auction is at a high level and a negative double is available.

6. After a 1♦ opening, all non-jump diamond bids by responder before opener has clarified his minor holdings are forcing — again, with a few competitive bidding exceptions, especially at the four-level.

Reason: In any system, there must be a way to make a forcing bid. Diamond bids like 2♦ are used in the System because, if opener has clubs instead, he must 'correct' to the three-level. If responder can force

to the three-level when opener has clubs, he should be able to furnish a play for a diamond contract at the three-level (at least) when opener really has diamonds.

7. After a major opening and an overcall at the three- or four-level, doubles are for penalty. After a major opening and an overcall of the other major at the two-level, doubles are *tentative* or *optional* penalty doubles. That means that opener can pass the double with five of his major and three of the opponent's suit or a doubleton honor in the opponent's suit — but not with a singleton or void in their suit, and usually not with a six-card suit of his own.

Reason: Negative doubles are most useful for finding major-suit fits. When both majors have been bid, there is less reason to use negative doubles, and there is also less reason when opener's hand is limited. But when responder has a strong defensive hand with a stack in trumps, he is too strong for a tentative penalty double since opener won't be able to leave it in.

8. After a 1♦ opening and an overcall, bids of a new suit at the two- or three-level are negative free bids (non-forcing). Doubles are negative. A negative double followed by bidding a new suit is forcing.

Reason: Finding a major-suit fit has priority over penalty doubles, just as in BWS. Based on frequency, negative free bids are more useful than forcing bids at the two- and three-levels. This is especially true when opener is known to have an unbalanced hand. When opener is likely to have a singleton in responder's long major suit, responder seldom has a hand with which he can force to game, especially since he doesn't know which minor opener is stronger in, and consequently cannot tell whether the hands fit.

9. The usual range for a 1♣ opening is 15-19 or 20 points. But 1♣-1♦; 1♥ is a relay to 1♠ (unless responder has a good hand). Then, if opener bids 1NT, he shows 18-19 points; if he bids 2NT, he shows 24-26 points, and the bid is forcing; if opener bids three of a major, he shows a game-forcing hand with a six-card major and four of the other major. While 1♣-1♦; 1♥ is usually a relay to 1♠, if responder has a good hand (like 10+ points), he can make an impossible bid (inconsistent with a weak hand) so that opener, if somewhat slam-minded, can initiate a

cuebidding sequence. When I talk about making game-forcing bids like 1♣-1♦; 3♠ or 2♣-2♦; 3♣ (the latter sequence showing a game force with a major and clubs as a second suit), I don't mean that you have to have a cinch for game opposite a misfitting Yarborough. Your hand should be good enough so that showing the hand type and forcing to game is more likely to gain than to lose.

10. After a 2♣ opening, a 2NT rebid by opener shows both majors. (With a major-minor two-suiter too strong to risk being passed below game, the 2♣ opener rebids the minor first and the major later.) When opener rebids 2♠ or 2♥, responder *invites* game by bidding 2NT; a raise asks opener to show a singleton. With a five- or six-card major and four of the other major, the opening bid should be 1♣. There is no upper limit after certain sequences.
11. Over a 2♦ opening, a 2♥ response is artificial and negative. A 2♠ response is artificial and positive (denying a five-card major, and probably a five-card minor). If opener has a four-card major or majors, with an unbalanced hand, his first priority is to show the major(s). So responder needs a five-card major to bid it (with one exception).

APPENDIX 1



The following section was written for Standard bidders. It is equally appropriate as an adjunct to the System.

RESPONDING TO 2NT

Most systems of responses to 1NT or 2NT furnish a lot of information to the opponents. Suppose responder uses Stayman, opener shows a major and responder bids 3NT. The opening leader knows opener has the major he has bid and responder has the other major. If opening leader has

♠ K 10 x x ♥ Q J x x ♦ 10 9 ♣ x x x

he will probably lead a diamond rather than a major. Also, later in the hand, it will be easier for both defenders to discard when they know that opener has, or doesn't have, a specific four-card suit. The original concept of Puppet Stayman was that responder, who was going to be dummy, would describe his hand and opener would conceal his own hand. But in most sequences, opener still had to furnish a lot of information to the opponents. Over Stayman, he would bid a minimum number of notrump to show no major

and bid diamonds to show at least one major. Then, if responder rebid a major and opener bid 2NT or 3NT, it meant that opener had the wrong major.

Few players use Puppet Stayman over 1NT (for several good reasons), but many players like it over 2NT. They open 2NT (or 2♣ followed by 2NT) with hands like

♠AKQxx ♥Jx ♦KQx ♣AQx

or

♠AJ10 ♥AKxxx ♦Q10 ♣AKJ

firstly because game could be missed by opening 1♥ or 1♠, and secondly because it is better for opener to be declarer in the final contract than to put his strong hand down as dummy after an initial 1NT response.

Puppet Stayman allows opener to bid a five-card major over a Stayman response. However, the system is incompatible with Smolen when responder has 5-4 in the majors. There are ways, if one doesn't mind the complications, to overcome the Smolen problem, but at the cost of having to describe opener's distribution in even more detail. Many players believe that the increased accuracy, although good for a bidding contest, is not worthwhile at the table. Perhaps one time in 25 your scientific system gets you to the perfect contract which other pairs miss, and one time in 10 the opponents set you or get a good result at matchpoints because you have told them too much, making their defense easier. Before I tell you what I recommend, I will list under what conditions I think it is least likely that playing in an eight-card major fit will be worth an extra trick.

When partner opens 1NT or 2NT and you have 4-3-3-3 distribution, no matter what your four-card suit is, you should resign yourself to letting partner play the hand in notrump. When there is a 4-4 major fit, partner sometimes gains a trick by playing in the major, and sometimes he doesn't, especially when he has the same distribution. The gain, if any, by finding the 4-4 fit is outweighed by making the defense easier when you search for the fit and don't find it. When responder has a five-card major with 5-3-3-2 distribution, he will usually gain a trick by playing in the major if there is a 5-4 fit, so he should use Stayman. But if there is only a 5-3 fit, sometimes the major plays a trick better and sometimes it doesn't. I think the 'doesn't' is more frequent. Meanwhile, sequences such as

Opener

2NT

3♥

pass

Responder

3♦

3NT

tell the opponents that declarer probably has a doubleton in responder's five-card suit, which often means that the five-card suit cannot be established and used unless dummy has a side entry. Again, that makes the defense easier. On the other hand, when responder has 5-4-4-0, 5-4-3-1 or 5-4-2-2 distribution, any eight-card fit is likely to be worth an extra trick. Since responder shouldn't show his five-card major with 5-3-3-2 distribution, whenever he transfers to a major and bids notrump, opener should choose the major-suit contract, provided he has three-or four-card support.

However, at IMPs, I think responder should make an exception to the rule of not transferring to a major with 5-3-3-2 distribution. When responder has 7-9 points with a good major suit, he is almost certain to make game in the major opposite three-card support. The hand that changed my views was

♠ Q 10 x x x ♥ A x ♦ Q x x ♣ x x x

Partner had three small hearts, ♠KJx, and all the missing honors in the minors. After a heart lead against 3NT, he couldn't hold up long enough and didn't have enough tricks without using the spades. If I had shown my spade suit, he would have chosen spades over notrump, and I think I should have given partner the choice. When responder's hand is weaker, it is better to bid 3NT since nine tricks in notrump are more likely than ten tricks in the major. When the hand is stronger, game is almost certain in either notrump or the major, and at matchpoints I think it is likely that 3NT will score better, especially when the partnership has a combined total of 31 or 32 points.

The actual bidding structure is as follows. Responder should use Stayman with 4-4-3-2 distribution, if *one* of the four-card suits is a major. If he has *two* four-card majors, he systemically shows that holding by bidding 3NT! With a four-card major, opener can bid it over 3NT, knowing he will find at least four-card support. Responder can also use Stayman with a three-card holding in a major and a singleton, or with a good three-card holding and a worthless doubleton — a hand that is likely to play better in a major if partner has the right five-card suit.

Over 3♣, opener rebids his five-card major if he has one; without a five-card major, he automatically rebids 3♦. Why tell the opponents whether or not he has the four-card major which responder doesn't show next round? (Opener is willing to show five because of the likelihood that game in the major will be the best contract.) Then, like in standard Puppet Stayman, responder bids the four-card major he does not hold. Now if opener bids 3NT, he is not revealing whether or not he has four of the major bid by responder since he knows responder doesn't have both majors — with which he would have responded 3NT (or 4NT or 5NT with both majors if he wanted to invite or insist upon a slam).

What if responder doesn't have both majors and simply wants to raise to 3NT? One possibility is to use Stayman and, no matter what opener rebids, bid 3NT. Whatever opener has, he can't bid over this sequence. The opponents won't know whether you had an interest in four of a major only if opener had the right five-card major, or whether you were just trying to cause confusion. The other alternative is to use 3♠ as a transfer to 3NT. My suggestion is to have both sequences available, choosing whichever one you are least worried will be doubled for the lead on the specific hand. The 3♠ transfer can also be used when responder has an interest in a minor-suit slam. Over opener's 3NT rebid, four of a major would be a splinter bid showing both minors, while a minor-suit bid at the four-level shows a single-suiter; opener can now make various bids to show how well he likes his hand in support of responder's minor(s).

Let's return to the 3NT response. With 5-4 in the majors and 2-2 in the minors, and with a fairly weak five-card suit, responder should respond 3NT. That way, he won't miss a 5-4 or 4-4 major fit. He could miss out on a 5-3 major fit, which may or may not be better than 3NT. If he is 3-1 or 4-0 in the minors, or possibly 2-2 if his five-card suit is strong enough to play opposite a doubleton, he takes a different approach, starting with Stayman. Now responder bids 4♣ over opener's 3♦ rebid to show five hearts and four spades, and he bids 4♦ to show five spades and four hearts.

When responder transfers to a major and then bids a minor, he shows at least five of the major and at least four of the minor with slam interest. The more distributional responder is, the fewer high cards he needs to show his two suits.

That leaves just a few loose ends to tidy up. If responder transfers to a major and opener has an exceptionally good hand for the suit he is transferred to, he can bid 4♣ (regardless of his club holding). Then, if responder has no interest in slam, he can bid 4♦ as a re-transfer to allow opener to be the declarer. Similarly, if the bidding goes

Opener	Responder
2NT	3♣
3♦	3♥

(showing spades) and opener has a very good hand for spades, he can bid 4♣ as a general slam try to show a great fit.

If responder transfers to a major and rebids a minor, the minor bid is natural and shows an interest in slam. Depending upon his degree of fit, whether he has ruffing values, whether he has mostly aces and kings or a lot of queens and jacks, opener can bid in steps to show how well he likes his hand. The first step would show the worst hand (wasted strength in the short suits and/or lack of controls). The second step would show an average hand; the third step a good hand, and the fourth step a super hand (like aces in the unbid suits, most of the honors in responder's two suits and maybe even a ruffing value).

Suppose responder has five of each major. He can transfer to spades and bid hearts (natural) the next time to give opener a choice of contracts at the game level. If responder transfers to hearts and then bids three spades, he shows slam interest, allowing opener to show how he feels about it at the four-level.

I already mentioned how to make a single-suited slam try in a minor: bid 3♠ to transfer to 3NT, followed by bidding the minor. What if you have a four-card major and a longer minor? My suggestion is to use Stayman, then bid the major you do not have. If you have found a major-suit fit, you can bid or invite your slam in the major, keeping your long minor a secret till you put down the dummy. If you don't find a major fit, *responder's* four of a minor is natural, showing a slam interest in the minor. Partner can tell which cards are valuable when he knows you have 4-5 or 4-6 in two suits.

To summarize, responder does not look for a major fit with 4-3-3-3 distribution and may not try very hard with other balanced distributions. With

both majors, he directly raises the notrump opening to the appropriate level. A Stayman response does not necessarily mean that responder has a four-card major; he may just be looking for a major contract opposite a five-card suit (but only when he has a ruffing value), or he may just be fooling around. Over a Stayman response, opener has only two choices: to show a five-card major or to deny one with 3♦. After Stayman, if responder has a four-card major, he bids the other major. After Stayman, most 4♣ bids by opener show that he likes his hand, while 4♣ by responder shows a Smolen hand with long hearts and 4♦ shows a Smolen hand with long spades. With nine cards in the majors and 3-1 or 4-0 in the minors, responder should make the Smolen bids. With a weak five-card suit and 2-2 in the minors, he may just bid 3NT directly, showing both majors. With no interest in a major-suit contract, responder can bid 3♠ directly. This transfers to 3NT, which responder can pass; alternatively, he can make a minor-suit slam try.

APPENDIX 2



SUMMARY CONVENTION CARD FOR THE SYSTEM

(Not complete. Only shows differences from BWS.)

GENERAL APPROACH: light, limited openings of one of a major, strong, forcing 1♣ opening, 1♦ opening shows limited, but unbalanced hand (please ask).

FORCING OPENINGS: 1♣, 2♣ and 2♦ (also 4♣ and 4♦ if you play Namyats).

NOTRUMP OPENINGS: 12-14 HCP. (Fill in the rest according to your agreements.)

2NT: 20-21 HCP, modified Puppet Stayman, Jacoby, 3♠ transfer to 3NT (may follow up with minor suit(s) slam try); 3NT response guarantees both majors.

MAJOR OPENINGS: usually 10-14 HCP, possibly weaker with long suit, 5+ length; double raise invitation-al, whether in competition or not, raise to game weak or strong.

MINOR OPENINGS: 1♣: usually 15-20 HCP, infrequent stronger hands.

1♦: 11-16 HCP, unbalanced hand (short in any suit), no 5+ card major; 14 point maximum with a 4-card major; most club bids by responder are 'pass or correct'; most diamond bids by responder before opener has rebid diamonds are forcing. 1NT response is also forcing.

OPENING TWO-BIDS: 2♣ artificial; shows 5+ of major and 17+ points; 2♦ also artificial, shows 20+ unbalanced or 22+ balanced; 2♥ and 2♠ are weak two-bids (5-10 HCP).

SPECIAL DOUBLES: After a major opening, optional penalty at three-level or higher; also after 1♠-(2♥) or 1♥-(2♠). After a minor opening, negative at two- and three-level; negative free bids (non-forcing) at two- and three-level; support doubles.

TWO-OVER-ONE: When opener bids one of a major, 2♣ by responder is forcing to game (may not show clubs). 2♦ usually shows invitational values and could be a three-card suit; 2♥ non-forcing.

Over 1♣: 2♣ or 2♦ natural and strong.

Over 1♦: 2♣ means 'pass or correct'. Most other club bids are also 'pass or correct'.

Again, I emphasize that you need to fill in the rest of the convention card, like defense versus notrump, slam conventions, Wolff signoffs, weak two-bids and carding on defense. I like cuebid doubles after a major overcall, upside-down attitude and count, Rusinow opening leads, etc. However, none of these conventions is crucial to the System.

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MARSHALL MILES of Redwood, California won the World Senior Teams Championship in 2004. His first book, *How to Win at Duplicate Bridge* (1957), is still in print. His most recent book was *Modern Constructive Bidding* (2005).



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