

Two Over One

3-Level Responses to 1NT & Smolen

Finding good uses for available bids

Introduction

When partner opens 1NT, the meaning of our 2-level responses are very familiar:

- 2 Clubs Stayman
- 2 Diamonds Transfer to hearts
- 2 Hearts Transfer to spades
- 2 Spades Transfer to 3 clubs for minor suit runoff.

2 notrump Inviting 3NT (8 or 9 HCP)

We have recently worked out the meanings for most of the 4-level:

- 4 Clubs RKC Gerber
- 4 Diamonds Transfer to Hearts
- 4 Hearts Transfer to Spades
- 4 notrump Inviting 6 NT (16 or 17 HCP)

Remaining now are the meanings of the 3-level responses, 3 clubs & diamonds, and 3 hearts & spades.

The 3-level responses to 1NT once had standard meanings, but advanced players have generally abandoned the standard meanings, while the less advanced have forgotten them. As a result, you cannot count on anyone else knowing the meaning of your 3-level responses to 1NT unless you have discussed them specifically with your partner. The meanings we will assign do not create an advanced standard. Instead, they simply reflect what many of us consider to be good systemic uses that fit well with our other systemic responses to 1NT.

3 of a Minor Over 1NT

Over 1NT we play the call of 3 clubs or of 3 diamonds as invitational, by which we mean partner is invited to bid 3NT. But we issue this invitation with a very specific meaning:

**a 6-card or 7-card minor
headed by AQ or KQ
with very little or nothing else**

8 752 1084 KQ9853

Over 1NT, bid 3 clubs. If partner holds the missing top honor, then our clubs are likely to run, delivering six tricks in a notrump contract.

Opener should not think that simply having 17 points is sufficient to accept our invitation and bid 3NT. If opener is missing the fitting honor, the opponents will likely be able to control the suit and keep declarer off the board. Opener should consider accepting the invitation only when holding the missing honor in responder's suit.

Look at these two possible hands that opener could hold when responder has the hand above:

1. QJ7 AK63 Q975 A2
2. AQ106 AK6 KJ63 84

With the first hand, opener holds the missing honor and 16 points, but 3NT is a very big favorite to make 9 tricks. In the second hand, opener has 17 HCPs, but he is missing the club ace. This opener will regret it if he accepts the invitation. To accept the invitation, have the missing honor. If opener lacks the missing honor, he should pass and play at the 3-level with partner's long minor suit as trump.

Notice we have said that responder's suit

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is headed by AQ or KQ. If it is headed by AK it is too strong for a jump to 3 of the minor.

8 752 1084 AK9853

Opener can establish such a suit simply by ducking one round and then cashing AK, expecting the suit to be established for 5 tricks. With a hand such as this, raise partner's 1NT opening to 2NT and invite on power. A six-card suit with 7 HCPs is fully the equivalent of a hand containing 8 HCPs.

3 Hearts or 3 Spades Over 1NT

Our choice of meaning for these jumps in a major is to describe hands that hold two 5-card majors. The call of 3 hearts shows 5 spades and 5 hearts and values to invite partner to bid game. The call of 3 spades also contains 5 spades and 5 hearts, but this time responder insists that game be bid.

3 hearts **5-5 in majors, invitational**
3 spades **5-5 in majors, game forcing**

1. Q9743 A8632 8 42
2. KQ743 A8632 8 42

With hand 1, bid 3 hearts, inviting game. With hand 2, bid 3 spades, insisting on it. Note that partner will have a fit with one of your major suits, for only upon a very extraordinary occasion will partner have opened 1NT with two doubletons in the majors.

Note also, then, that responder's shape contains inherent value. That's why, in our examples, we have invited with only 6 HCPs and forced game with 9 HCPs. When opener considers whether or not to accept the invitation

made by a 3 heart call, he should consider not just quantity of total points but their location. Heavy values in the minors will lead to wasted values, while values in the majors will prove more useful.

From time to time you will pick up a hand that is 5-5 in the majors and stronger still, so strong that you will have slam interest.

**If 5-5 in the majors with slam interest,
 1st transfer into spades and then
 rebid 3 hearts.**

K10864 AQ10 84 4 K5

opener	responder
1NT	2♥
2♠	3♥

Opener can now go immediately to RKC, in which case responder will answer in the heart suit, the last bid suit. Or, opener could begin cue bidding a minor suit control. Or, opener may simply take a suit preference, whereupon responder will presume to take control with cue bids or RKC.

One more 5-5 hand type can come up. This would be a very weak hand with 5-5 shape.

J9653 108432 J 105

The best treatment for this hand is garbage stayman. Bid 2 clubs on the off chance that opener possesses a 4-card major. If he bids one, then pass. If, instead, he bids 2 diamonds, bid 2 of one or another of your suits, stopping the auction at the 2 level.

**If 5-5 in the majors and very weak,
 use garbage stayman.**

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Smolen

Has your partner ever opened 1NT to find you with 10 points and 5-4 in the majors?

AJ864 KQ84 75 96

If you decide to transfer into spades, you have no way to show that you also hold 4 hearts. But if, on the other hand you bid 2 clubs Stayman, partner may bid 2 diamonds, leaving you wondering how to show a 5-card spade suit. You may try jumping to 3 spades, hoping that partner can figure it out. But even if he does, his hand goes on the table if he raises spades, and you lose the advantage of getting the opening lead coming into the stronger hand. This is the problem that Smolen solves.

Playing Smolen, when you have the hand above, start with Stayman.

When responder holds 9+ points with a 5-card major and a 4-card major, he first bids Stayman. If opener bids 2 diamonds, responder jumps to 3 in his 4-card major, announcing that he holds 5 cards in the unbid major.

If opener has 3 cards in the unbid major, he will now bid game in that major and be the declarer in your 5-3 fit. If opener has only 2 cards in your 5-card suit, he will simply select to play 3NT.

opener	responder
1NT	2♣
2♦	3♥

Responder shows 4 hearts and 5 spades. Opener will set the final contract.

Practice

Partner opens 1NT. What is your response?

1. QJ832 KJ742 97 4
2. 9 764 AQ9642 875
3. A965 KQ863 Q9 94
4. KQ943 A10863 7 83
5. 93 96 84 KQ97542
6. 85432 K9653 83 4
7. AQ1087 KJ973 A6 8

You open 1NT with the following hand:

A94 KJ86 KQ8 K84

What do you bid over these responses?

8. 3 clubs
9. 3 hearts
10. 3 spades

You open 1NT with

KJ84 AJ10 AQ96 75

What do you bid over these responses?

11. 3 hearts
12. 3 clubs

Answers

1. 3 hearts (3 spades is also acceptable)
2. 3 diamonds
3. 2 clubs. If partner bids a major, raise to game. If partner bids 2 diamonds, jump to 3 spades.
4. 3 spades.
5. 3 clubs
6. 2 clubs. If partner bids a major, pass. If he bids 2 diamonds, bid 2 hearts.
7. Bid 2 hearts. When partner bids 2 spades, bid 3 hearts.
8. 3NT
9. 4 hearts
10. 4 hearts
11. 4 spades. You have fitting honors for both majors.
12. Pass

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More Practice

Describe responder's hand and discuss your response.

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. | opener
1NT
2♦ | responder
2♣
3♥ |
| 2. | opener
1NT | responder
3♣ |
| 3. | opener
1NT | responder
3♠ |
| 4. | opener
1NT
2♠ | responder
2♥
3♥ |
| 5. | opener
1NT | responder
3♥ |
| 6. | opener
1NT | responder
3♦ |

More Answers

1. Responder has game forcing values with 4 hearts and 5 spades.
2. Responder holds 6 or 7 clubs with AQ or KQ and nothing else.
3. Responder has 5 of both majors and game forcing points.
4. Partner has 5 of both majors and slam interest.
5. Partner has 5 of both majors and invitational values.
6. Partner has 6 or 7 diamonds headed by AQ or KQ and nothing else.

6-4 Smolen

We have discussed Smolen as a transfer used when responder's shape is 5-4 in the majors. Occasionally responder will hold 6-4 instead of 5-4. Hands with 6-4 shape have extra trick taking abilities and fewer side suit losers, so they are more powerful than hands that are only 5-4. Moreover, even though you know opener must have at least a doubleton in your longer suit, and therefore a guaranteed 8-card fit, you may have an additional 4-4 fit in the other major, or perhaps even 4-5. If you do have such an additional fit, then it will make a preferable trump suit. Therefore, you want to find the additional fit if it exists, and you want to make partner aware of your unusual and powerful 6-4 shape.

To show this hand, you begin as with 5-4 smolen, by using the Stayman convention. When partner's response is 2 diamonds, denying a 4-card major, you still continue bidding in a normal smolen fashion, which means you bid your 4-card major at the 3 level. If partner now selects your 6-card suit, you know that he has 3 trump, and this may effect your decisions. Or, and this is the key point of 6-4 smolen, if partner denies 3 cards in your long major by bidding 3NT, then your next bid is a transfer bid into your 6-card suit, as below:

opener	responder
1NT	2♣
2♦	3♠
3NT	4♦
4♥	

Everything is a normal smolen auction until responder bids 4 diamonds. This surprise bid is a transfer to hearts, expressing a hand with 6 hearts and 4 spades. Do not alert the bid of 4 diamonds because alerts at the 4 level are not alerted unless it is the initial response or opener's first rebid.