

## Two Over One

# Forcing Notrump

## Companion agreements to two over one agreements

### The Basics of Forcing NT

When opener begins with a bid of 1 heart or 1 spade, responder's answer of 1NT forces opener to bid again for one round. The point count for a response of 1NT is 6 to 12, or, to be even more accurate, from a good 5 points to a weak 12 points. Please note that a 1NT response to a minor is NOT forcing. 1NT is forcing only when the opening suit is a major suit.

If opener is in 3rd or 4th seat, she may lack the normal values of an opening hand. If opener has opened light in 3rd or 4th seat, she is not forced by the bid of 1NT and may pass it. However, if the opener in 3rd or 4th position DOES have a full opener, they will consider themselves forced and they will bid a second time. We say, then, that over an opening major suit bid in 3rd or 4th seat the 1NT response is only semi-forcing. It is not forcing upon a weak opener. It is forcing upon a normal opener.

If you are opener in 1st or second seat and your partner responds 1NT, you are required to announce "forcing" to your opponents. If you are in 3rd or 4th seat, you are required to announce "semi-forcing."

Although responder's range of 5+ to 12- may seem large, it is actually two ranges in one. If responder holds 5+ to 9-, she will make the same sort of minimum bids a standard bidder would make. But if, instead, responder holds 9+ to 12-, she will make an invitational bid at her second turn. We will discuss this in more detail soon.

When responder's bid is a forcing 1NT, she denies a hand that could raise the opener's major suit to 2. If opener's bid was 1 heart, then the forcing NT also denies a hand that could bid 1 spade over 1 heart. The forcing NT also denies a hand good enough to make a 2/1 call.

### Opener's Rebids

Here is a menu of rebids that opener can make over a forcing 1NT:

- Rebid 2 of the major.
- Jump rebid to 3 of the major.
- Jump rebid to 4 of the major.
- Bid a new suit at the 2 level.
- Raise to 2NT
- Raise to 3NT
- Bid a new suit at the 3 level (Jump shift).
- Reverse.

As we discuss each type of rebid, we will also discuss responder's actions and the course of the auction.

### Opener Rebids 2 of the major

When opener rebids 2 of her major suit over responder's forcing 1NT, she shows a 6-card suit and minimal point count, 12 to 15- points. If that suit is her only biddable suit, she has rebid it perforce. But what if opener also holds a 4-card suit? Should opener elect to rebid the 6-card suit, or should she first bid the 4-card suit?

Her choice is governed by agreement. If the 6-card suit is so good that opener is willing to play in it opposite a singleton or void, then she should rebid the 6-card suit. But if the suit is not that solid, then she should first bid her 4-card suit. If she does bid the 4-card suit and then later rebids the major, then responder is advised of reduced suit quality.

How should responder act when opener has rebid 2 of the opening major suit?

#### When responder has 5+ to 9-

- a.) Almost always pass. Even if you have a void, you can't expect to improve the contract.
- b.) Rarely responder may bid 3 of a minor. Responder will have at best a singleton in opener's

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suit, while responder's own minor is a good 6- or 7-card suit, which will basically be her entire hand. The suit should be something like KQ10xxxx or better. Otherwise, take your chances in partner's suit. Opener must remember that responder has a minimum hand and feels that the side's chances are definitely better in the minor.

### **Responder has 9+ to 12- and 3 trump.**

Raise the major to 4. With 9 trump and this many values, the partnership has a good try for game. Bidding 1NT with 3 trump and 9+ to 12- is fairly common. The point count is that of a limit raise, but responder lacks the 4th trump necessary to make such a bid. The Standard bidder will have made a 2/1 bid to show 10+ points, but the responder in the 2/1 system will bid the forcing notrump convention instead.

### **Responder has 9+ to 12- and 2 trump.**

Responder should raise the major suit to 3 and invite opener. Alternatively, responder can bid 2NT to invite a notrump game if the other 3 suits are well stopped and responder has no ruffing values.

### **Responder has 9+ to 12- and no fit.**

Responder can bid 2NT to invite game in notrump. Ideally responder can stop all other suits.

## **Opener Rebids 3 of the major**

This bid can be passed by responder. Hardy states the bid shows 15+ to 19-, but in practice players seem to play it as 18- if their suit is good, which it frequently is.

Responder will choose to pass, to raise, or to bid 3NT, as her hand suggests. Playing in the major is usually preferred unless responder feels very comfortable with 3NT.

Slam tends to be just out of reach with these two point count ranges, even if responder has 3-card trump support.

## **Opener Rebids 4 of the major**

Opener will now have at least 7 trump and some reason to want to try game, perhaps a tolerable 4-card suit on the side. Notice that opener would have opened 2 clubs holding 9 tricks. Therefore this jump bid shows a hand somewhat weaker, perhaps as weak as 16 points, but with a shape feature.

Responder will pass with a minimum. If responder holds the higher end of the 9+ to 12- range, a slam try may be appropriate. Responder ideally would have a 2-card fit for a slam try, but perhaps more important than trump are aces especially, and then perhaps kings.

## **Opener Rebids a New Suit at the Two Level**

Opener's most frequent rebid over responder's forcing 1NT is probably a new suit at the 2 level. In fact, anytime opener has 12 to 18-, her rebid will be at the two level. If opener's first suit was spades and her rebid is hearts, she promises a minimum of 4 hearts.

If, instead, opener rebids a minor, it may not contain 4 cards. For example, if opener has 2 spades, 5 hearts, and 3 of each minor, there just isn't any 4-card suit there. In this case opener rebids clubs. In the past this bid required an alert, but now it no longer does. Both the bidders and the defenders are expected to know that this may be a 3-card suit.

In fact, not impossibly, opener could have to rebid a 2-card suit. Holding 4 spades, 5 hearts, and 2 of each minor, and lacking the values needed

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to reverse, opener has no choice but to rebid 2 clubs. What if partner were to pass you in your 2-card suit? Well, that would mean that partner holds no more than 1 heart. Plus, partner did not bid 1 spade, so she has a maximum of 3 spades. That leaves at least 9 cards in the minors. If partner has diamonds instead of clubs, she will bid diamonds. So the only time partner will pass you in 2 clubs is when she holds at least 5 of them, and clubs will in fact be your best fit. Sometimes the system holds together in surprising ways.

### **When responder holds 5+ to 9-**

In general, when responder's first bid was a forcing notrump and her point count is minimal, her goal will be to stop at the two level. To stop at the 2 level, simply do not make any bid higher than 2 of partner's major. Opener will always understand this as minimum values and will almost always pass. The only time opener will not pass is when she holds 16 to 18-, which is extra strength that must be shown. Or, on occasion, opener will need to correct your bid. More in a moment.

If opener has started with 1 heart and has rebid 2 diamonds, responder with 5+ to 9- can only choose between the two suits offered. We say responder must make a suit preference. You should prefer hearts if you have a doubleton. Playing in 5-2 trump fits at the 2 level is quite fine. You should prefer hearts with a doubleton not simply to prefer a major suit, but also because partner could have as many as 18 points. Bidding allows a very strong partner to bid again, while passing does not.

If opener has started with 1 heart and has rebid 2 clubs, a third possibility for responder arises, namely to bid 2 diamonds. Do you

remember that partner's club suit may be only 2 cards long? So you will not often pass 2 clubs. In fact, you need 5 clubs to pass it. Most often you will hold 2 hearts. Whenever you do, bid hearts as a suit preference. The only time you would bid 2 diamonds would be when you held a singleton or void in hearts, but your diamonds are 5 cards long. Your shape would necessarily be something like xxx x xxxxx xxxx. Otherwise you would either have 2 hearts or you would have been able to bid 1 spade over 1 heart.

If partner has opened 1 spade and has rebid 2 diamonds, you have 3 choices: pass (the least attractive), bid 2 spades with a doubleton, or bid 2 hearts whenever you have a 5-card suit. If you bid hearts, partner will usually pass. If partner has 16 to 18-, she will now bid again at 2NT or higher. If opener does now bid 2 spades, she is showing a singleton or void in hearts and hopes that you have a doubleton spade.

If partner has opened 1 spade and has rebid 2 clubs, you get 4 choices: pass (least attractive), diamonds, hearts, or spades. Your most likely bid is the suit preference to 2 spades. But you may bid 2 hearts instead if you hold 5 of them. To bid diamonds you must have a singleton or void in spades and at least 5 diamonds.

**In a nutshell**, your usual choice is to rebid partner's major suit with 2-card support. You can, however, rebid 2 hearts instead whenever you hold 5. Your rebid of diamonds will always indicate a singleton or void in partner's major. You will pass partner's minor only as a last resort.

Opener will usually pass whatever action you take. Opener will not pass your 2 heart bid if his suit is spades and she holds only a singleton or void in hearts. Otherwise, opener will bid again only with 16 to 18-, just to assure that no game is missed. If opener has his hand, she will make a bid higher than the suit of her first bid.

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## **When responder has 9+ to 12-**

When you have bid the forcing notrump holding this upper range, you must make a game invitational bid. You have 4 ways to do it.

### **You may have a 3-card limit raise.**

Let's say you were dealt K97 AJ9 K9864 42. Partner opens 1 heart or 1 spade. You have limit raise values with only 3 trump. Playing standard you would bid 2 diamonds, but playing 2/1, you are not strong enough to bid 2 diamonds. So you bid the forcing notrump instead. Now when partner bids a new suit at the two level, you jump to 3 of her major. This jump signifies the 3-card limit raise. Note that it is not a splinter. It isn't a splinter because it is a jumpshift within a forcing notrump sequence. Jumpshifts within this sequence are not splinters.

**You may have a balanced hand.** With a balanced hand containing only a doubleton in partner's major, rebid 2NT. You will also need to provide the stoppers for the two unbid suits. Although you strongly prefer to hold 2 cards in partner's major when you bid 2NT, it may not always be possible. Bidding it with a singleton in partner's major is reluctantly acceptable.

### **You may have your own 6-card suit.**

If you do have your own 6-card suit you can show it provided you can make a jump bid into it. For example, if you have a 6-card heart suit, over partner's 2nd bid you can jump to 3 hearts. Likewise, suppose that partner's 2nd bid is clubs and you hold 6 diamonds. You can jump to 3 diamonds. But now let's say that partner has opened 1 spade and rebid 2 hearts, and you have 6 diamonds. Now you can no longer jump to show your hand. But why would you want to? Partner has shown the majors. Better to bid 2NT.

**You may fit opener's 2nd suit.** Showing a fit for partner's second suit tends to indicate

that you have no better bid to make. You don't fit partner's first suit, you have no suit of your own, and something prevents you from rebidding 2NT. Of course, if partner's 2nd suit is hearts, a raise to 3 hearts is a positive step. But showing support for a minor is a "no better bid" situation.

Raising partner's 2nd bid suit when it's a minor might require you to make a "hard" bid. Let's say that partner opens 1 heart and rebids 2 diamonds, and your best choice would be to show diamond support. With 9+ to 12- points, you show support for the minor by bidding 2 spades. This bid is called "**the impossible 2 spade bid.**" It's impossible that you have spades because you bid 1NT over 1 heart. Therefore you don't have spades. It's impossible.

When opener hears you make the impossible 2 spade bid, she will remember that you are raising her minor suit, but she will treat your bid as if asking for a spade stopper to play in notrump. If opener's hand is minimal with a spade stopper, she will bid 2NT. You can pass, or maybe even raise, if this works for you. Otherwise you can bid 3 of the minor. If partner did not have a spade stopper, she will make the bid that otherwise best suits her hand. She could bid the other unbid suit, showing a stopper, as part of the notrump hunt. But whatever the case, both partners know they have a fit in the minor.

If the impossible 2 spade bid is not available, then the direct raise of partner's 2nd suit shows 9+ to 12-. Partner opens 1 spade and rebids 2 diamonds. You have responded the forcing notrump and now you raise to 3 diamonds. You are showing 9+ to 12- and better option.

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## Practice

You have opened 1 heart and partner has responded 1NT. What do you rebid with the following hands?

1. J4 KQ1087 AJ3 QJ6
2. K54 QJ1087 QJ6 A3
3. QJ65 AQ875 J3 K3
4. K4 AQJ1063 Q7 J95
5. K4 QJ7643 5 AQJ3
6. A4 AQ10963 Q7 KJ5

Partner has opened 1 spade and rebid 2 spades over your forcing notrump response. What is your next bid?

7. 97 KJ4 AQ52 9873
8. 5 63 Q42 KQ108532
9. 5 K3 Q42 Q1087532
10. 5 KJ93 K1087 KJ104
11. 53 KJ93 K1087 KJ10
12. Q3 Q93 K1087 KJ104

You open 1 spade and rebid 2 clubs over a forcing notrump. Partner rebids 2 hearts. What do you do?

13. KQ973 AJ5 62 K108
14. KQ973 6 AJ5 K1083

Here is the auction so far. What is responder's next bid?

	pard	opp	you	opp
	1 ♠	P	1NT	P
	2 ♣	P	2♥	P
	2 ♠	P	?	

15. J4 K10983 1094 A75
16. 4 K10983 1094 A975
17. 4 K10983 10984 A75

## Discussion

1. 2 clubs, the lower ranking of equal length minors.
2. 2 diamonds. The longer minor.
3. 2 clubs, the lower ranking but equal minor.
4. 2 hearts. 6-card suit, minimal range.
5. 2 clubs. Two biddable suits. Spades are not particularly good.
6. 3 hearts. 6-card suit, between 15+ and 18.
7. 3 spades. Two trump are adequate, 9+ to 12.
8. 3 clubs. Running out with a weak hand and a very good minor. Opener must pass.
9. Pass. Your clubs are too weak for running out. Take your chances with partner's 6-card suit.
10. 2NT. You must invite with 9+ to 12-, and you clearly can contain the unbid suits.
11. 2NT. Better than bidding 3 spades because your control of the unbid suits is excellent and you have no ruffing values. Expect to make as many notrump tricks as trick in a spade contract.
12. 3 spades. Better than 2NT because your control of hearts is tenuous.
13. Pass. The perfect contract. You can't get here playing standard.
14. 2 spades. Hope partner has 2 spades.
15. Pass. There is no better spot.
16. 3 clubs. The only fit available.
17. 2NT. Congratulations if you got this one. You already limited your hand to the range of 5+ to 9- when you bid 2 hearts, so partner knows your 2NT is not an invitation. You would pass 2 spades if you held 2 spades, so you hold just 1 spade and 5 hearts. That means you have 7 cards left in the minors. With 4 clubs you would have returned to clubs. So, opener will either pass you in 2NT, or she will bid 3 clubs if she has a 5-card club suit. This was hard, but let it be an example of nice inference in the 2/1 system.

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## Opener raises 1NT to 2NT

When responder bids a forcing notrump and opener raises to 2NT, she shows a balanced hand with 18 or 19 HCP. Strictly speaking, the bid is non-forcing, but responder should pass only if she stretched to make her first bid.

Responder now has a system of transfer bids to describe a variety of hands. The principle agreement is this:

**When opener raises the forcing NT to 2NT, signifying a balanced hand and 18 or 19 HCP,**

**ALL OF RESPONDERS ENSUING BIDS IN A SUIT ARE TRANSFER BIDS.**

- If you were starting to show a 3-card limit raise, transfer opener into her major suit to show 3-card support. Then, either raise to 4 of the major (if you think your hand will ruff), or to 3NT (if you think your hand will not ruff).
- In the same vein, if responder has a 3-card limit raise and a good side suit that can be a source of tricks at slam, she transfers into the major and then bids her side suit.
- Lacking a fit with opener's suit, but having a 5-card major of her own, responder can transfer into her suit and then bid 3NT, offering a choice of games.
- \* Responder who is weak, but whose hand is singlesuited, can transfer into her long suit and then pass.
- If opener's suit was spades and responder has 5 hearts and 3 spades, responder can transfer into hearts (showing 5) and then bid 3 spades (showing 3).

## Opener raises 1NT to 3NT

When opener raises responder's forcing notrump bid to 3NT, she shows a solid 6-card major suit. Solid means that the suit is headed by AKQ. Compare the following two auctions:

1♥      P      1NT      P  
3♥

Opener shows 6 hearts with 16-18 HCP.

1♥      P      1NT      P  
3NT

Opener shows 6 solid hearts with 16-18.

In the first auction, opener's hand may be unbalanced or the suit may not be solid. In the second hand the hand is balanced and the suit is solid. Both hands make the assumption that 9 tricks are likely. But in the 2nd example, it is presumed that those 9 tricks can be taken quickly enough that the notrump game is preferable to the major suit partscore. Standard bidders could make this same agreement, but this nice refinement is usually found only in the two over one system.

Responder's action should nearly always be to pass and play 3NT. Since partner's maximum point count is 18 and responder's maximum is 12, the total is just short of the slam range, and a successful slam is not likely.

Even if responder holds 3 trump and was planning to show a 3-card limit raise, passing 3NT is still best if responder is balanced. This may be an opportunity to beat the field by staying in notrump instead of playing in the suit. That is, if 4 of the major makes 4, then 3NT will probably make 4 also, and your 430 will beat their 420. Of course, if responder were unbalanced, and could likely score ruffing tricks in the short hand, then a return of the major suit would be preferred.

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## Practice

What is opener's rebid over a forcing notrump?

1. AJ10 KQJ98 K54 A6
2. AJ10 KQJ987 KJ5 6
3. K109 AKQ1098 K5 K6

Below are hands for responder. Opener has bid 1 spade, and responder has answered 1NT. Now opener has raised 1NT to 2NT. What should responder bid next?

4. K83 K105 Q982 Q103
5. KJ4 75 AQJ93 1074
6. 6 642 QJ9743 J63
7. J4 KQ1073 Q42 1073
8. J4 KQ10753 Q4 1073

## Discussion

1. 2NT. Balanced 18 or 19.
2. 3 hearts. 6 hearts, 15+ to 18-
3. 3NT. Balanced 16-18 with solid 6-card major.
4. 3 hearts. Transfer into spades showing 3-card support, but bid 3NT to show a lack of ruffing values. The combined cards may make just as many tricks in notrump as in the suit contract, yielding a good board at duplicate.
5. 3 hearts. Transfer to spades showing 3-card support, and then bid 4 diamonds to show slam interest and a potential source of tricks.
6. 3 clubs. Transfer to diamonds and then pass. Ordinarily 1NT shows 5+ points, but this case responder knew that opener would have to bid again over the forcing notrump. So responder hoped to improve the contract when opener bid a new suit.
7. 3 diamonds. Transfer to hearts, showing 5, then bid 3NT, giving a choice of games.
8. 3 diamonds. Transfer to hearts and then raise to 4 hearts. You show a 6-card suit. Partner's 2NT showed a balanced hand, so you have a known fit.

## Opener's Rebid is a Jumpshift

When opener has an unbalanced 18+ points, but not yet a hand that can open 2 clubs, then she will be planning to make a jumpshift. A jumpshift by opener is entirely forcing to game, unless the partner's are absolutely compelled to stop at 4 of a minor. So if responder's first bid is the forcing notrump, opener still proceeds with her jumpshift plan and rebids at the 3 level instead of at the 2 level.

If opener's 2nd suit is hearts, then a 4-card heart suit is certainly promised. But if the suit is clubs or diamonds, opener may occasionally have cause to rebid a 3-card suit. For instance if opener were to hold 4 AQ9873 AJ4 AK6, she must not jump rebid to 3 hearts, which can be passed, but must manufacture a bid of 3 clubs.

Responder's next bid should just be the best bid available for her hand. She must remember that a minor suit, especially clubs, could be a manufactured bid. She must remember that the auction is game forcing, even if she is entirely minimal. The principle of fast arrival applies to responder's bids in suits. If responder has a maximum hand for her forcing notrump bid, she will need to go slow and express an interest in slam.

## Opener's Rebid is a Reverse

The only reverse available to opener in a forcing notrump auction is the auction beginning 1 heart followed by a reverse into spades, showing longer hearts than spades and 16+ points. This reverse is strictly forcing for one round. The complaint is sometimes made that the reverse into spades is pointless since responder cannot hold 4 spades. But the reverse is still correct as the means for opener to show her hand so that intelligent action can follow. What's more, the

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forcing notrump system can find its way, including the possibility of bidding game in a 4-3 spade fit.

If responder has 9+ to 12- and was planning to show a 3-card limit raise, she now jumps to 4 hearts. This is not fast arrival. It is ensuring that game is reached even if opener's reverse were entirely minimal.

If responder raises only to 3 hearts, she is simply taking a preference for hearts to spades with a minimum count and no better bid. In fact, responder may make this suit preference bid holding only 2 hearts.

If responder has no fit for either major, but she has a balanced hand, she should rebid in notrump. A bid of 2NT would show the point range of 5+ to 9-, while the bid of 3NT will show 9+ to 12-. Responder needs to supply the minor suit stoppers.

If responder raises to 3 spades, she is promising only 3-card spade support. But she is also promising 9+ to 12- points and suggesting that game in the 4-3 spade fit is likely the best contract. Doubtless her hand is somehow unbalanced.

On occasion, responder will rebid 3 of a minor. This bid shows a minimum range hand based entirely on a 6-card or longer minor suit. It suggests that playing 3 of the minor is likely the best contract unless opener has extra values.

## Semi-forcing 1 Notrump

When responder has already passed before partner makes her first bid, then a 1 notrump is only semi-forcing. Opener will now be in either 3rd or 4th position and has perhaps opened light. If so, then she will pass your 1NT response to signify a light opening bid. But if opener does bid over your 1NT response, then she is signifying a full opening hand. Once opener signifies a full

opener, then play the entire system. But until partner does show a full opener, special circumstances apply to responder.

If, for instance, responder is a passed hand and has a limit raise, she will use the Drury Convention, which asks partner whether or not they have a light opening. More information will follow in another lesson. For now, simply recognize that the bids of 2 clubs and 2 diamonds will be reserved for bidding Drury.

Do not get carried away with a maximum passed hand when partner has opened in 3rd or 4th seat. Quite the contrary. Until partner shows they have a full opener, exert caution for fear partner's bid has been light. If it has, partner will need your maximum passed hand to make even a partscore contract.

Notice that as a passed hand, you cannot possibly have a Jacoby 2NT response to the opening bid. For that reason **a 2NT response by a passed hand over 1 of a major has a totally unusual meaning.** In fact, it is an unusual notrump bid showing 5-5 in the minors and a singleton in partner's suit. Do not make the 5-5 bid with a doubleton in partner's suit since you may yet find partner's major the best contract.

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## Practice

Opener has bid 1 heart, and over your forcing notrump has reversed into 2 spades. What is your next bid?

1. K82 AJ4 97432 QJ
2. J32 8 K1083 QJ852
3. J2 84 KJ932 KQ105
4. Q8 J4 K7653 J875
5. KQ5 7 A9643 J875
6. J2 7 KQJ942 9863

Responder's first bid has been pass.

7. Opener bids 1 spade. What do you respond?  
K3 AJ6 Q9754 J107
8. Opener has bid 1 spade. What do you respond?  
7 J4 KQ973 KJ1043

## Discussion

1. 4 hearts. Make sure game is reached.
2. 2NT. Show minimum values while denying a fit.
3. 3NT. Deny a fit for the majors, but make sure with 9+ or more that game is reached.
4. 3 hearts. This is a suit preference for hearts. Some may bid 2NT, but your minor suits are so weak that the defense may score too often.
5. 3 spades. With 9+ and over you must reach game. Spades looks more likely to you than notrump because your minors are spotty while your spades are good, plus you have some ruffing power.
6. 3 diamonds. A minimum hand with nothing but diamonds.
7. 1NT. Just as always.
8. 2NT. A passed hand can't be making a Jacoby 2NT raise. Instead, your bid is unusual. It shows 5-5 in the minors.