

# Improving 2/1 Game Force - Part 3

By: Fred Gitelman

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This article is the third in a series about improving the effectiveness of 2/1 Game Force. The first 2 articles appeared in the November 1993 and January 1994 issues of Canadian Masterpoint.

In the first article I suggested using a natural, game-forcing 2NT response to a major suit opening bid. I further suggested using the cheapest jump shift (1 ♥ – 2 ♠ and 1 ♠ – 3 ♣) as forcing raises of the major suit that was opened (the hand you would normally bid Jacoby 2NT with). Here is the response structure I suggest for these raises. The emphasis is on opener describing his hand. Opener can always show whether or not he has extra trump length, extra values, as well as if and where he has shortness.

## 1) 1 ♥ - 2 ♠ – Opener's responses:

- 2 NT    5 trumps, extra values, balanced
- 3 ♣    Any minimum (but see 4♥ below)
- 3 ♦    5 Trumps, extra values, unbalanced
- 3 ♥    6+ Trumps, extra values, balanced
- 3 ♠    6+ Trumps, extra values, singleton or void in spades
- 3 NT    Unused
- 4 ♣    6+ Trumps, extra values, singleton or void in clubs
- 4 ♦    6+ Trumps, extra values, singleton or void in diamonds
- 4 ♥    6+ Trumps, minimum, balanced

## 2) 1 ♠ - 3 ♣ – Opener's responses:

- 3 ♦ Any minimum (but see 4 ♠ below)
- 3 ♥ 5 Trumps, extra values, unbalanced
- 3 ♠ 6+ Trumps, extra values, balanced
- 3 NT 5 Trumps, extra values, balanced (forcing)
- 4 ♣ 6+ Trumps, extra values, singleton or void in clubs
- 4 ♦ 6+ Trumps, extra values, singleton or void in diamonds
- 4 ♥ 6+ Trumps, extra values, singleton or void in hearts
- 4 ♠ 6+ Trumps, minimum, balanced

The following rules should make it pretty easy to remember the above. I think that if you learn the first 2 rules, the entire structure follows naturally from there.

- The cheapest suit bid shows any minimum except a balanced minimum with extra trump length (bid 4 of the major with that). All other bids show extra values.
- The next cheapest suit bid shows 5 trumps and extra values in an unbalanced hand.
- The cheapest no trump bid shows 5 trumps and extra values in a balanced hand.
- Rebidding your major at the 3 level shows extra values, extra trump length, and no shortness.
- Jumps in new suits (or bidding 3 ♠ when hearts was opened) show shortness in the suit bid (like splinters), but also show extra values and extra trump length.

## 3) After Opener Bids the Cheapest Suit:

The auction has gone:

1 ♥	2 ♠	or	1 ♠	3 ♣
3 ♣			3 ♦	

Opener's rebid shows just about any minimum. If responder is interested, he can bid the next step (3 ♦ or 3 ♥) to ask. Opener responds as follows:

- Opener bids his major with six or more trumps and an unbalanced hand (with a balanced hand, opener would have bid game in the major on the last round). Responder can now bid the next step to ask opener where his shortness is. All other bids by opener show 5 trumps.
- Opener bids 3NT with a 5 trump balanced minimum that does not mind playing in 3NT – for example

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

This is the one sequence in my entire system that contradicts the definition of serious 3NT in the November 1993 article.

- Opener bids his shortness with a 5 trump unbalanced minimum.
- Opener bids game in the major with a 5 trump balanced minimum with no interest in playing 3NT e.g.

♠ A Q x x x    ♥ x x    ♦ x x    ♣ A J x x

#### 4) After Opener Bids the Next Cheapest Suit:

1 ♥	2 ♠	or	1 ♠	3 ♣
3 ♦			3 ♥	

Opener's rebid shows 5 trumps, extra values, and shortness somewhere. If responder is interested he can bid the next step to ask for shortness. Opener then bids his short suit.

Once opener has described his strength, trump length, and approximate distribution, responder can start cue-bidding if he still has slam interest. Responder can also start a cue-bidding auction before opener has fully described his hand by bidding above the next step. My November 1993 and January 1994 articles described an effective cue-bidding style that complements this structure well.

## IMPROVING FORCING 1NT AUCTIONS

Playing a forcing 1NT response to a major suit opening is an important corollary to playing 2/1s as forcing to game. There

are many hands in the 10-12 point range that qualify for a Standard American 2/1 response. Playing 2/1 Game Force, you bid a forcing 1NT with most of these hands. The fact that the 1NT response has a wide range and that opener must sometimes bid a non-suit in response can make follow-up auctions tricky. The problem is so difficult that I believe that no matter which methods you play in this area, you will sometimes end up in a ridiculous contract.

Here are a couple of suggestions:

### **1) Don't Pass Opener's Minor Suit Rebids Very Often**

The auction has gone:

1 ♡	1 NT
2 ♣	

You hold:

♠ K x   ♡ A 10 x   ♦ x x x   ♣ J x x x x

*Do not pass.* Bid 2 ♠ or 3 ♣ (I prefer 3 ♣). Game is still possible – in spades, if partner has something like:

♠ A Q J 10 x   ♡ x   ♦ x x x   ♣ A K Q x

in clubs – slam is excellent opposite

♠ A x x x x   ♡ x   ♦ A x   ♣ A K x x x

or in notrump

♠ A x x x x   ♡ K x   ♦ x x x   ♣ A K Q

By bidding you will occasionally take a minus when you would have made 2 ♣ but the potential game (or slam) bonus is much more important (at IMP scoring anyway).

## 2) Have More Than 1 Way To Raise Opener's Minor

The auction has gone:

1 ♡            1 NT  
2 ♦

Hand 1:

♠ x x x   ♡ x   ♦ A Q x x x x   ♣ x x x

Hand 2:

♠ Q x x   ♡ x   ♦ K Q x x   ♣ J x x x x

Hand 3:

♠ A x   ♡ x x   ♦ A J 10 x x x   ♣ J x x   [repaired]

My first suggestion implies that you should not pass with any of these hands. At the same time, it is not right to bid 3 ♦ with all 3 of them. That would give the raise of partner's minor too wide a range and make it impossible for him to judge accurately. There is an easy solution when hearts is the suit that has been opened:

Use responder's 2 ♠ rebid as some kind of conventional raise. 2 ♠ has no natural meaning since responder did not bid 1 ♠ at his first opportunity.

I prefer to play that 2 ♠ shows either a hand like the first hand or a hand like the third hand (that is either a weak raise with a lot of trumps or a hand almost worth a 2/1). With a hand like the second hand you simply raise opener's minor (this is called a courtesy raise). Over responder's 2 ♠ rebid, opener can return to his minor with no game interest or bid 2NT to ask which hand type responder has. This 2NT bid will not affect who declares a possible no trump contract because responder has already bid 1NT. After opener's 2NT inquiry, responder can go back to 3 of the minor with Hand 1 or make some other descriptive bid with Hand 3.

When 1 ♠ is the opening bid, things are more difficult. If opener bids 2 ♣, you can use responder's 2 ♦ rebid as an artificial force. There are many variations of this convention. The one that I

play is called BART. Unfortunately it is quite complex, but if interest warrants I will discuss BART in a future article. Notice that BART (or one of its variations) does give something up (the natural 2 ♦ bid) while the 2 ♠ bid discussed in the previous paragraph is free (it does not replace a natural bid). If opener's suits are spades and diamonds, bidding is extremely awkward. If somebody has a good solution to this problem, I would be happy to hear it.

### **3) Have Methods After Responder's 2NT Rebid:**

The auction has gone:

1 ♠	1 NT
2 ♦	2 NT
?	

Responder has shown 10-12 points but he has many possible distributions. Opener's hand is virtually unlimited and he also has many possible distributions. The right level could be a partscore, game, or slam. It could still be right to play in any trump suit or in no trump. Do you and your partner have the methods to deal with all of these possibilities?

There are six types of hands that opener might wish to describe:

1. 5-5 minimum opening
2. 5-5 game force
3. 6-4 minimum opening
4. 6-4 game force
5. 5143 (roughly) game force
6. 5341 (roughly) game force

In the discussion below, Type 5 will always be the 5431 hand with 3 cards in the lower ranking unbid suit. Type 6 will be the 5431 hand with 3 cards in the higher ranking unbid suit.

The structure that I use lets opener show all of these hand types at a convenient level. After that, responder is usually in a good position to place the contract or at least to know what the best trump suit is (if any). In the above auction, this is how opener would continue:

- 3 ♣ Artificial force (types 2, 4, or 5 above). Responder must bid 3 ♦ and opener will clarify.
- 3 ♦ Type 1 above. Responder would either PASS, take preference to spades, or raise diamonds with a good fitting hand.
- 3 ♥ Type 6 above. Responder can place the contract in the appropriate game, bid 3 ♠ to show 2 card support, 4♥ to agree hearts, or 4 ♦ with a good hand in support of diamonds.
- 3 ♠ Type 3 above. Responder would usually PASS, but might occasionally raise spades or go back to 4 ♦.

If opener bids 3 ♣ (the artificial game force, types 2, 4, or 5), responder must bid 3 ♦. Opener would then bid:

- 3 ♥ Type 2 (5-5 game force)
- 3 ♠ Type 4 (6-4 game force)
- 3 NT Type 5 (5143 game force)

This structure works in all sequences in which opener's second suit is not clubs. If opener's second suit is clubs, the 3 ♣ bid is needed to show the weak 5-5. 3 ♦ is now used as the artificial force. There are only 2 sequences:

1) The auction has gone

1 ♥	1 NT
2 ♣	2 NT
?	

- 3 ♣ Type 1 (weak 5-5)
- 3 ♦ Type 2 (strong 5-5), 3 (weak 6-4), or 4 (strong 6-4)
- 3 ♥ Type 5 (strong 1534)
- 3 ♠ Type 6 (strong 3514)

In this case, opener must bid the artificial force (3 ♦) if he wants to play 3♥ (Type 3, weak 6-4). Responder will bid 3♥ and opener can pass.

## 2) The auction has gone

1 ♠	1 NT
2 ♣	2 NT
?	

- 3 ♣ Type 1 (weak 5-5)
- 3 ♦ Type 2 (strong 5-5) or 4 (strong 6-4)
- 3 ♥ Type 3 (weak 6-4) or 5 (strong 5134)
- 3 ♠ Type 6 (strong 3514)

Once again, opener must "transfer to his major" to get out in three of that suit. In this case, opener can continue with 3NT to show a strong 5134 (Type 5). Here is yet another set of rules to help you remember all of this:

- With a weak 5-5 (Type 1) opener always bids 3 of his second suit
- With a weak 6-4 (Type 3) opener bids 3 of his first suit unless opener's second suit is clubs. In this case, opener must "transfer to his major".
- The cheapest new suit is an artificial force. Responder must bid the next step. The artificial force always can contain the strong 5-5 (Type 2) and the strong 6-4 (Type 4). Unless opener's second suit is clubs, the artificial force can contain Type 5 (a 5431 hand with 3 cards in the lowest unbid suit).
- To show Type 5 (strong 5431 hand with 3 in the lower unbid suit), opener bids 3 ♣ (artificial force) followed by 3NT unless clubs is his second suit. If clubs is opener's second suit, he bids 3♥.
- To show Type 6 (strong 5431 hand with 3 in the higher unbid suit), opener bids his 3 card suit unless clubs is his second suit. In that case, he bids 3 ♠.

The last thing I would like to offer is a warning:

Unless you are willing to really learn a system well with a regular partner, you are better off without it. Not knowing your system will get you poor results, ruin the game for your opponents, and create ethical problems that you really do not



need. The more complex and artificial your methods, the greater the scope is for all of these types of problems.

I am not suggesting that everyone has to play methods as complex (and I believe effective) as those that I present. Having agreements with your partner is the important thing. They do not have to be the best possible agreements. In fact, I strongly believe that having simple agreements that your partnership knows well is far more effective than having complex agreements that your partnership is uncomfortable with.

If you believe that the methods I have described are too complex for you or your partnership, then I hope I have been able to show you some weak parts of how you play 2/1. If you do feel like you would like to adopt some or all of these methods, all I can tell you is that it is worth the effort. You will experience one of the most satisfying parts of bridge when the perfect hand for your methods actually comes up (as it will).