



Eric Rodwell is known for his highly developed skills in creating integrated bidding systems at world-class levels. In this third article on 2/1 game force, Eric discusses the impact of 2/1 on the 1NT response to a major suit.

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If the partnership has agreed to play two-over-one game force (2/1), then a new suit response at the two level is a marathon bid ★, forcing to at least game. That can create a challenge for responder when the opening bid is 1♥ or 1♠ and responder has 11 or 12 points.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	?	

Suppose responder, East, has this hand. In standard methods, East is too strong to bid 1NT and would respond 2♦. The 2♦ response is forcing ●, but not forcing to game. Playing 2/1, however, the 2♦ response would be forcing to game. With only 10 high-card points plus 1 length point for the five-card suit, responder isn't strong enough to commit the partnership to the game level.

To get around this dilemma, the range for a 1NT has to be expanded from 6-10 points to 6-12.

The Forcing 1NT Response

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Allowing responder to have as many as 12 points for the response of 1NT creates another challenge for the partnership. In standard methods, opener would pass a 1NT response with a balanced hand of about 13–14 points. If responder has 11 or 12, the partnership could miss a game with a combined total of 25 or 26 points.

To meet this challenge, when playing 2/1, a response of 1NT to an opening bid of 1♥ or 1♠ is forcing ●—opener must bid again. The 1NT response is forcing for only one round; it is not forcing to game.

The use of the forcing 1NT is not a big change from standard methods. Most of the time, the auction will go the same way in either system:

WEST		EAST	
♠ A Q 8 7 3		♠ K 4	
♥ K 6 4		♥ Q 8 7 3	
♦ K J 6 3		♦ Q 5	
♣ 5		♣ 9 7 6 4 2	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♦	Pass	2♠	All Pass

West opens the five-card major suit. With only 7 high-card points, East isn't strong enough to do anything but respond 1NT. West now shows the second suit. East give preference back to opener's first suit, and the partnership stops in a spade partscore.

Even though the partnership is in a seven-card fit, it's a good spot, probably better than 1NT or 2♥ on the 4–3 fit. Playing 2/1 or standard—or almost any other methods—the partnership would reach the same contract.

The Better Minor Rebid

The forcing 1NT response will make a difference on some hands.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
?			

♠ A Q 8 7 3
♥ K 6 4
♦ K J 6
♣ 5 3

Suppose opener has this hand. With a minimum balanced hand and no second suit to show, opener would pass the non-forcing 1NT response with this hand. Playing 2/1, opener can't pass because the 1NT response is forcing. What does opener rebid?

With a minimum balanced hand and no side four-card suit, opener bids a three-card minor: 2♣ with both three-card minors, or 2♦—as on this hand—with only a doubleton club. This is similar to an opening bid of 1♣ or 1♦, which could be based on a three-card suit.

Although this might seem a bit strange, since 1NT could be the best spot, the forcing 1NT response will often get the partnership to a better contract than standard methods.

WEST		EAST	
♠ A Q 8 7 3		♠ K 2	
♥ K 6 4		♥ Q 8 3	
♦ K J 6		♦ Q 10 7 5 3	
♣ 5 3		♣ 9 6 4	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	1NT ●	Pass
2♦	Pass	Pass	Pass

2♦ is a better contract than the 1NT contract that would be reached in standard methods when opener passed the 1NT response.

WEST		EAST	
♠ A Q 8 7 3		♠ 6 2	
♥ K 6 4		♥ Q J 9 8 7 3	
♦ K J 6		♦ Q 3	
♣ 5 3		♣ 9 6 4	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	1NT ●	Pass
2♥	Pass	2♥	All Pass

2♥ is a much better spot than 1NT!

The Three-Card Limit Raise

The forcing 1NT provides an easy way for responder to show three-card support for opener's major with an invitational hand, about 11-12 points:

WEST		EAST	
♠	K Q 8 7 3	♠	A J 2
♥	4 2	♥	Q 8 7 3
♦	K 5	♦	J 9 6 2
♣	A 9 7 4	♣	K 8

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	1NT ●	Pass
2♣	Pass	3♠ ●	Pass
Pass	Pass		

In standard methods, East would start with a 2♦ response, since an immediate limit raise to 3♠ would show four-card support. This would create a rebid challenge for West and perhaps lead to confusion later in the auction.

Using 2/1, East starts with a forcing 1NT ●. After West's 2♣ rebid, East jumps to 3♠ to show an invitational hand of about 11-12 points with specifically three-card support. West passes with a minimum and the partnership stops in a reasonable spot.

Showing a Weak Raise

The forcing 1NT can also be used to differentiate between a sound raise and a weak raise of opener's major. With about 8-10, responder raises to the two level right away. With a weak raise, about 5-7, responder bids 1NT and then gives preference to the major:

WEST		EAST	
♠	A 5	♠	J 6 4
♥	K J 8 7 3	♥	9 4 2
♦	7 3	♦	Q 9 5 2
♣	A K 8 5	♣	Q J 4

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	Pass	1NT ●	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♥	All Pass

After East's weak-sounding preference to 2♥, West isn't tempted to bid again. If East had raised to 2♥ right away, West might have moved toward game.

When Forcing 1NT Is Off

If the partnership has agreed to play the forcing 1NT response, there are three situations when it doesn't apply:

WHEN 1NT FORCING DOESN'T APPLY

- After an opening bid of 1♣ or 1♦.
- If responder is a passed hand.
- If responder's right-hand opponent overcalls or doubles.

When Opener Bids 1♣ or 1♦

When the opening bid is 1♣ or 1♦, responder has room to bid hearts or spades at the one level. With no major, responder can show a balanced hand of about 11-12 points by jumping to 2NT, invitational. With a balanced hand of 13-15 points, responder can jump to 3NT. So there's little need to use a response of 1NT as forcing.

After an opening bid of 1♣ or 1♦, a response of 1NT shows about 6-10 points and is non-forcing ●.

WEST		EAST	
♠	A 10 7 5	♠	J 6 3
♥	A Q 8 3	♥	K 10 5
♦	8 5	♦	K Q 10
♣	A 9 4	♣	8 7 5 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	Pass	1NT ●	Pass
Pass	Pass		

East doesn't need to raise clubs with poor four-card support. Instead, East responds 1NT, showing 6-10. West knows the partnership doesn't have a major suit fit, since responder didn't bid 1♥ or 1♠. Opener is happy to play partscore in 1NT.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♣	Pass	2NT ●	Pass
Pass	Pass		

WEST		EAST	
♠	A 5	♠	K 7 6
♥	A 8 3 2	♥	K 9 4
♦	K Q 10 4	♦	J 3
♣	8 4 2	♣	A 10 7 5 3

East can jump to 2NT ● to show a balanced hand with invitational values. There's no need for a forcing 1NT when East has 11-12 points. With a minimum, West passes and the partnership is in the best spot.

Responder is a Passed Hand

If responder passed initially, opener knows that responder has fewer than 13 points. So, opener can pass a 1NT response with a minimum

opening bid. This is especially useful if opener has made a 'light' opening bid—with fewer than 13 points—in third or fourth position. There's no need for the partnership to get too high. So, a 1NT response is only invitational ● when responder is a passed hand.

WEST		EAST	
♠	K J 4	♠	Q 7 2
♥	4 2	♥	A J 8 6 3
♦	K J 10 3	♦	Q 2
♣	10 8 6 3	♣	J 7 5

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass	Pass	1♥	Pass
1NT ●	Pass	Pass	Pass

After West passes, East opens light in third chair with 10 high-card points plus 1 length point. When West responds 1NT, East doesn't have to bid again. The partnership can stop in 1NT, which is high enough.

Right-Hand Opponent Overcalls

When an opponent overcalls, it is more practical to treat responder's notrump bids as natural, showing some strength in the opponent's suit and suggesting notrump as a place to play. A 1NT response shows about 6-10 points and is invitational ● after an overcall.

The overcall gives responder other options with a hand unsuitable for bidding notrump. Responder can pass with a marginal hand, waiting for opener to bid again with extra strength. Responder can make a negative double or a cuebid. Responder can bid a new suit at the two level, which is no longer forcing to game, only forcing for one round (see last issue).

WEST		EAST	
♠	7 3 2	♠	K Q 10
♥	A K 9 6 2	♥	5 4
♦	A 5 4	♦	Q 8 6 3
♣	Q 9	♣	J 10 8 4

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	1♠	1NT ●	Pass
Pass	Pass		

East makes a natural 1NT response after the 1♠ overcall, West doesn't have to take the partnership any higher. ♦