

Forcing Notrump

In the earlier days of bridge, four-card majors were opened commonly. However, today very few partnerships open four-card majors. Most of the bridge players whether they play Standard system or Precision open five-card majors. The main reason for this is that five-card majors are easier to play.

In standard bidding, 1NT response to partner's major-suit opening bid is nonforcing. However today most of the partnerships who play five-card majors play Forcing One Notrump response to major suit opening bid. We would discuss in detail in these articles, Forcing Notrump as many Bridge players inspite of being good card players don't have clear understanding of this important bridge convention.

A) What is Forcing Notrump

When playing Forcing Notrump, the one notrump response to a major-suit opening generally shows 5-12 HCP and is forcing on the opener for one round. However, responder who has bid forcing 1NT does not promise a rebid. The forcing notrump response helps to narrow down the ranges of other bids by the responder and makes bidding easier for some difficult hands although you can no longer play 1NT contract. The hands in which 1NT will be the correct contract occur rather infrequently. Therefore, missing a possible 1NT contract seems a small price to pay in exchange for a tool that works better on most hands. The 1NT forcing response covers following types of hands:-

- Weak hands - containing a long suit or worth a raise of opener's suit (5-7 HCP and 3 cards in major).
- Hands that would respond a nonforcing 1NT.
- 3-card support and invitational hand of 10-12 HCP (3-card limit raise hand).
- Balanced hands of 10+-12HCP and can also be 13-15 HCP (depending on partnership style) with a maximum doubleton in opener's major suit.

B) Rebids by Opener after Forcing Notrump Response

Since the opener has already promised five-card length with his opening bid, rebidding his suit after the forcing notrump shows extra length – minimum 6 cards. Therefore, with a balanced hand of 5-3-3-2 distribution, opener must bid his cheapest 3-card minor suit. However in a hand containing 5 hearts and 4 spades not good enough to reverse, opener may have to bid 2C with a 4-5-2-2 distribution or rebid his 5-card heart suit if the suit is of exceptional quality. The following is the rebid structure available to opener:

- Rebid his major suit at 2-level with 6-cards and upto 15 – Bad 16 HCP.
- Bid a minor suit at 2 level with 3+ cards and upto 17–18 HCP.
- Bid a new major suit at 2 level with 4+ cards – If new major is hearts then points may be upto 17 HCP where as if new major suit is spades then this constitutes a reverse and shows 17+ HCP.
- Bid 2NT – Shows a 5-3-3-2 hand and 17-18 HCP.
- Jump rebid his major suit at three level with good 6+ cards and 16-18 HCP.
- Jump in a new suit at three level is game forcing with 4+ cards and 19+ HCP. With a 6-4 or 5-5 distribution and good suit, the points can be 17+. Jump bid in a minor can sometimes be 3-cards only if opener has a single suiter GF hand and no convenient rebid is available to him.
- Jump to 3NT – Shows a balanced hand and 19–20 HCP.
- Jump to 4 of Opener's major suit – to play with atleast 7-card suit.

C) Advantages and Disadvantages of Forcing Notrump Response

- You can no longer play in 1NT which may be the last makeable contract.
- Since opener's minor suit rebid at two level can be of 3-cards, this sometimes creates difficulties and you may land up playing in 4-3 or 3-3 fit although you may have a 5-3 fit available.
- Weak hands containing a six-card suit can be easily handled.
- 3-card limit raise can be easily distinguished with the help of forcing notrump.
- Raise of opener's suit can be in 2 ways – direct raise with 8-10 points and indirect via forcing 1NT with upto 7 points and also you can play jump to 3-level directly as preemptive raise with 4 trumps.
- As responder can bid 1NT with GF hands, 2 over 1 response promises a reasonable suit.

Although we would definitely recommend Forcing Notrump, when playing with Subhash, he introduced the concept of Semi-Forcing Notrump which is definitely superior. We will continue our discussion next month on rebids by responder and further developments and Semi Forcing Notrump Response. We will also discuss transfer methods which responder can use after opener rebids his major suit.

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Forcing Notrump (Part – 2)

Last month we discussed briefly, the Opener's re-bids playing Forcing Notrump. Let us say you and your partner are playing forcing notrump and you opened One Heart holding following hands:

(1) S – A87 H – Q8754 D – 852 C – AQ (2) S – KJ32 H – KJ543 D – A6 C – 54

After partner bids 1NT (forcing), what should you do?

In hand (1) you are supposed to bid 2D and in hand (2) what else apart from 2C. Certainly you would hate to make those bids at the table. This brings us to the concept of Semi-Forcing Notrump.

In Semi-Forcing Notrump, the opener passes 1NT bid if he is holding a minimum balanced hand (upto 12 HCP) as above, otherwise he responds as if 1NT was forcing. Certainly Semi-Forcing Notrump is a good idea as it allows you to play 1NT contract. However the only possible draw back is that incase partner has a 3-card limit raise, you don't play in your best fit although it may not matter much as you are playing only at one level against three level.

Also if responder is a passed hand a 1NT response is semi-forcing irrespective of your method when responder is not a passed hand. A 1NT response by a passed hand generally denies support for partner's major as with 3-card limit raise hand you would use Drury Convention.

A) Rebids by Responder after Opener bids a lower ranking new suit at 2-level

The opener has promised only 3-cards in his second suit if it is a minor suit although he can have much more. Responder has to keep this in mind as he clarifies his hand to opener. The following is the rebid structure available to responder:

- Pass – Shows a weak hand. If Opener's rebid was 2C or 2D, responder must have 4-card support. However if opener's rebid was 2H, responder can pass with 3-cards.
- Bid a new suit at 2 level or 3 level (without jump) – Shows a long suit in a weak hand upto 9 HCP.
- Bid partner's major suit at 2 level – Shows preference, with 2-cards upto 9 HCP or 3-cards upto 7 HCP.
- Bid 2NT – Shows a balanced or semibalanced invitational hand 10-12 HCP. It is then the turn of the opener to describe his hand further. Opener can have variety of hands in which either opener wants to sign-off at 3-level or force to game. We will discuss all aspects of this bidding in next month's bulletin.
- Jump in a new suit at three level – Shows a good suit of atleast 6-cards and 9-10 HCP.
- Jump raise opener's major suit to three level – Shows 3-card limit raise hand.
- Raise opener's minor suit to three level – Shows atleast 5-card support, unbalanced hand upto 9 HCP.
- Jump to 3NT/4 of Opener's major suit – Shows a hand of 11-12 HCP and fit in opener's minor suit.
- Make a Impossible 2S bid (after 1H opening) – As responder has already denied holding 4-card spade suit, this bid shows an invitational hand with good support for opener's minor suit.

B) Rebids by Responder after Opener rebids his major suit at 2-level

When opener rebids his suit at 2-level, he promises minimum 6-cards in his suit and upto 15/16 HCP. The responder therefore can pass with a weak hand unless responder has a very long suit of his own and feels that it is better to play in his suit. The following is the rebid structure available to responder:

- Pass – Shows a weak hand.
- Bid a new suit at 3 level – Shows a long suit in a weak hand upto 9 HCP.
- Bid 2NT – Shows a balanced or semibalanced invitational hand 10-12 HCP.
- Raise opener's major suit to three level – Shows 2/3-card support and invitational hand.
- Jump to 3NT/4 of Opener's major suit – Shows a hand of 11-12 HCP.
- Jump to 3S (after 1H Opening) or 4C/D – splinter, singleton in the bid suit and three card support for the opener's major suit. Responder's hand has improved after opener rebids his suit.

The structure mentioned above after Opener rebids his major suit is a simple one. For experienced partnerships, we would recommend little bit of science by which responder can show various types of hands like: weak or invitational hand in a minor suit, invitational with both minors, invitational hand with values in a particular suit.

In our next bulletin we will cover rebids by responder after opener raises the forcing notrump.

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Forcing Notrump (Part – 3)

We discussed briefly, the re-bids of opener and responder playing Forcing Notrump. We continue our discussion on special sequences which we would like to recommend for serious partnerships.

C) Rebids by Opener after responder rebids 2NT

The responder's rebid of 2NT shows a balanced or semibalanced invitational hand with 10-12 HCP. The opener now can decide to play in a partscore or game in a particular denomination. In certain hands opener will need responder's cooperation to make a decision after opener describes his hand to responder. There are basically five sequences which are possible:

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| 1) 1H-1NT-2C-2NT-? | 2) 1H-1NT-2D-2NT-? | |
| 3) 1S-1NT-2C-2NT-? | 4) 1S-1NT-2D-2NT-? | 5) 1S-1NT-2H-2NT-? |

The types of hand which opener can hold fall broadly into five types:

Minimum opening hands (where opener wants to sign-off) : 1. 5-5 distribution 2. 6-4 distribution
 Game Forcing hands : 3. 5-5 distribution 4. 6-4 distribution and 5. 5-4-3-1 type distribution

Playing normal methods it is not possible to show all these type of hands at the right level. Our general recommendation is what we call : **Weak minor and strong major** i.e. whenever opener rebids his minor he shows a weak hand of 5-5 distribution wanting to play in a partscore. When opener rebids his original major he shows 6-4 distribution GF hand and if he rebids his second major, he shows 5-5 distribution GF. To show other types of hands containing Fragment we generally use new minor as a puppet and for weak 6-4 hands (second suit minor) opener must transfer into his original major. The complete structure is as follows:

1H-1NT-2C-2NT- ? 3C = 5-5 to play 3D = Puppet to 3H, After 3H Pass = 6-4 Weak 3S = 5-5 GF 3N = D Fragment (1-5-3-4) 3H = 6-4 Game Forcing 3S = Fragment (3-5-1-4), GF	1S-1NT-2C-2NT- ? 3C = 5-5 to play 3D = Puppet to 3H, After 3H 3S = 5-5 GF 3N = D Fragment (5-1-3-4) 3H = Puppet to 3S, After 3S Pass = 6-4 Weak 3N = H Fragment (5-3-1-4) 3S = 6-4 Game Forcing	1S-1NT-2H-2NT- ? 3C = Puppet to 3D, After 3D 3H = 5-5 Weak 3S = 6-4 Weak 3N = C Fragment (5-4-1-3) 3D = D Fragment (5-4-3-1), GF 3H = 5-5 Game Forcing 3S = 6-4 Game Forcing
1H-1NT-2D-2NT-? 3C = Puppet to 3D, After 3D 3H = 6-4 Weak 3S = 5-5 GF 3N = C Fragment (1-5-4-3) 3D = 5-5 to play 3H = 6-4 Game Forcing 3S = S Fragment (3-5-1-4), GF	1S-1NT-2D-2NT-? 3C = Puppet to 3D, After 3D 3H = H Fragment (5-3-1-4) 3S = 5-5 GF 3N = C Fragment (1-5-4-3) 3D = 5-5 to play 3H = Puppet to 3S, to play 3S = 6-4 Game Forcing	Important : Whenever opener's second suit is a minor – the new minor bid is a puppet and after puppet the rebid of 3S by opener shows 5-5 Game Forcing hand and 3NT shows minor suit Fragment.

D) Rebids by Responder after Opener raises the Forcing Notrump

When opener raises the Forcing Notrump, he promises balanced hand containing 18 – 19 HCP. The further bidding can be natural however we recommend transfer bids. The transfer bid allows responder to control the auction and stop in a partscore. Also on many hands it will make opener (the stronger hand) declarer.

- **All suit bids**, at the three level are transfers including bidding the opener's major.
- **Transfer to opener's major**, shows 3-card support. If responder then bids 3NT, shows scattered values and gives opener the choice of game contract. If after transfer responder bids a new suit, he shows a good side suit and 3-card limit raise values. After transfer bidding 4major is to play.
- **Jump to 4 of opener's major**, shows a balanced 3-card limit raise hand without a side suit.
- **3NT**, is natural to play.

The above suggested methods although artificial are quite effective. In our next bulletin we will cover rebids by responder after opener rebids his major suit at two level.

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Forcing Notrump (Part – 4)

We continue our discussion on special sequences available to responder after opener rebids his major suit at two level.

E) Rebids by Responder after Opener Rebids his suit at two-level

When the Opener re-bids his suit, he shows atleast 6-cards in his major suit and generally denies 4-cards in a minor or hearts (if opener's suit is spades). Opener can have upto 15-16 hcp for this bid. Now it is responder's turn to describe his hand so that opener can decide to play in a partscore or game in a particular denomination.

The types of hands which responder can hold fall broadly into six types:

Weak hands (where responder wants to sign-off) : 1. Any long minor suit hand

Invitational hands : 2. Any 6-card minor 3. Balanced or semi-balanced with values in a particular suit
4. With general values 5. 3-card limit raise hand 6. 5-5 in minors

Playing normal methods it is not possible to show all these type of hands at the right level. However playing transfers most of the above hands can be easily shown. Also the transfer method makes opener declarer whenever responder has a weak hand with long suit. Transfer to opener's major suit at three level is 3-card limit raise. The complete structure is as follows:

<p>1H-1NT-2H- ? 2S = Puppet to 2N with Invitational hands Opener bids 2N if he doesn't want to accept invitation, otherwise he bids 3C/D. Opener can also bid 3H to play. After 2NT 3C = Club suit, Invitational hand 3D = Diamond suit, Invitational hand 3H = Values in Spades, Invitational hand 2N = Puppet to 3C. After 3C Pass = Weak hand with Club suit 3H = Values in Clubs, Invitational hand 3C = Puppet to 3D. After 3D Pass = Weak hand with Diamond suit 3H = Values in Diamond, Invitational hand 3D = 3-card Heart support, limit raise. After 3H bid by opener, responder can bid game 3H = General invitation with doubleton Heart</p>	<p>1S-1NT-2S- ? 2N = Puppet to 3C. After 3C Pass = Weak hand with Club suit 3D = Diamond suit, Invitational hand 3H = Heart suit, Invitational hand 3S = Values in Clubs, Invitational hand 3C = Puppet to 3D. After 3D Pass = Weak hand with Diamond suit 3S = Values in Diamond, Invitational hand 3D = Puppet to 3H. After 3H Pass = Weak hand with Heart suit 3S = Values in Heart, Invitational hand 3H = 3-card Spade support, limit raise. After 3S bid by opener, responder can bid game. However if opener wants to play game, he either bids 4S or can cue bid. 3S = General invitation with doubleton Spade</p>
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The hand which is very difficult to describe is 5-5 in minors with invitational values. Although rare but these hands do come up. Therefore we do not prefer to handle these hands through forcing notrump. The solution is to bid 3 Club directly after 1H or 1S opening to show 5-5 in minors invitational hand (being played by some expert partnerships). However this would require changing the response structure after 1H/S opening if you play Bergen raises.

F) Bart and Anti Bart conventions

Playing forcing or semi-forcing notrump, the opener's minor suit re-bid at two level shows minimum 3-cards. Due to this generally responder returns to opener's major suit with 2 cards and less than 10 or 11 hcp. In this case responder's strength is not clear and also finding 4-4 minor suit fit is difficult. The Bart Convention devised by Les Bart has attempted to solve this problem. The Bart convention is applicable after 1S opening.

Bart convention was presented in our bulletin of September 2003. However we would strongly recommend Anti Bart convention which can be played after 1H or 1S Opening. We will discuss this convention in detail in next month's bulletin. Considering the advantages of Anti Bart convention, it is recommended that 2D re-bid by opener should generally show minimum 4-cards and 2C minimum 2-cards so that you can bid 2C more often. However there is one disadvantage of Anti Bart convention. As 2D bid is a transfer to 2H, you can no longer play in 2D. With a weak hand you either pass 2C re-bid by opener or bid 3D (with a long diamond suit) to play.

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Forcing Notrump (Part – 5)

We have been discussing Forcing Notrump convention. We are concluding our discussion on this very important convention with the Anti Bart convention.

G) Anti Bart convention after Opener rebids 2C

When responding to Forcing Notrump, opener re-bids his better minor which could be minimum 3-cards and some cases only 2-cards. For this bid, opener's hand has a wide range and may be just short of game force. Similarly responder can have a wide variety of hands with points upto 11-12 hcp. In normal methods it is not possible for responder to describe his hand precisely for opener to decide where to play. To solve these problems we recommend Anti Bart convention which works as follows:

In Anti Bart convention transfer to Opener's major shows following kinds of hands:

- 2 or 3 card support for opener's major suit and less than 8 HCP or
- Various hand with 4/5 clubs or good diamond suit

Opener bids the major suit with minimum hand upto 16 hcp and responder either passes or describes the hand further. The complete structure is as follows:

<p>1H-1NT-2C- ? 2D = Puppet to 2H to play or Inv hands 2H = Doubleton heart and 8-10 HCP 2S = 9-10 HCP and 5-card clubs 2N = Inv hand 10-12 HCP and denies 4 clubs 3C = 6+ clubs, unbalanced hand upto 8 hcp 3D = 6+ diamonds, upto 8 hcp, to play 3H = 3-card limit raise 3S = Splinter, 6+ card clubs</p>	<p>1S-1NT-2C- ? 2D = Transfer to hearts, shows 5+ hearts 2H = Puppet to 2S to play or Inv hands 2S = Doubleton spade and 8-10 HCP 2N = Inv hand 10-12 HCP and denies 4 clubs 3C = 6+ clubs, unbalanced hand upto 8 hcp 3D = 6+ diamonds, upto 8 hcp, to play 3H = Splinter, 6+ card clubs 3S = 3-card limit raise</p>
<p>1H-1NT-2C-2D (Puppet to 2H) – ? Opener mostly bids 2H. With a much better hand he can make other bids to describe his hand. 2H = Puppet. After opener bids 2H responder bids: Pass = weak heart raise or preference 2S = 5-card clubs, 11-12 hcp 2N = 4-card clubs, Inv hand 10-12 hcp 3C = 6+ Clubs, 9-11 hcp 3D = 6+ Diamonds, 9-11 hcp 3H = Doubleton honour, club fit, Inv hand 2S/3D = Fragment 2N = 17-18 HCP 3C = 5 hearts and 5 clubs, 16-17 hcp 3H = 6 hearts and 4 clubs, 16-17 hcp</p>	<p>1S-1NT-2C-2D (Transfer to 2H) – ? 2H = Transfer accepted, responder can pass with weak hand or make a descriptive bid. 2S = 5 hearts, 2 spade and 8-10 HCP 2N = 5 hearts, Inv hand 10-11 hcp 3S = 5 hearts, 3 spade and 10-11 HCP 2S = 6-card spade, to play 2N = 17-18 HCP, denies 3-hearts 3H = 3-card heart 15-17 hcp</p> <p>1S-1N-2C-2H (Puppet to 2S) – ? Structure is similar as after 1H-1NT-2C-2D</p>

Examples

<p>West Opener ♠ Kxxxx ♥ Axx ♦ x ♣ AKQx</p>	<p>East Responder ♠ A ♥ KQxxx ♦ xx ♣ xxxxx</p>	<p>West Opener ♠ AKJxx ♥ xx ♦ KQx ♣ Kxx</p>	<p>East Responder ♠ Qx ♥ A10xx ♦ Axx ♣ xxxx</p>	<p>West Opener ♠ AKJxx ♥ xx ♦ KQx ♣ Kxx</p>	<p>East Responder ♠ Qx ♥ Axxx ♦ xxx ♣ xxxx</p>
<p>West Opens 1S and the bidding should proceed as : 1S-1N-2C-2D-3H-3S and so on to reach an excellent slam. (Actual hand from Kanpur tournament.)</p>		<p>West Opens 1S and bidding with Anti Bart proceeds: 1S-1N-2C-2S-2NT-3NT. The 2S bid makes life easier for opener as he can safely bid 2NT.</p>		<p>West Opens 1S and this time the bidding with Anti Bart proceeds: 1S-1N-2C-2H-2S-Pass. The 2H bid alerts opener and he knows that there may be no game.</p>	

We have been playing this convention and would recommend for all serious partnerships.

(Contributed by Sudhir Aggarwal)