

Improving the Forcing Notrump

1NT Forcing: 1NT forcing is the garbage bucket of all bids. It is such a stupid, non-descriptive and obtuse treatment that no one would play it, if it were not absolutely necessary! We feel that we gain a lot more by being able to signal a Game Force with a 2/1 bid and for that reason alone, it is worth it! But there must be ways to improve the Forcing NT and the subsequent bids.

Let's start by breaking down the type of hands that would utilize this convention. Firstly, it is only used after a 1 of a Major opening. So, the first limitation is that the Opener has a 5+ card suit in the Major bid, and his hand is 11 - 21 points. As for the 20 - 21 range, many of these hands will be put in to either 2NT (balanced hands) or upgraded to 2♣ (unbalanced hands).

Essentially, that leaves an exceptional 11 to a normal 19 as the range described by 1 of a Major opener. These hands can be broken down into 3 categories, definable by points and Losing Trick criteria, as follows:

1. Minimum Hands: 11 - 15 points, ≥ 7 LTC. It is a hand that has roughly 1/3 of the total values in the deck. The bid is made in the hope that if Partner also has a similar size hand, we may make a Game and earn Game bonus.
2. Intermediate Hands: 15 - 17 points, 5 or 6 LTC. It is a hand that has enough values that if Partner holds his normal $\frac{1}{4}$ share of the values in the deck, that a Game is very likely. All of these hands have either a 6+ card Major or a side 5 card suit. It is described by jumping to the 3 level. The Intermediate Hands without 5/5 or better shape usually cannot meet the LTC requirement and therefore are bid in the same manner as the minimum hands until the Responder declares Invitational values. Then the appropriate Game can be bid.
3. Strong Hands: 18 - 21 points, 4 or 5 LTC. It is the hand that can make a game opposite a Partner that barely eked out a response.

Now that we have defined the Opener's hand, let's examine what a Forcing NT response looks like. Its characteristics are:

1. Apparent misfit for the Major (except the 3 card Limit Raise).
2. Less than 2/1 values. Can't make Game if partner has a Minimum. Slam is highly unlikely.
3. Enough to respond. If you pass, you could possibly miss a Game or (although unlikely) a Slam bonus opposite a Strong hand from the Opener.

So, 6 - 11 points and most likely a misfit! There are 2 types of hands that need special handling:

1. Constructive hands with 8 - 11 points that could possibly make Game opposite an Intermediate range Opener (and very few exceptional Minimums). This includes the one fitting hand (3 cards LR).
2. The hand that is best played in a partial in the Responder's suit. A suit that he hasn't had a chance to show as yet.

Following is an attempt to better handle these various combinations.

Major suit Openers 1♠ and 1♥ have traditionally been dumped in to the same bucket by the system designers. But in fact, they each have significant characteristic differences. It is crucial to address each one separately. But it is also highly desirable to handle them in somewhat similar manners for the sake of memory! The following tries to cater to these limitations.

1♠ Openers: After the Forcing NT, if the Opener has a very descriptive hand he will bid it now.

1. An Intermediate Opener with a 5 card side suit will jump to 3 of the side suit.
2. An Intermediate hand with 6+ ♠ will jump to 3♠.
3. A Strong 5332 shaped hand will bid 3NT, directly. Responder may bid 2-under Transfers over 3NT when appropriate. The in-between step will be the super-accept, except that 4NT will always be to play.
4. A Strong hand with 4+ card ♦ suit will now raise 1NT to 2NT. (More on the rest of the ♦ side-suit sequences later).
5. A hand that would have opened 4♠, if it weren't for that pesky side card can now bid 4♠.

All of the Minimum hands that do contain 4+ cards in a Red suit will bid 2 of that suit. All other hands will relay to 2♦ by bidding 2♣. If the Responder accepts the relay, the Opener will bid 2 of the appropriate Major as described, unless he has something quite special to show.

The relay breaks by the Responder are at least as important as the relay accepts are. Relay breaks are done with the following type of hands:

1. Invitational hand that has a 6+ card minor suit.
2. Invitational hand with 5+ card ♥ suit and no tolerance for ♠.
3. All Constructive (9 - 11) hands without a fit.
4. 3 cards LR.

Minimum (and Intermediate) 1♠ Openers:

Intermediate hands of 5332, 5431, 5422 shape are treated exactly like minimum hands, and will rely on the Responder to show the extras by breaking relay before searching for a Game.

Summary:

| Opener | Responder | | |
|--------------------|------------------|------------|--|
| 1♠ | 1NT | | ****Minimum 5/5 in the Blacks must open 1♠. |
| 2♥/♦ | | No relay | Natural, minimum w/ 4+ card side suit as described. |
| | 2NT | | Agrees the second suit and is a Game Try. Intermediate openers should shape out if possible. |
| Relay | | | |
| 2♣ | | | Relay to 2♦, unless there is a special case for a Relay Break (rb). |
| | 3♣/♦/♥ | rb | Invitational hand with 6+ cards. (Not required if you play 2/1 in minors as not GF.) |
| | 2NT | rb | Responder shows 9 - 11 points, (<=2 ♠, 3 ♥). |
| | 2♠ | rb | 3 card Constructive Raise (8 - 11). Kokish Game Tries available over this. |
| | 2♥ | rb | Constructive hand (9 - 11) with 5+ ♥. |
| After Relay Accept | | | |
| | 2♦ | ra | Relay accepted (ra). Denies one of the (rb) hands. |
| 2♥ | | After ra | Minimum Opener, 3 card ♥ suit. Over this 2♥ bid, the Responder's 3♦ is HSGT in ♦; 3♥ is HSGT in ♣, agreeing ♥. |
| 2♠ | | After ra | Minimum Opener without 3 ♥. |
| | 3♣/♦ | after 2♥/♠ | Min. hand with a 6+ card suit. To play. |
| | 2NT | after 2♥/♠ | Serious misfit! 5/5 in the minors. |

Strong 1♠ Openers:

- 5341 2NT then 3♥ over the 3♣ query. (2NT directly over 1NT always shows ♦ side suit).
- 5143 2NT then 3♠ over the 3♣ query. (2NT directly over 1NT always shows ♦ side suit).
- 5242 2NT then 3NT over the 3♣ query.
- 5♠/5♦ 2NT then 3♦ over the 3♣ query. 3♠ agrees ♠; everything else is a cue for ♦.
- 5314 Relay then 3♥ (the fragment). 2♣ Relay followed by 3 level bid shows a natural 5431.
- 5134 Relay then 3♦ (the fragment). 2♣ Relay followed by 3 level bid shows a natural 5431.
- 5224 Relay then 3♣. 3♦ by Responder query for shortness. 3NT=5224.
- 5♠/5♣ Relay then 3♣. 3♠ agrees ♠; everything else is a mild slam try for ♣.
- 5431 Relay then 2NT followed by 3♦ over 3♣ query. (Relay then 2NT shows ♥ side suit).
- 5413 Relay then 2NT followed by 3♠ over 3♣ query. (Relay then 2NT shows ♥ side suit).
- 5422 Relay then 2NT followed by 3NT over 3♣ query.
- 5♠/5♥ Relay then 2NT followed by 3♥ over 3♣ query.

Summary:

| Opener | Responder | | |
|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|--|
| 1♠ | 1NT | | |
| Over 1NT | | SJS. GF. | |
| 2NT | | Directly over 1NT. | Strong hand with ♦ side suit. |
| | 3♣ | Query | 3♣ is Query. 3♥ shows ♥ fragment. 3♦ shows 5 ♦, 3♠ shows the ♣ fragment, 3NT shows 5242. |
| | 3♠/♥ | Non-Query bids | 3♠ instead of 3♣ query will show 3 cards LR. 3♥ by the Responder agrees ♦ and is a mild slam try. |
| Over 1NT | | | |
| 2♣ | 2♦ | ra | Relay Accepted. |
| After Relay Accept | | SJS. GF. | |
| 2NT | | GF. | Strong hand with ♥ side suit. |
| | 3♣ | Query | 3♣ is Query. 3♥ shows 5 ♥. 3♦ shows ♦ fragment, 3♠ shows the ♣ fragment, 3NT shows 5422. |
| | 3♠/♦ | Non-Query bids | 3♠ instead of 3♣ query will show 3 cards LR. 3♦ by the Responder agrees ♥ and is a mild slam try. |
| After Relay Accept | | | |
| 3♣ | | after 1♠-1NT-2♣-2♦ | 5+ ♠ / 5 ♣, or 5224 SJS. 3♦ asks for shortness. Bid 3NT with none. 3♣ agrees ♠. 3NT by responder to play. 3♥ is a mild slam try for ♣. |
| 3♦ | | after 1♠-1NT-2♣-2♦ | 5134 SJS. 3♠ agrees ♠. 3NT to play. Everything else is a mild slam try for ♣. |
| 3♥ | | after 1♠-1NT-2♣-2♦ | 5314 SJS. 3♠ agrees ♠. 3NT to play. Everything else is a mild slam try for ♣. |
| After Relay Accept | | | |
| 3♠ | | GF. | 6+ ♠. GF values. Start cue bidding please! |
| 3NT | | GF. | 6+ ♠. GF values. But okay to play 3NT (6322). |

1♥ Opener: There are 2 possibly minimum bids after the ♥ Opener versus only 1 after the ♠ Opener.

| Opener | Responder | | |
|--------|-----------|-------------|--|
| 1♥ | 1♠ | Non-Forcing | 4+ ♠. Unlimited (unless you play SJS). |
| 1NT | | | Minimum hand. May be passed. |
| 1♥ | 1NT | Forcing | <4 ♠. Responding Values (< 2/1 GF). |

XYZ (or New Minor Forcing) applies over the first sequence.

After the Forcing NT reply, if the Opener has a very descriptive hand he will show it immediately.

1. An Intermediate Opener with a 5 card side suit will jump to 3 of the side suit.
2. An Intermediate hand with 6+ ♥ will jump to 3 ♥.
3. A Strong 5332 shaped hand will bid 3NT, directly. Responder may bid 2-under Transfers over 3NT when appropriate. The in-between step will be the super-accept, except that 4NT will always be to play.
4. A reversible hand (Intermediate or Strong) will bid 2♠. Lebensohl applies.
5. A hand that would have opened 4♥, if it weren't for that pesky side card can now bid 4♥.

Any Minimum 1♥ Opener containing 4 cards ♦ suit will bid 2♦ over the forcing NT.

All other hands will relay to 2♦ by bidding 2♣. If the Responder accepts the relay, the Opener will bid 2 of the appropriate Major as described, unless he has something quite special to show.

Minimum (and Intermediate) 1♥ Openers:

Summary:

| Opener | Responder | | |
|--------------------|-----------|----------|--|
| 1♥ | 1NT | | Responder may have bypassed 4 ♠. Alertable. |
| After 1♥-1NT | | | |
| 2♦ | | | Natural, w/ 4+ cards ♦ side suit. |
| | 2♠ | | Agrees ♦ and is a general Game Try. Intermediate openers should shape out if possible. |
| Relay | | | |
| 2♣ | | | Relay to 2♦, unless there is a special case for Relay Break. (rb) |
| | 3♣/♦ | rb | Invitational hand with 6+ cards. (Not required if you play 2/1 in minors as not GF.) |
| | 2NT | rb | Responder shows 9 - 11 points, (<=2 ♠, 3 ♥). |
| | 2♠ | rb | Invitational hand w/ 5+ ♠. |
| | 2♥ | rb | 3 card Constructive Raise (8 - 11). Kokish GT available over this. |
| After Relay Accept | | | |
| | 2♦ | ra | Relay accepted. (ra) |
| 2♥ | | After ra | Minimum Opener without any redeeming features. |
| | 2♠ | after 2♥ | 9 - 11 points with 5+ ♦. |
| | 3♣/♦ | after 2♥ | Min. hand with a 6+ card suit. To play. |
| | 2NT | after 2♥ | Serious misfit! 5/5 in the minors. |

Strong 1 ♥ Openers: Since there are no 4 card ♠ suits left to be dealt with (Opener would have Reversed), We are left with Strong 6 cards ♥ suit hands, Strong 5/5 with a minor, and the strong 5431 with 4 card minors.

3514 Relay then 2♠ (the ♠ fragment). 2♣ Relay followed by non-minimum bid shows ♣ side suit.

1534 Relay then 2NT (the ♦ fragment). 2♣ Relay followed by non-minimum bid shows ♣ side suit.

?6?? Relay then 3♥. Start Cue-bidding please!

2524 Relay then 3♣. 3♦ asks for shortness. 3NT=2524.

5♥/5♣ Relay then 3♣. 3♥ agrees ♥; everything else is a mild slam try for ♣.

3541 2NT (directly over 1NT forcing) followed by 3♠ over 3♣ query. (2NT shows ♦ side suit).

1543 2NT (directly over 1NT forcing) followed by 3♥ over 3♣ query. (2NT shows ♦ side suit).

5242 2NT (directly over 1NT forcing) followed by 3NT over 3♣ query.

5♥/5♦ 2NT (directly over 1NT forcing) followed by 3♦ over 3♣ query.

Summary:

| Opener | Responder | | |
|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|--|
| 1 ♥ | 1NT | | |
| Over 1NT | | SJS. GF. | |
| 2♠ | | Directly over 1NT. | Normal Reverse. Play Lebensohl. |
| 2NT | | Directly over 1NT. | Strong hand with ♦ side suit. |
| | 3♣ | Query | 3♣ is Query. 3♠ shows ♠ fragment. 3♦ shows 5 ♦, 3 ♥ shows the ♣ fragment, 3NT shows 5242. |
| | 3♥/♠ | Non-Query bids | 3♥ instead of 3♣ query will show 3 cards LR. 3♠ by the Responder agrees ♦ and is a mild slam try. |
| Over 1NT | | | |
| 2♣ | 2♦ | ra | Relay Accepted. |
| After Relay Accept | | SJS. GF. | |
| 2 ♠ | | GF. | Strong hand with ♣ side suit, and ♠ fragment. |
| 2NT | | GF. | Strong hand with ♣ side suit, and ♦ fragment. |
| 3♣ | | GF. | Strong hand with 5224 or 5 ♣. 3♦ asks for shortness. 3NT= 2524. 3♥ agrees ♥. 3Nt by responder to play. 3♠ is a mild slam try for ♣. |
| 3♥ | | GF. | 6+ ♥. GF values. Start cue bidding please! |
| 3NT | | GF. | 6+ ♥. GF values. But okay to play 3NT (6322). |