



Two-way Checkback

ASSUMING, for the purposes of these articles, that you play a version of modern-style Acol, I very strongly recommend that after the bidding has started 1x – 1y a 1NT rebid by opener shows 15-17 High-card Points (HCP) (*not* 15-16) and a 2NT rebid shows 18-19 HCP (*not* 17-18).

This also frees up a jump to 3NT to show something else – an Acol-two type hand based on a good six- or seven-card suit being probably the best version to use.

The reasons for playing the above scheme are too numerous to fully go through here. But using 15-16, 17-18, 19 etc. as your no trump rebids is really a step backwards in terms of developing an integrated sensible bidding system. Just consider: nearly everyone these days uses Weak Two bids in some fashion (Benji, Multi etc.). Of necessity, therefore, responder has to develop a style where responding with 5 HCP is fairly normal. Using my proposed scheme above allows for the bidding not to systemically and regularly get too high.

If you respond with 5 HCP and then find opener has either jumped to 2NT with 17 or 3NT with 19 you will almost invariably fail. This makes no sense whatsoever.

Assuming a 15-17 no-trump rebid, therefore, it is a must to incorporate a checkback mechanism. The approach I use is known as *Two-way Checkback*.

How Does Two-way Checkback Work?

Essentially after a 1NT rebid:

- i. Invitational sequences start with 2♣.
- ii. Game-going sequences (and some slam sequences) start with 2♦.
- iii. Jumps to the three level are slam tries and show at least six cards in the 'jump' suit if it is the first suit bid, or 5-5 if two suits have been bid.

The 2♣ Response

After the following start to the auction:

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♠
1NT ¹	2♣
¹ 15-17 HCP	

This bid of 2♣ forces or demands that opener bids 2♦ (this is referred to as a 'puppet bid'). Any bid by responder thereafter is *invitational*.

Thus:

a)	Opener	Responder
	1♦	1♠
	1NT ¹	2♣ ²
	2♦ ³	2♥ ⁴
		2♠ ⁵
		3♥ ⁶
		3♠ ⁷

- ¹ 15-17 HCP
- ² Checkback
- ³ Puppet, forced
- ⁴ Invitational, with 5 spades and 4 hearts
- ⁵ Invitational, with 5 spades
- ⁶ Invitational, with 5 spades and 5 hearts
- ⁷ invitational, with 6 spades

- b) Sometimes you wish to make a weak bid at the two level. Bidding a new suit, or rebidding your first suit is to play. If you wish to play in 2♦ you can 'puppet', then pass; e.g. with this hand:

♠	K 7 4 2
♥	6
♦	Q J 7 6 5 3
♣	7 2

Opener	Responder
1♥	1♠
1NT ¹	2♣ ²
2♦ ³	Pass
¹ 15-17 HCP	
² Checkback	
³ Puppet	

This auction avoids the dilemma which occurs when playing natural methods: if the auction goes 1♥ – 1♠ – 1NT (15-16 HCP) – 2♦, should the opener give preference back to spades or not?

- c) To invite in no-trumps you can either just bid 2NT directly or via the 2♣ invitational checkback route. I play that bidding 2NT directly is slightly stronger.

The 2♦ response

The 2♦ response to a 1NT rebid is game-forcing checkback (typically 10 HCP or a good 9). Thus:

Opener	Responder
1♠	1♥
1NT ¹	2♦
¹ 15-17 HCP	

Opener now simply bids his cheapest feature. There is absolutely no need for jumping at this stage as the auction is known to be forcing to game. So:

Opener	Responder
1♠	1♥
1NT ¹	2♦ ²
2♥ ³	
2♠ ⁴	
2NT ⁵	
3♠ ⁶	

- ¹ 15-17 HCP
- ² Game-forcing checkback
- ³ Shows three-card support for hearts
- ⁴ Shows four spades, denies three hearts
- ⁵ Denies four spades or three hearts
- ⁶ Denies four spades or three hearts, shows five good clubs

So with a fairly normal Stayman-type hand such as this, the bidding would go:

♠	K J 4 2
♥	K J 8 3
♦	Q 7 6
♣	7 2

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♥
1NT ¹	2♦ ²
2♥ ³	2♠
¹ 15-17 HCP	

- ² Game-forcing checkback
- ³ Three-card support for hearts

As you can see, there is *no need* to jump since the 2♦ bid is game-forcing. Opener can now support spades with a fit, or bid naturally without a spade fit. Once a fit is located, there is plenty of room to exchange cue-bids etc. – making slam development much easier.

Jumps to the Three Level

As stated earlier, jumps to the three level are slam tries. Consider this example:

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

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♠
1NT ¹	3♣ ²

- ¹ 15-17 HCP
- ² Slam try, 5-5 in the black suits

Knowledge of 5-5 in the black suits and a slam try (with 5-4 East would go through 2♦ instead) helps West to see the huge slam possibilities – since all three red-suit losers are covered. The great club slam really ought now to be reached, and the auction might continue as below:

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♠
1NT	3♣
3♦ ¹	3NT ²
4♥ ¹	6♣ ³

- ¹ Cue-bid
- ² Made a slam try, no need to do more yet
- ³ Oh, all right then, partner!

A useful point when judging slam auctions is that if you have the top trumps and partner is making a slam try *you must not be shy* in bidding the slam – often, if you don't, you will find that you have

missed the boat since partner is too worried by his poor trumps to push on.

Checkback after a 2NT (18-19 HCP) Rebid

As a parting note, there is of course room to have some sort of checkback after a 2NT rebid as well.

I use 3♣ to say that I have a weak hand that wants to stop soon. Again, opener puppets to 3♦ (mandatory), over which responder can pass or bid his suit.

The 3♦ bid I use as a form of major-suit checkback.

Bids of 3♥/3♠ can be used as natural and forcing (again, there's room for individual partnership work here).

So, holding this hand we can 'sign off' in 3♠ after the auction below:

♠ Q J 8 7 4 2
♥ 8 3
♦ Q 7 6
♣ 7 2

Opener	Responder
1♣	1♠
2NT ¹	3♣ ²
3♦ ³	3♠ ⁴

- ¹ 18-19 HCP
- ² 'End' signal
- ³ Puppet, mandatory
- ⁴ To play

Whereas holding the hand opposite we simply use 3♦ checkback to see if a 5-3 spade fit exists.

♠ Q J 8 7 4
♥ K 3
♦ K 9 7 6
♣ 7 2

Conclusions

The scheme is remarkably efficient and easy to use once you get your head around it. I have suggested a basic structure and there is plenty of room for partnerships to add and embellish. No-trump rebids are very common, so it clearly pays to put work into this area. □

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