

## The Five-card Major System

# Five-card Majors Part III

by Neil Rosen

THE idea of writing a comprehensive series of articles on five-card majors, strong no-trump and two-over-one game forcing is that the articles should provoke interest and debate. I sincerely hope that you will try to take on board some of the suggestions I am making – though clearly individual partnerships can, and should, amend or adjust some of the ideas to suit their tastes.

I also hope you will have a go at the exercises that I set within the articles. These are designed to support and augment rather than to catch you out or depress you! Please feel free to contact the editor with any queries you may have – who knows, we may even get the space in a future article to answer them directly!

I will start this month with a quick review of some of last month's material, which seems to have caused quite a lot of interest since it was published. There will also be some associated quizzes for you to double-check your understandings.

### Inverted Minor-suit Raises

To raise 1♣ to 2♣ you need at least 11 high-card points (HCP) – maybe 10 with a good quality six-card suit. The bid is essentially at least invitational facing a maximum weak no-trump. It needs to be remembered that this hand type, i.e. a balanced weak no-trump, is *always* the most frequent hand type for a 1♣ opener.

Remember, also, that the sequence 1♣ – 2NT is natural (11-12 HCP), so only use the 2♣ bid if your club suit is a feature worth showing.

#### After 1♣ – 2♣:

- A bid of 2♦ shows a no-trump hand, *without* four clubs (11-14 or 18-19 HCP).
- A bid of 2♥/2♠ is natural and unbalanced (showing at least five clubs and four hearts / spades) and is not necessarily promising any extra values, so is forcing as far as 3♣ only.

- 3♦/3♥/3♠ are best played as splinters, i.e. showing a singleton or a void in the bid suit – clearly describing an attractive hand with a feature easily definable *below* the level of 3NT, so, for example, Hand A . . .

<b>Hand A</b>
♠ A 7 2
♥ 3
♦ A Q 8
♣ K Q 10 9 6 2

. . . would jump to 3♥ after a 1♣ – 2♣ start to the auction.

- 2NT shows a weak no-trump *with* at least four clubs.

#### 1♣ – 3♣:

The 3♣ response is pre-emptive in nature (again, you normally assume a weak no-trump opposite) and will usually be passed. The bid shows at least six cards (very, very occasionally five) and about 5-9 HCP. It can be quite weak but remember that opener may have an 18-19 balanced hand, in which case he will now rebid 3NT – so quite weak, yes, but not revolting!

#### 1♦ Openers:

In auctions starting with 1♦ the difference is that you always start with the assumption that the diamond suit is real – hence after an inverted raise (1♦ – 2♦), should opener introduce a new suit, this is natural and unbalanced (usually 5-4 but occasionally 4-4-4-1). It does not promise any extra values, so it is forcing to 3♦ only. Should opener *jump* in a new suit, again this is a splinter bid.

The sequence 1♦ – 3♦ is weakish (showing fewer than 10 HCP).



### Quiz No. 1

Here are some problems for you. In each case, what would you bid?

Answers on the next page – no peeping!

<b>Problem 1</b>	(A)	You	Partner
♠ 9 5 2	You	1♣	2♣
♥ 4 3		?	
♦ A Q 7	(B)	You	Partner
♣ A Q 7 6 4	You	1♣	3♣
		?	

<b>Problem 2</b>	(A)	You	Partner
♠ 8 7 3	You	1♦	2♦
♥ 7 5		?	
♦ A Q 8 6 2	(B)	You	Partner
♣ A Q 5	You	1♦	3♦
		?	

<b>Problem 3</b>	(A)	You	Partner
♠ 7 5	You	1♦	2♦
♥ K J 6 3		?	
♦ A Q 7 5 2	(B)	You	Partner
♣ Q 6	You	1♦	3♦
		?	

<b>Problem 4</b>	(A)	You	Partner
♠ K 7 3	You	1♣	2♣
♥ K J 2		?	
♦ 7 5 2	(B)	You	Partner
♣ A K 5 2	You	1♣	2♣
		2NT	3♣
		?	

## Answers to Quiz No. 1

<b>Problem 1</b> ♠ 9 5 2 ♥ 4 3 ♦ A Q 7 ♣ A Q 7 6 4	(A)	<b>You</b>	<b>Partner</b>
		1♣	2♣
		?	
	(B)	<b>You</b>	<b>Partner</b>
	1♣	3♣	
	?		

(A): 2NT. Tempting though it is to express your 'real' clubs, the essential nature of this hand is that it is a balanced 3-2-3-5 12-count (i.e. a *weak no-trump*). Express that with 2NT which *guarantees* real (at least four) clubs at the same time.

(B): **Pass** is the normal bid here. Partner has shown weakness, so game will not be making. There is room, however, for some creativity / flair on auctions like this. One possibility is to up the stakes with a preemptive raise to 4♣, since if you pass the opponents might protect and find a likely making contract of their own. 4♣ should not be misconstrued, because you could make any other descriptive bid with genuine game ambition.

<b>Problem 2</b> ♠ 8 7 3 ♥ 7 5 ♦ A Q 8 6 2 ♣ A Q 5	(A)	<b>You</b>	<b>Partner</b>
		1♦	2♦
		?	
	(B)	<b>You</b>	<b>Partner</b>
	1♦	3♦	
	?		

(A): As in 1(A), bid 2NT. This gets across the balanced character of the hand and its (lack of) strength. You can still stop in 3♦ if necessary: if that is the bid partner makes once he knows that you have a weak no-trump hand, you will pass.

(B): Again, **pass**. Or perhaps, depending on vulnerability, raise to 4♦.

<b>Problem 3</b> ♠ 7 5 ♥ K J 6 3 ♦ A Q 7 5 2 ♣ Q 6	(A)	<b>You</b>	<b>Partner</b>
		1♦	2♦
		?	
	(B)	<b>You</b>	<b>Partner</b>
	1♦	3♦	
	?		

(A): 2♥, showing typically at least five diamonds and four hearts, (but occasionally 4-4-4-1 is possible), with no extra values implied at this stage.

(B): **Pass** – quickly! Partner's bid is weak.

<b>Problem 4</b> ♠ K 7 3 ♥ K J 2 ♦ 7 5 2 ♣ A K 5 2	(A)	<b>You</b>	<b>Partner</b>
		1♣	2♣
		?	
	(B)	<b>You</b>	<b>Partner</b>
	1♣	2♣	
	2NT	3♣	
	?		

(A): 2NT. This shows a weak no-trump with at least four clubs.

(B): 3NT. Partner's bid is now invitational and non-forcing. However, he has shown enough values to issue an invitation facing a weak no-trump. With a maximum, you are duty bound to accept this invitation.

## No-trump Responses to a One-of-a-Minor Opening

- a) 1♣ – 1NT  
1NT denies a four-card major and shows 6-10 HCP. In practice it could be a *bad* 11-count which would not want to invite facing 11-14 balanced.
- b) 1♣ – 2NT  
2NT denies a four-card major, and denotes a very flat hand with a *good* 11 or 12 HCP.
- c) 1♣ – 3NT  
3NT shows a 13-15 HCP balanced hand – again with no four-card major. Usually the hand does not contain wonderful controls (i.e. aces and kings) as otherwise some good slams will be missed.
- d) 1♦ – 1NT  
Again, 1NT denies a four-card major and shows 6-10 HCP.
- e) 1♦ – 2NT  
Scratched record by now! No four-card major and a balanced 11-12 HCP hand.
- f) 1♦ – 3NT  
13-15 HCP, no four-card major – similar principles to c) above.

- g) 1♣/1♦ – 4NT  
Technically 4NT here should be *ordinary* Blackwood, because if you wished to use Roman Key-card Blackwood you should agree the minor first with an inverted raise (This is an optional treatment I only recommend to advanced partnerships).

**FOOTNOTE to auctions starting with a 1♦ opener:** I touched on this in my last article (*April Online Extra, page 61*) where I introduced you to the very important aspect that responding 2♣ to 1♦ is forcing to game. You can therefore use 3♣ as *invitational* to reduce the burden on, and frequency of, the no-trump response. Remember: typically 3♣ over 1♦ shows a six- or seven-card suit and 10-12 HCP.



## Quiz No. 2

Now test yourself with a few more quizzes.

<b>Problem 1</b> ♠ Q 2 ♥ 4 3 2 ♦ A K J 8 4 ♣ K 7 3	Partner opens 1♦.	
	What is your plan?	

<b>Problem 2</b> ♠ A K 7 3 ♥ 7 5 ♦ A 8 7 5 4 ♣ A 2	(i) Partner opens 1♦. Do you bid 1♠ or 2♦?	
	(ii) Assuming for the moment that you have chosen 2♦, what do you do now over the following developments?	

(A)		(B)	
<b>Partner</b>	<b>You</b>	<b>Partner</b>	<b>You</b>
1♦	2♦	1♦	2♦
2♥	?	2♠	?

(C)		(D)	
<b>Partner</b>	<b>You</b>	<b>Partner</b>	<b>You</b>
1♦	2♦	1♦	2♦
2NT	?	3♦	?

More questions on next page!

## Problem 3

♠ A 2  
♥ K 7 3  
♦ A 8 7 5 4  
♣ K 6 4

(A)  
You Partner  
1♦ 3♣  
? ?

(B)  
You Partner  
1♦ 2♦  
? ?

(C)  
You Partner  
1♦ 3♦  
? ?

(i) Partner opens 1♣. What do you respond?

(ii) Partner opens 1♠, the opponents overcall 1♠; what do you respond?

## Problem 4

♠ Q 7 3  
♥ K 5  
♦ A 5 4 2  
♣ K 8 5 2

## Answers to Quiz No. 2

### Problem 1

♠ Q 2  
♥ 4 3 2  
♦ A K J 8 4  
♣ K 7 3

Partner opens 1♦. What is your plan?

Playing inverted minor-suit raises as you are, it should be quite simple to start with 2♦, then bid

3NT next time. If you play Acol, you have a really tricky time: you either have to jump straight to 3NT (ignoring the big diamond fit) or improvise by bidding 2♣, which can often lead to all sorts of problems.

### Problem 2

♠ A K 7 3  
♥ 7 5  
♦ A 8 7 5 4  
♣ A 2

(i) Partner opens 1♦. Do you bid 1♠ or 2♦?

(ii) Assuming for the moment that you have chosen 2♦, what do you do now over the following developments?

(A)  
Partner You  
1♦ 2♦  
2♥ ?

(B)  
Partner You  
1♦ 2♦  
2♠ ?

(C)  
Partner You  
1♦ 2♦  
2NT ?

(D)  
Partner You  
1♦ 2♦  
3♦ ?

(i): This is a matter of style and partnership agreement. My belief is that with a game-going hand you should always bid as naturally as possible, hence bidding your longest suit – diamonds – is best. With fewer points, you can happily start with 1♠ (fewer than 12 HCP essentially).

(ii)(A): Partner has shown an unbalanced hand with at least four hearts. Bid 2♠ now – which is natural and forcing since you started with 2♦ first, remember!

(ii)(B): Raise quietly to 3♠. This is in fact *stronger* than bidding 4♠, since the auction is forced to game as discussed, so you can leave room for any possible slam exploration. An ill-advised jump to 4♠ should be construed as minimum and most certainly not slam suitable.

(ii)(C): Bid 3♠. You are going to game; who knows, partner may still have a four-card spade suit! It would be very lazy not to find out.

(ii)(D): Partner has shown a weak hand *without* a four-card major. This is a very difficult bid now – you might well settle for a slight gamble of 3NT, based on your overall strength. Though any of you choosing 5♦ have my admiration: a hand full of controls (aces and kings) nearly always plays very well in a trump contract.

### Problem 3

♠ A 2  
♥ K 7 3  
♦ A 8 7 5 4  
♣ K 6 4

(A)  
You Partner  
1♦ 3♣  
? ?

(B)  
You Partner  
1♦ 2♦  
? ?

(C)  
You Partner  
1♦ 3♦  
? ?

(A): 3NT. Partner has issued an invitation. You are maximum and furthermore you have a wonderful fitting king of clubs to add to the party.

(B): 2NT. Describe your hand as 11-14 balanced. This bid is forcing for one round. If partner describes a minimum

now with 3♦, you can push on to 3NT since you are maximum, whereas with a minimum you would be happy to pass.

(C): Pass – quickly! Partner has made a weakish bid (fewer than 10 HCP), so you will not be making game. You should be delighted that you appear to be stealing the contract from the opponents.

### Problem 4

♠ Q 7 3  
♥ K 5  
♦ A 5 4 2  
♣ K 8 5 2

(i) Partner opens 1♣. What do you respond?

(ii) Partner opens 1♠, the opponents overcall 1♠; what do you respond?

(i): 2NT. I prefer this to 1♦ or 2♣ myself. Certainly to bid 2♣ here, when holding a balanced 11-12 count, you should really have five clubs, in my opinion.

(ii): 2NT. Again, do not fall into the age-old trap of supporting partner's non-existent club suit. The fundamental difference between five-card major systems and Acol is shown here where we do not want to show a fit for a non-existent (in all likelihood) suit.

## Dealing with Intervention after a 1♣ Opener

### a) After a One-level Overcall

After your side opens 1♣ and the opponents overcall, you should play a fairly natural set of continuations.

So, introducing a new suit or making a negative double could be played pretty much as your partnership already does. Jump bids in new suits are *weak* jumps not strong (basically the same system bids as if the opponents had not overcalled – see article in the [Online April issue, page 60](#)).

There is some debate as to whether after a 1♥ overcall a double should be played as guaranteeing four spades (with 1♠ showing at least five cards in the suit), or for the double to *deny* four spades, with 1♠ therefore showing at least four cards. My preference is for the latter (using support doubles is vital here – see more details in my next article).

Thus, holding Hand B overleaf:



## Hand B

♠ 9 7 2  
♥ 8 5  
♦ A Q 8 4  
♣ Q 9 6 2

After 1♣ – (1♥) you can now double to deny spades and hence show minor-suit values. This enables you to bid on a great number of hands which otherwise would be unbidable.

You also have the option of supporting partner's opening 1♣ bid – in various ways. After the following sequence:

<b>Partner</b>	<b>Opp 1</b>	<b>You</b>	<b>Opp 2</b>
1♣	1♣	?	

The following scheme works well:

2♣ = 5+ clubs, 5-9 HCP.  
2♠ = 5+ clubs, 10+ HCP.  
3♣ = 6+ clubs, 5-9 HCP.

Note that if partner forces you to speak, you are sometimes compelled to bid no-trumps even without a stopper in the opponent's suit – as the best description of your hand. Thus, after the start to the auction below, and holding Hand C:

<b>You</b>	<b>Opp 1</b>	<b>Partner</b>	<b>Opp 2</b>
1♣	1♣	2♦	Pass
?			

## Hand C

♠ 8 5 2  
♥ K J 6 4  
♦ K 4  
♣ A J 9 7

I strongly believe 2NT (11-14) to be the *only sensible choice* here. If partner then wishes to raise to 3NT, he can always bid the opponent's suit first

to check for a stopper if he does not possess one himself (in practice, partner will invariably have one anyway).

## b) After a Double

1. A new suit at the one level follows standard practice, i.e. you ignore the double and the bid is forcing for one round.
2. Jump bids at the two level (i.e. 2♦/2♥/2♠) are Weak Jump Shifts (WJS), just as if the opponent had passed, so showing a six-card suit and about 4-8 HCP non vulnerable and 5-9 HCP if vulnerable.
3. 2NT shows a good club raise, at least five clubs, 10-11+ HCP.

4. 3♣ is weakish, typically showing six clubs and 5-9 HCP.
5. 3♦/3♥/3♠ are natural and preemptive (seven-card suits are expected, since WJS at the two level were available).

## Dealing with Intervention after a 1♦ Opener

### a) After an Overcall

Partner opens 1♦ and your right-hand opponent (RHO) overcalls with, say, 1♥. Now:

Double shows exactly four spades.  
1♠ shows at least five spades.  
1NT shows 6-10 HCP and is natural.  
2♣ shows 10+ HCP and is forcing for one round. Please note that this *is not forcing to game* as it would have been without intervention.  
2♦ is natural and weakish; it can be based on a three-cards suit if no other clear bid is available.  
2♥ is an unassuming cue-bid showing a good diamond raise with at least four diamonds and 10+ HCP.  
2♠ is a fit-showing jump, showing five spades, at least four diamonds and 9+ HCP.  
2NT is natural and shows 11-12 HCP.  
3♣ is fit-showing, promising at least five clubs and four diamonds, and 9+ HCP.

Note that because 1♦ always promises a *real suit*, it is best to play jumps as fit-showing rather than weak in competition (this can of course be altered to suit your own partnership style).

### b) After a Double

Things are nice and straightforward now: new suits are natural and forcing for one round, jump bids are fit showing.

★★★★★

## Quiz No. 3

### Problem 1

♠ 7 2  
♥ K Q J 9 8 3  
♦ 8 4  
♣ 9 7 3

Partner opens 1♣ and you hold the hand in Problem 1. What would you bid in each of the auctions below?

- |     |                      |                      |                 |
|-----|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| (a) | <b>Partner</b><br>1♣ | <b>Opp 1</b><br>1♦   | <b>You</b><br>? |
| (b) | <b>Partner</b><br>1♣ | <b>Opp 1</b><br>Dble | <b>You</b><br>? |
| (c) | <b>Partner</b><br>1♣ | <b>Opp 1</b><br>1♠   | <b>You</b><br>? |
| (d) | <b>Partner</b><br>1♦ | <b>Opp 1</b><br>Dble | <b>You</b><br>? |
| (e) | <b>Partner</b><br>1♦ | <b>Opp 1</b><br>1♠   | <b>You</b><br>? |

### Problem 2

♠ K 8 4  
♥ 9 6 2  
♦ K 5  
♣ A J 8 6 5

You open 1♣ with this resplendent 11-count (I sincerely hope you would!). What's your rebid in each of the following auctions?

- |     |                  |                      |                      |                     |
|-----|------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| (a) | <b>You</b><br>1♣ | <b>Opp 1</b><br>Pass | <b>Partner</b><br>2♦ | <b>Opp2</b><br>Pass |
| (b) | <b>You</b><br>1♣ | <b>Opp 1</b><br>Pass | <b>Partner</b><br>1♥ | <b>Opp2</b><br>2♦   |
| (c) | <b>You</b><br>1♣ | <b>Opp 1</b><br>1♥   | <b>Partner</b><br>2♦ | <b>Opp2</b><br>Pass |
| (d) | <b>You</b><br>1♣ | <b>Opp 1</b><br>1♠   | <b>Partner</b><br>2♠ | <b>Opp2</b><br>Pass |

(Answers on next page)



## Answers to Quiz No. 3

Partner opens 1♣ and you hold the hand in Problem 1. What would you bid in each of the auctions below?

**Problem 1**

♠ 7 2  
♥ K Q J 9 8 3  
♦ 8 4  
♣ 9 7 3

(a) Partner Opp 1 You  
1♣ 1♦ ?

**Bid 2♥** – a perfect hand for a Weak Jump Shift.

(b) Partner Opp 1 You  
1♣ Dble ?

Again, **bid 2♥** – still weak after a double or an overcall, remember!

(c) Partner Opp 1 You  
1♣ 1♠ ?

**Double.** You would need seven hearts to jump to 3♥. Bidding 2♥ would be a gross overstatement (you would need a stronger hand, 10+ HCP or the equivalent.)

(d) Partner Opp 1 You  
1♦ Dble ?

Bid 1♥. 2♥ would be fit showing, not a Weak Jump Shift, after a 1♦ opening and intervention.

(e) Partner Opp 1 You  
1♦ 1♠ ?

Double, as you did in auction (c) after a 1♣ opening.

### Problem 2

♠ K 8 4  
♥ 9 6 2  
♦ K 5  
♣ A J 8 6 5

You open 1♣ with this resplendent 11-count (I sincerely hope you would!). What's your rebid in each of the following auctions?

(a) You Opp 1 Partner Opp2  
1♣ Pass 2♦ Pass  
?

**Pass.** Partner has made a Weak Jump Shift. If you had three-card diamond support you might on occasion up the ante with a pre-emptive raise to 3♦.

(b) You Opp 1 Partner Opp2  
1♣ Pass 1♥ 2♦  
?

**Pass, Pass, Pass!** Unless forced to speak by partner, a voluntary bid of 2NT should show 18-19 HCP, *never* 11-14.

(c) You Opp 1 Partner Opp2  
1♣ 1♥ 2♦ Pass  
?

**Bid 2NT.** Even without a stopper, partner's forcing bid means we have to make the best description of our hand. Remember: if partner also lacks a heart stopper he can always bid 3♥ rather than a lazy 3NT.

(d) You Opp 1 Partner Opp2  
1♣ 1♠ 2♣ Pass  
?

**Tricky** – you have a choice between 2NT and 3♣. Holding five clubs, I would plump for a non-forcing 3♣ bid. Partner can always still ask for a stopper by bidding 3♠ – the opponent's suit. □

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