

## The Five-card Major System

### Part V – by Neil Rosen

HAVING started discussing the importance of the 1♥/1♠ openers, it is vital to understand fully how to respond to them.

In the last issue I looked at using the Level of the Fit, allied with the use of Bergen Raises and Jacoby 2NT. (Remember these are optional approaches; you can use a much more natural style if you feel more comfortable.)

### Responding to 1♥/1♠ as a Passed Hand

Firstly: a) no Jacoby; b) no Bergen Raises!

With a fit for partner's major I recommend that a jump in a new suit is a 'fit-showing jump' (see June 2013, pages 44-45), so holding Hand A:



#### Hand A

♠ 4 3  
♥ A J 8 5  
♦ K J 10 5 2  
♣ 6 5

|            |               |
|------------|---------------|
| <b>You</b> | <b>Opener</b> |
| Pass       | 1♥            |
| 3♦         |               |

This bid shows nice diamonds (usually at least five cards) and a primary heart fit (four cards in length at least). This replaces Bergen Raises as a passed hand.

Similarly you cannot have 13+ high-card points (HCP) and a fit, so 2NT is no longer needed as Jacoby. I recommend it shows a *good four-card raise* (as it would after an opponent's take-out double), i.e. four-card support and 10+ HCP approx.

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### Drury

Many people now use this convention, which originally hailed from the US. The idea is that as a passed hand you split the range of raising the major to the two level, as below:

- After a 1♥/1♠ opening, a raise to 2♥/2♠ shows 5-8 HCP, usually three-card support, or four cards with a very stodgy hand.
- After a 1♥/1♠ opening, a bid of 2♣ is artificial and shows a good 9+ HCP and three-card support.

### Continuations after 1♥/1♠ – 2♣

The idea is that the opener simply rebids his suit at the two level with a minimum/sub-minimum opening bid. Opener can bid 2♦ without a real diamond suit simply to say his hand is better than minimum without a clear-cut alternative bid. Any other bid is natural-ish and suggests that there is a possibility of game facing a passed partner. For example, say you hold Hand B:

#### Hand B

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

|            |                |
|------------|----------------|
| <b>You</b> | <b>Partner</b> |
| 1♠         | Pass           |
| 2♦         | 2♣             |

Here 2♦ just signifies a better than minimum hand. Most people play that a jump to 3♦ instead would be a splinter bid.

Much debate raged in this country as to the ethical legality of this convention when it was first introduced, since it was sometimes used to control and moderate a possible psychic third-in-hand action by partner. Fortunately common sense has prevailed and the convention is now permitted – which sensibly enhances the bidding methods by giving more definition. It allows a simple raise to be 5-8 HCP only, allowing much better judgement as

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to when to make game-tries opposite.

Let's bid a few hands and recap . . .

## Responding to 1♥/1♠ Quiz

What do you respond to a 1♠ opening a) as a non-passed hand and b) as a passed hand on each of the hands below:

### Hand 1

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

### Hand 2

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

### Hand 3

♠ K Q 6  
♥ 7 2  
♦ 9 6 5  
♣ A J 10 5 2

### Hand 4

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

## Answers

**Hand 1:** a) 2♠. Remember that a single raise shows up 10 HCP with a flat hand.

b) 2♣, showing a 'good 2♠ bid', i.e. three-card support and a good 9+ HCP.

**Hand 2:** a) 3♦. A Bergen raise, showing a limit raise with at least four trumps (10-12 HCP).

b) 2NT. As a passed hand, you can show a good raise with at least four trumps via 2NT. This should *not* be used as a natural bid.

**Hand 3:** a) 3♣. A Bergen raise, showing a limit raise with precisely three trumps. Note that despite only 10 HCP you have a decent five-card suit to promote the hand away from a simple 2♠ raise.

b) 2♣. 3♣ would not be a Bergen raise as a passed hand – it would be fit-showing, promising at least five clubs and four

spades. Here you can use Drury (sometimes referred to as a 'Power Raise') to show your decent three-card raise.

**Hand 3:** a) 1NT. I recommend this for everyone playing the 2-over-1 variation of the system, where a 2♣ response (lower of two four-card suits, remember) would in fact be forcing to game, hence an opening hand would be needed.

b) 1NT. Also 1NT as a passed hand can be up to 11 HCP (probably not a great 11 in practice, as you would have opened the bidding!). If the hand is not strong enough to open, it should only be responding 1NT, in my opinion.

## Two-over-one Game-forcing

Please note that for each individual partnership this aspect is entirely optional.

Assuming you do decide to give it a go however, many, many more auctions become possible that are not available in Standard Acol. If you do not enjoy complex auctions, I do not recommend 2-over-1 but if you do like to enjoy your bidding then give it a try!

The essential premise is that a change of suit at the two level (**NOTE: not a jump!**) as a response to an opening bid is *forcing to game*. Thus:

1♦ – 2♣  
1♥ – 2♣  
1♥ – 2♦  
1♠ – 2♣  
1♠ – 2♦  
1♠ – 2♥

are all natural bids, but played as FG (forcing to game). In practice, for simplicity, most partnerships play them as showing 12+ HCP (13 for the extremely cautious amongst you). They can be made with less if you take an extreme shine to the hand, of course.

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Thus, holding Hand C:

## Hand C

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

Facing a 1♠ opening you should certainly force to game with 2♥ in my opinion, the spade fit making this clear-cut.

## The 1NT Response

This is now played as wide ranging (5-11 HCP approx.). The US treatment is to play it as forcing for one round. I do not recommend this approach. I prefer 1NT to be 'semi-forcing', i.e. opener can pass with a balanced hand of 11-14 HCP.

After an opening bid of 1♦ you can bid 1NT with 5-10 HCP and 2NT with 11-12, so the 1NT response in practice is not too wide-ranging.

After an opening bid of 1♥/1♠, a 1NT response is more like 5-11 HCP (and should be alerted as such) in practice, since 2NT is *not available* as natural (Jacoby takes precedence here).

## Opener's Action after a Two-over-one Response

All bids as described are natural but FG (12+ HCP). Opener's actions are as follows:

- All fairly natural, no hidden complexities need to be used here. There is of course room for partnerships to develop their own ideas and continuations.
- Since responder is known to be strong, then reverses by opener can be shaded down a bit – I recommend 14+ HCP as a guideline here.
- Rebidding the major by opener nearly always guarantees six cards.
- Bidding 2NT shows 11-14 balanced (or sometimes semi-balanced). Thus, holding Hand D as opener, after the auction has started

## Hand D

♠ K J 9 8 4  
♥ A 6 2  
♦ 5  
♣ K J 6 3

1♠ – 2♦ it is generally better to bid 2NT rather than rebidding the spades (which would show a six-card suit). Note the hand is not strong enough to bid the clubs. In practice, I play that 2NT is actually 11-14 HCP *or* 18-19 (responder assumes the weaker variation and the opener continues bidding to show 18-19 – quite safe of course when you remember that the responder has shown an opening hand!) For example, in the auction below:

| Opener | Responder |
|--------|-----------|
| 1♥     | 2♣        |
| 2NT    | 3NT       |
| 4NT    |           |

The 4NT bid would show the 18-19 HCP type as otherwise opener would obviously pass with 11-14.

- A jump to 3NT *from either partner* at any time during a two-over-one auction should be ascribed a special meaning. I recommend it to show 15-17 HCP – whichever hand bids it. This can be a vital piece of definition; an accusation often levelled at the two-over-one system is that no-one ever knows the 'strength' of the hand opposite – just the shape gets shown!
- A jump bid by opener in his own suit should *guarantee* a good suit (solid or one-loser at worst). Thus sometimes the simple rebid can conceal quite a strong hand – not a problem when you remember the auction cannot stop short of game!
- A jump by opener in a new suit is a *splinter*; for example:

| Opener | Responder |
|--------|-----------|
| 1♥     | 2♣        |
| 3♦/3♠  |           |

Both of these jumps should be splinters (in reality any Acol expert should already be comfortable with this treatment)

Here are some example hands where you can look at

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and compare the auctions with the Standard Acol auctions. In each case West is the dealer.

**Deal 1**

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

**5-card Major Auction**

1♣ – 1♥  
2♥ – Pass

**Acol Auction**

1NT – Pass

Acol routinely misses major-suit part-scores as we can easily see here. A 1NT opening bid would be passed out.

Using our system, you open 1♣ and East must respond 1♥. The major-suit fit thus comes to light. Note that if East wrongly responded 1♦, West would rebid 1NT not 1♥ and the heart fit would fail to come to light.

**Deal 2**

|             |                                                                                     |             |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| ♠ K J 9 6 2 |  | ♠ 7 3       |
| ♥ A 3       |                                                                                     | ♥ K 8 4     |
| ♦ K 7 2     |                                                                                     | ♦ A Q 8 6 3 |
| ♣ Q 4 3     |                                                                                     | ♣ J 9 6     |

**5-card Major Auction**

1♠ – 1NT  
Pass

**Acol Auction**

1♠ – 2♦  
2♠ – Pass

Acol struggles into the poor 5-2 fit (or 2NT if East feels so inclined). You can routinely stop in a much safer, higher-scoring contract, always a high points earner whether at match-points or IMPs.

**Deal 3**

|             |                                                                                   |           |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| ♠ K J 9 6 2 |  | ♠ Q 7 3   |
| ♥ A 3 2     |                                                                                   | ♥ K 8 7 4 |
| ♦ K 7 2     |                                                                                   | ♦ J 8 6 3 |
| ♣ Q 4       |                                                                                   | ♣ A 6     |

**5-card Major Auction**

1♠ – 2♠  
Pass

**Acol Auction**

1♠ – 2♦  
2♠ – 3♠  
4♠ – Pass

Playing Acol, East is virtually honour-bound to raise to 3♠ to admit to the partial fit. This will often prove too high.

A balanced 10-count always raises just to the two level in our system, thus providing the security of remaining at the two level (often the last making spot).

**Deal 4**

|              |                                                                                    |             |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| ♠ K 10 9 6 2 |  | ♠ A 7 3     |
| ♥ A 9 3 2    |                                                                                    | ♥ 8 7       |
| ♦ A 2        |                                                                                    | ♦ K Q 8 7 4 |
| ♣ K 4        |                                                                                    | ♣ Q 8 6     |

**5-card Major Auction**

1♠ – 3♣  
3♥ – 4♠  
Pass

**Acol Auction**

1♠ – 2♦  
2♥ – 3♠  
4♠ – Pass

Both auctions lead to 4♠ here – so there is no great overall difference. One small benefit, however, is that by using a Bergen raise East does not have to reveal his diamond suit during the auction. In essence, the more you can minimise telling the opponents about your hand during the auction, the better!

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## Dealing with Intervention after 1♥/1♠ Openings

There is again quite a lot of scope here. I will present a few simple ideas.

- A new suit at the two level by responder cannot necessarily be FG. It is played as forcing for one round (F1). It therefore simply shows 10+ points as in standard methods.
- When the opponents overcall, make use of the Level of the Fit principle by often raising to the three level with four-card support and a bit of shape. For example, holding Hand E:

**Deal 5**

|                                             |  |                                            |
|---------------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------------|
| ♠ K J 10 9 6 2<br>♥ A 3<br>♦ Q 7 2<br>♣ Q 4 |  | ♠ Q 7<br>♥ K 8<br>♦ A 8 6 3<br>♣ K J 8 7 2 |
|---------------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------------|

### 5-card Major Auction

1♠ – 2♣  
 2♠ – 4♠  
 Pass

### Acrol Auction

1♠ – 2♣  
 2♠ – 3NT  
 Pass

Acrol normally ends up with East punting 3NT and West guessing whether to pass or remove to 4♠ (guessing badly – usually, in my case!). In the Five-card Major auction, when West shows six spades, East has an easy decision.

**Deal 6**

|                                             |  |                                            |
|---------------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------------|
| ♠ A 10 8 6 2<br>♥ A 3 2<br>♦ Q 7 2<br>♣ A 4 |  | ♠ K 9 7 5 4<br>♥ 8<br>♦ K 8 6 5 3<br>♣ 7 2 |
|---------------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------------|

### 5-card Major Auction

1♠ – 4♠  
 Pass

### Acrol Auction

1♠ – ???

Relatively easy playing Five-card Majors to raise straight to the four level. Two nice kings and a fair bit of shape allow the Level of the Fit principle to take over. You might be making a contract at the four level, but if not the opponents certainly could make something so you want to aim for maximum disruption.

But playing Acrol? Who knows . . .

If you jump straight to 4♠, invariably you catch partner with 15-16 HCP balanced – just enough to stop the opponents making anything but often not enough (unless you have quite a fortuitous mesh) to make 4♠.

What is the alternative? 2♣? 3♣? Not at all clear for Acrol players, to tell you the truth.

**Hand E**

|                                            |
|--------------------------------------------|
| ♠ 8 2<br>♥ K 7 6 3<br>♦ 9 4<br>♣ Q J 6 5 2 |
|--------------------------------------------|

If partner opens 1♥ and the next hand overcalls with 2♦, raising to 3♥ is quite normal, showing fewer than the values for a UCB.

- UCBs (Unassuming Cue Bids (see pages 24-25, June 2012)). These show support for partner and 10+ HCP (well, in reality a good 9 – as usual).

I like to differentiate between three- and four-card support, however, to aid partner in both part-score and higher judgement, so:

- A cue bid shows three-card support, e.g. 1♥ – (2♣) – 3♣, whereas:
- A bid of 2NT shows four-card support, e.g. 1♥ – (2♣) – 2NT.

Clearly the introduction of 2NT as *not natural* is a significant change. It takes a bit of getting used to but the gains far outweigh the losses.

If you have a *natural* 2NT bid to make, either make a negative double or introduce a new suit – no problem!

- Use jumps in new suits after overcalls or doubles to be ‘fit-showing’ as I have described earlier. Thus:

1♥ – (2♣) – 3♦ = fit showing  
 1♥ – (2♣) – 4♦ = splinter

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- e) Some people choose to play special methods when their opponents double a 1♥/1♠ opener (some use transfers, for example).

I will leave that to your individual partnerships to resolve.

## The Strong No-trump

This is really the easiest change of all that we have made. We all know how to open and respond to 1NT already.

A few small changes in ethos:

1. Opening 1NT on 5-3-3-2 hands in the 15-17 HCP range and containing a five-card major works much better than opening 1♥/1♠. This is not always the case when playing a weak no-trump – though many of you are probably accustomed to this style already.
2. Many 5-4-2-2 hands without a convenient rebid should open 1NT.
3. Sometimes even with a six-card minor 1NT is the best bid, for example holding a hand such as Hand F:

### Hand F

♠ K 9  
♥ A Q 6  
♦ A 6  
♣ Q 10 6 5 4 2

This works best when the minor is not of terrific quality. Otherwise, simply open the minor and jump to the three level for your rebid.

## Advantages of the Strong No-trump

1. It suffers very few penalties (in practice, it's almost *never* doubled).
2. Major-suit part-scores are found more easily by not pre-empting your own side with the weak no-trump.
3. 15-17 HCP is an excellent range for auction development. Knowledge that opener has 12-14 HCP, or 18-19 if balanced, and not opening 1NT is much clearer and more efficient than Acol.

## Strong 1NT Quiz

Which of the following hands should be opened with a strong no-trump?

### Hand 1

♠ A K J 6 3  
♥ 7 4  
♦ K 6 3  
♣ A 6 5

### Hand 2

♠ A K J 5 4  
♥ 7 4  
♦ K Q 5 2  
♣ Q 5

### Hand 3

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

### Hand 4

♠ 6 2  
♥ A J 4  
♦ Q 10 5  
♣ A K Q J 7

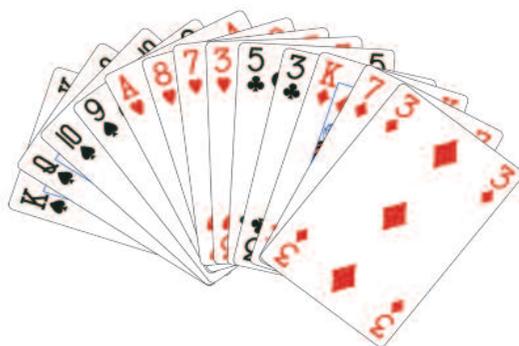
### Hand 5

♠ A J 7 6  
♥ K 2  
♦ K Q 6 5  
♣ A 5 2

### Hand 6

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

Answers overleaf ⇨



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## Answers

### Hand 1

♠ A K J 6 3  
♥ 7 4  
♦ K 6 3  
♣ A 6 5

**Yes** – an easy one to start with. Don't worry about the five card major or small doubleton heart – life's too short!

### Hand 2

♠ A K J 5 4  
♥ 7 4  
♦ K Q 5 2  
♣ Q 5

**No.** A 5-4-2-2 with a five-card major should bid naturally, hence 1♠ followed by 2♦ should be the plan.

### Hand 3

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

**No.** A 4-4-4-1 shape should not open 1NT (never with a singleton). Open 1♦ – the suit below the singleton if that is your usual style, or 1♣ otherwise (I prefer 1♦).

### Hand 4

♠ 6 2  
♥ A J 4  
♦ Q 10 5  
♣ A K Q J 7

**No.** Remember you can *upgrade* the hand, i.e. with a very good five-card suit add a point on – then show it in the range 18-19 not 15-17. This approach will generate you enormous gains in the long-term.

### Hand 5

♠ A J 7 6  
♥ K 2  
♦ K Q 6 5  
♣ A 5 2

**Yes** – nice and straightforward this time.

### Hand 6

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

**Yes.** With moderate clubs and strong doubletons I believe 1NT to be much the best bid here.

## Responding to a 15-17 1NT

Just use your current methods but tailor the point counts accordingly; that is:

With 8/9 HCP you can invite game.  
With 10+ you can force to game.

A simple scheme of responses might look something like this.

After an opening 1NT:

- 2♣ = Stayman (or non-promissory Stayman if your 2NT response is not natural).
- 2♦ = Transfer to hearts.
- 2♥ = Transfer to spades.
- 2♠ = Transfer to clubs.
- 2NT = Transfer to diamonds.
- 3-level bids = Slam try, 6+ card suit

## Responding to a 15-17 1NT Quiz

### Hand 1

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

### Hand 2

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

### Hand 3

♠ Q 6 2  
♥ Q 6 3  
♦ A 10 9 5  
♣ Q 7 2

### Hand 4

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

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## Hand 5

♠ Q 8 7 4 2  
♥ Q 7 6 3  
♦ 5 4 2  
♣ 9

## Hand 6

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

### Answers

**Hand 1:** 2♥. Transfer to spades then bid 3NT next to offer opener a choice of contract.

**Hand 2:** 2♥. You actually have a choice here. You can transfer then raise to game, or you can jump to 4♠ directly. I only recommend the latter if your partner is struggling with a headache! Generally it is much wiser to negotiate for the strong no-trump hand to be declarer if at all possible.

**Hand 3:** 3NT – an easy one at last!

**Hand 4:** 4NT – quantitative. This shows that facing a maximum 17 count you will have enough for 6NT (33 HCP generally, when no long suits expected).

**Hand 5:** 2♣ – Stayman. I have *never* believed you need any values for this, and holding both majors the bid is obvious. If partner disappoints by bidding 2♦ you can still bid 2♠ – to play.

**Hand 6:** 3♥. Enough for a fully-fledged slam try here. Opener will know that you guarantee at least six hearts so will look at his strength and controls rather than particularly at his degree of fit for hearts. □

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