Bidding After 1M/1♠-1NT*/1M-1NT* when Playing 2/1

By Neil H. Timm

Learning the 2/1 Bridge System is difficult, why? You have at learn at least three very important basic bids as opener/responder (1) What to bid after partner makes a 2/1 response? (e.g. do you follow Bergen, Lawrance, or Schuler Shift) (2) What to bid after partner responds 1NT*? (3) What do you bid when having a 3+card fit for the major suit bid? An overview of each follow, but in this Tip, I address point (2) in some detail.

1. Core 2/1 Game Forcing Responses

When you bid a lower-ranking suit at the 2-level, you promise **13+HCP** and create a mandatory forcing to game bid (3NT, 4 of a major, or 5 of a minor). Because game is guaranteed, the partnership bids "slowly" to find game or slam.

- **1♠ -2♣ / 2♦**: Promises 13+HCP and usually a 4+ card suit.
- **1♠ -2♥**: Promises 13+HCP and a **5+ card Heart suit**.
- **1♥ -2♣ / 2♦**: Promises 13+HCP and a 4+ card suit.

2. Forcing/Semi-Forcing 1NT* Response

Since 2-level bids by responder require 13+HCP, hands with **7–12 HCP** employ the bid of 1NT*(forcing/semi-forcing).

- **1NT Forcing/ Semi-Forcing**: Opener is always expected to rebid (forcing) unless they have a strictly balanced minimum (semi-forcing) opening.

3. Conventional Support Bids (Trump Fit)

When partner holds 3 or more cards in opener's bid major suit, the 2/1 agreements normally rely on conventional tools to define your high-card strength and hand distribution right away:

Bid	Convention	Strength / Meaning
2 of the Major	Single Raise	**6–9HCP** with 3+ card support (Constructive/Minimum).
3 of the Major	Limit Raise / Bergen	**10–12 points** with 3 or 4-card support (Invitational). *(Many 2/1 players use **Bergen Raises** via 3♣/3♦ to differentiate 3-card vs 4-card limit raises while others may use fit bids or other conventions)*.
2NT*	**Jacoby 2NT***	**13+points** (Game Forcing) with **4+ card support**. Asks opener to show singletons, voids, or extra values for slam exploration.

Double Jump Shift	**Splinter Bids**	**13+points** (Game Forcing) with **4+ card support** with **singleton or void** in the skipped suit (direct or ambiguous).
3NT	Choice of Game	Typically, **13–15HCP**, completely balanced, with exactly **3-card support**. Offers a choice between playing 3NT or 4 of the major.

4. Forcing 1-Level Response

- **1♥ -1♠**: Shows **6+HCP** and a **4+card Spade suit**. New suit by responder is forcing for 1-round (no problems here).

5. Opener's "Standard Rebids" (No Special Conventions)

If you are playing standard methods without conventional gadgets, the openers describe their hand shape and strength (typically **12-19 total points**) as follows:

- **Pass**: Shows a balanced minimum hand (12–14 points) and no interest in game.
- **2 of a Lower-Ranked New Suit (e.g., 1♠ -1NT -2♣/2♦)**: Shows 4+ cards in the second suit. Usually a minimum to medium hand (12–17 points).
- **2 of the Opened Major (e.g., 1♠ -1NT*-2♠)**: Shows a 6+ card suit and a minimum hand (12–15 points).
- **2NT**: Shows a balanced, invitational hand (**17–19 points**).
- **3 of a Lower-Ranked New Suit**: A **jump shift**, showing a strong, game-forcing hand (18+ points) with a 4+ card secondary suit.
- **3 of the Opened Major**: Shows a strong 6+ card suit and an invitational (NF) hand (16+ points).

Having read the above summary of the 2/1 System, I came across Tommy Sorberg's 2013 Bridge Blog on "Continuations After 1NT Forcing" where he considers several bidding problems: What do you bid?

"Remember that **Max Hardy** is looking over your shoulder from that big bridge table in the sky.

(i) KJxx, AQxxx, Jx, Qx

(ii) K4, AQJT9x, 5, QJ43

(iii) K4, QJ7643, 5, AQJ3

(iv) K4, AKQJ63, Q7, J95

On hand (i) you have 4 spades but to bid them would be a reverse – not with 13 hcps! In 2/1 game force, it is not systemically correct to rebid your 5-card heart suit, so you "suck it up" and bid 2 clubs. **The rule** says you bid your best 2 card minor and hope for the best. Somehow this often works out.

On hand (ii) you have a 6-card heart suit which is rebiddable, but also a 4-card club suit you could show Note that hand (iii) has the same feature. How do you decide whether to show the club suit or just rebid your hearts? There is **another rule** for this. **Here is the standard**: Opener will only show the 4-card suit when the 6-card suit is not solid enough to play against a singleton. Opener bids 2 hearts with hand (ii) and 2 clubs with hand (iii). If you are responder and have a singleton in openers major (which happens with alarming frequency), it is important to understand the implication of opener rebidding a second suit. Opener is telling you that he does not have a 6-card major, or if he does it is not good enough to play against a single in your hand. If you have a single in opener's major, you have 12 cards in the other suits. Remember opener's bid of a new suit at the 2 level does not show extra values nor is it forcing, so you can pass, and with 4144 that may be the best thing to do. These situations come under the "catch all" that "sometimes you just gotta do what you gotta do."

Hand (iv) is even more twisted. I would guess many readers would bid 3 hearts over 1NT forcing. You are not going to like that match point choice if the hand makes 10 tricks in both NT and spades. Opener should bid 3NT showing 16-18 hcps, solid hearts, and no single or void. This asks responder to pass if his hand is balanced and otherwise correct to 4 hearts.

The wind up is what to do when responder has a good heart hand and the auction goes 1s/1NT/2c. Below are 4 rebid hands for responder, what is your rebid?

(i) 7 KQJ876 54 42

(ii) 76 KQT975 AJ5 43

(iii) 87 KQ98 AQ87 432

(iv) T6 KQJ87 543 765

With hand (i), bid 2 hearts to play. It tells partner to please pass. With hand (ii) you have 6 hearts and 10 hcps. It is too good for 2 hearts, so invite with 3 hearts. With hand (iii) bid 2NT since you have stoppers in the unbid suits and 10-12. How about hand (iv)? Good hearts but a single in partner's bid suit and only 6 hcps. Partner's 1 spade opening did not guarantee anything about his hearts and the rebid of 2 clubs may well be 4 clubs which tends to reduce the chance of holding hearts. This is a judgment hand and only the quality of the hearts makes them a consideration. Still, my experience in match points tells me to ignore the hearts and take a false preference to 2 spades where you are guaranteed a 7-card trump suit. After all, responder has a 6 hcp, 9 LTC minimum hand. Disaster could be impending."

With the problems raised by Tommy, what is one to do? There are specialized conventions that address the above problems called Lisa (modification of the Bart convention developed by Les Bart) – a responder orientated and Gazzille which is opener orientated convention developed by Leo Gazzilli).

Lisa Bidding Overview (After 1♠-1NT*)

Developed by Pete Whipple and Jamie Radcliffe, the **Lisa convention** was engineered to fix structural shortcomings of Bart—specifically what happens when the opener has 0–1 hearts but extra point values, or when the opener has a strong heart suit, but without heart length.

The **Lisa convention** addresses the auction **1♠-1NT*** followed by opener's artificial **2♣*** rebid.
Initial Steps:

- **1♠**: Opened major (5+spades).
- **1NT***: 7–12 HCP (forcing/semi-forcing).
- **2♣***: Artificial, forced rebid by opener.

Responder's Third Bid (The Lisa Matrix):

- **2♦* Artificial**. Shows *either* 6+hearts with weak values, or a weak preference for spades.
- **2♥**: Shows exactly **2 Spades and 5 Hearts** with a weak hand.
- **2♠**: Shows exactly **2 Spades** with a strong, simple preference.
- **2NT**: Invitational to game; holds fewer than 4-clubs.
- **3♣**: Invitational to game; holds 5+clubs.
- **3♦**: Invitational to game; holds a 6+ card Diamond suit.

Continuations after the 2♦* artificial ask:
After 2♦* opener must describe further:

- **Opener bids 2♥**: If responder then passes, they are weak with a 6+heart suit. If responder bids **2♠**, it is a weak simple preference. If responder bids **2NT**, it is invitational with exactly 4-clubs.
- **Opener bids 2♠**: If responder then passes, it is a weak suit preference. If responder bids **3♥**, it is a weak sign-off. If responder bids **4♦**, it functions as a transfer to Hearts.

Gazzilli Bidding Overview (After 1M-1NT*)

While Bart and Lisa are responder-driven, **Gazzilli** completely flips the focus to the **opener**. In a standard 2-over-1 framework, a 1NT response spans a wide range (6–12 points). If the opener has a powerhouse hand (16/17+ points), jumping to the 3-level risks bypassing the optimal contract if the responder is totally broken.

The **Gazzilli convention** operates identically after either **1♥ -1NT*** or **1♠ -1NT***. Its core purpose is sorting out whether opener has a basic minimum hand or a powerhouse **17+ HCP hand**.
Initial Steps:

- **1♥ or 1♠**: Standard major opening.
- **1NT***: Forcing/Semi-forcing response.
- **2♣* (Gazzilli)**: **Artificial and forcing**. Shows either a standard minimum opening with Clubs (11–15 HCP) or *any* strong hand holding **17+HCP**.

Responder's Vital Reply:

- **2♦***: **Artificial Relay (8+HCP)**. This is the positive answer setting up a forcing auction opposite opener's strong option.
- **Any other 2-level suit bid**: Denies game-going values (0–6HCP). It is a sign-off or weak "pass or correct" bid to play in that spot.
- **2NT**: Weak distribution showing length in both minors.

Opener's Bids After the 2♦* Positive Relay:

Once responder shows 8+ points via 2♦*, opener reveals their true strength and shape:

- **2 of the Opened Major (e.g., 1♠ -1NT*-2♣ -2♦ -2♠)**: Confirms the **weak option** (11–15 HCP). Opener has a standard minimum hand and wants to stop low.
- **2 of a New Suit (Lower Ranked)**: Shows a **strong hand (17+HCP)** with 5+ in the major and 4+ in the newly named suit. The auction is now a **Game Force**.
- **2NT**: Shows a **strong hand (17+HCP)** with a balanced pattern (usually 5-3-3-2) and around 18–19HCP.
- **3 of the Opened Major**: Shows a **strong hand (17+ HCP)** with a powerful 6+suit **Game Force** bid.
- **2NT**: Shows a **strong hand (17+HCP)** with a balanced pattern (usually 5-3-3-2) and around 18–19HCP.
- **3 of the Opened Major**: Shows a **strong hand (17+HCP)** with a powerful 6+card major suit.

Lisa (After 1♠ – 1NT – 2♣*)

The Lisa convention is designed to rescue the partnership when **Responder has 5 Hearts but a weak hand**, which is notoriously hard to show after a 1♠ opening.

Hand A: Responder's Dilemma (5 Hearts, 2 Spades, Weak)

- **Opener:** ♠ K Q J 7 4 ♥ 8 3 ♦ A Q 5 ♣ J 9 2 (13 HCP)
- **Responder:** ♠ 9 5 ♥ A 10 7 6 4 ♦ J 8 3 ♣ 10 6 4 (5 HCP)
- **The Auction:**
    1. **1♠** – Standard opening.
    2. **1NT*** – Responder cannot bid 2♥ and bids 1NT*.
    3. **2♣*** – Opener makes the standard minor-suit rebid with their 3-card club suit.
    4. **2♥**– **Lisa Conventional Bid**. Responder bids exactly 2♥ to show *exactly 5 Hearts and 2 Spades with a weak hand*.
- **The Result:** Opener immediately passes. The partnership safely plays in a **5-2 Heart fit at the 2-level**. In standard bidding, Responder would have to pass 2♣ (a 3-card fit) or prefer 2♠ (a 5-2 fit in the opponent's trump), completely missing hearts.

Hand B: Responder Has a Six-Card Heart Suit

- **Opener:** ♠ A Q 10 6 3 ♥ J 2 ♦ K 5 ♣ K 9 7 2 (13 HCP)
- **Responder:** ♠ 8 ♥ K Q 9 7 5 3 ♦ 10 8 4 2 ♣ 6 (4 HCP)
- **The Auction:**
    1. **1♠ – 1NT***
    2. **2♣*** – Opener rebids their lowest 4-card minor.
    3. **2♦*** – **Lisa Conventional Bid**. This tells Opener: *"I am weak, and I either have 6+ Hearts or a weak Spade preference."*
    4. **2♠** – Opener shows their true shape preference.
    5. **3♥**– Responder clarifies 2♦* bid by correcting to 3♥.
- **The Result:** Opener passes. The is in a safer **3♥ contract**, escaping a doomed 2♣ or 2♠ contract.

Gazilli (After 1♥ – 1NT)

The Gazzilli convention is designed to differentiate between **Opener's minimum hands** and **strong hand** without bypassing the safety of the 2-level.

Hand C: Opener has a Strong Hand (18HCP)

- **Opener:** ♠ A K 4 ♥ A Q J 8 5 ♦ K J 3 ♣ 9 2 (18HCP)
- **Responder:** ♠ J 9 5 ♥ 7 2 ♦ 10 9 6 4 ♣ A Q 7 3 (8HCP)
- **The Auction:**
    1. **1♥** – Standard opening.
    2. **1NT*** – Forcing or Semi-Forcing response.
    3. **2♣***– **Gazzilli**. Opener signals they have either a minimum with clubs or 17+ HCP.
    4. **2♦*** – **Responder's Relay**. Responder bids 2♦ to signal: *"I have 8+HCP. I am strong enough for game if you are maxed out."*
    5. **2NT!** – Opener breaks the relay by bidding 2NT, which officially reveals their **17+ HCP balanced powerhouse**.
- **The Result:** Because Responder previously promised 8+HCP, the partnership immediately knows they have game-going values (18+8 = 26 total points) and comfortably bids **3NT**.

Hand D: Opener has a Weak Hand; Responder Has a Weak Hand

- **Opener:** ♠ 9 3 ♥ A K 10 7 4 ♦ Q 8 2 ♣ K J 4 (12HCP)
- **Responder:** ♠ J 10 8 2 ♥ 6 ♦ J 9 7 5 3 ♣ 8 6 2 (3HCP)
- **The Auction:**
    1. **1♥ -NT***
    2. **2♣***– **Gazzilli**. Opener checks to see if Responder is strong.
    3. **2♦*** – **Bailout/Sign-off**. Responder does *not* have 8+HCP, so they cannot make the artificial 2♦* positive relay. In Gazzilli, if Responder has a weak hand, they just bid their natural long suit.
- **The Result:** Opener passes 2♦*. The partnership rests safely in **2♦*** on a total of 15 high card points for the two hands avoiding any dangerous unforced games or high-level penalties.

Gazzilli is a very complex and Lisa is simpler and easy to learn! Which convention is better? What follows is the "AI" response. When comparing options for handling the **1M – 1NT** auction (specifically after a 1♠ opening) in a 2/1 bidding system, the comparison is typically between **Gazzilli** and **Bart/Lisa** (assuming "List" is a typo for the Lisa convention, which is an upgraded variation of Bart). Neither convention is universally "better," as they focus on completely different sides of the auction. **Gazzilli is generally considered more powerful and essential for expert-level systems** because it solves the highly problematic wide point range of the opener's rebids.]

What follows are Links to the two Conventions: Liza and Gazzilli:

https://www.bridgewebs.com/ocala/Lisa%20Bidding%20Convention.pdf

Gazzilli PDF Blueprint on Bridgewebs

Some prefer the Walsh Approach which closely follows 2/1, follow the link: https://neapolitanclub.altervista.org/eng/walsh-system-notes-forcing-notrump-by-rhoda-walsh-2.html