

Responder's Second Bid After Three 1 Level Suit Bids

While playing the other day I picked up the following hand:

♠843 ♥AQ9532 ♦7 ♣KQ8

I felt pretty good about it. 11 HCP, a 6 card suit, honors together and honors in my length. It meets the rule of 20 and I would definitely open it in any seat. However, I was in 3rd seat and my partner beat me to the punch by opening 1D. I had a fairly automatic 1H response but then my partner rebid 1S. Now what?

The questions are:

- Do I force to game or invite?
- If I invite, do I invite in hearts or in NT?

After 3 bids at the 1 level responder has a fair amount of information. But how much information depends upon your partnership style and agreements. Consider the following 2 hands:

1. ♠AQ52 ♥_ ♦KQ8643 ♣632

2. ♠KQJ5 ♥K76 ♦T986 ♣A4

They both would open 1D and 1S is a common rebid with both of them. Opposite #1 you have no fit and will struggle to make anything at the 2 level. Opposite #2 11 tricks in hearts seems like a good bet. What is responder to do other than guess well when trying to decide upon their rebid?

Here's some ways in which to improve your guesses:

Opener's rebid style

There are 3 main ways to rebid after 1m-1H. They are:

- Always bid 4 spades if you have them
- Always bid 1N if balanced
- Choose which one best describes your hand

Knowing your partnership style helps you guess well when you rebid because you have more information about your partner's hand.

For example, if you always show 4 spades then most commonly your partner will be balanced when they bid 1S. You might easily want to invite in hearts with partner likely to have enough to have an 8 card major suit fit.

If you always rebid 1N if balanced, then by bidding 1S you have denied holding a balanced hand. Then opener is most likely to have heart shortness and you might want to be conservative with the misfit and invite in NT.

Responder's rebid options

Natural bidding

With a weak hand:

Pass, bid 1N, or any previously bid suit at the 2 level

With an invitational hand

Bid 2C, 2N or any previously bid suit at the 3 level

With a game forcing hand

Bid 2C, 3N or any previously bid suit at the 4 level

Notice how 2C gets in there twice. That's because it's a new suit and new suits by responder are forcing. When a bid is forcing you do not need to put an upper limit on the strength.

Fourth Suit Forcing

One of the earliest conventions that players are taught is fourth suit forcing. After opener has offered up 2 potential trump suits and responder a 3rd, the likelihood of finding a fit and wanting to play in the 4th suit are small. Instead players quickly grew to like the concept of a "tell me more" bid that says I want to keep talking, but I don't know what to say. Most players out here in Portland play this as Game Forcing. Much like 2/1 having this agreement allows you to relax and know that whatever happens, you and your partner will get to game so you can just take your time and find the right strain and level instead of having to worry about partner passing your next bid.

You can also play this as invitational or better. This does have the advantage of enabling you to describe difficult invitational hands, but does complicate the rest of the auction as you need clear rules as to just when an auction becomes forcing to game.

XYZ

The last and most popular convention amongst local experts is XYZ. This is essentially applying the concepts of 2 way new minor forcing to all auctions that have 3 bids at the 1 level instead of just those where the last bid was 1N. Much like in 2 way NMF, 2C forces 2D and either shows a hand that wants to play in a long minor or else invitational values. 2D is artificial and game forcing.

While XYZ is popular and handles many auctions well, it falls down when opener has hidden extra values and doesn't know when to accept or reject the relay to 2D. This is because in contrast to when opener rebids 1N, when opener rebids 1 of a major partner has a wide range of both HCP and shape possibilities. Therefore it can be difficult for responder to properly evaluate their hand's potential values. After all, if opener can still be 7420 or 4432 and 12 HCP to 17, what's a 10 count worth?