Introducing Strong NT and 5 Card Majors
(a conversion course)

This course is intended to give a whistle stop look at playing Strong No Trump and 5 card Majors, for people who have been playing ACOL. It will deal with the major differences, especially for those who want to understand what they are playing against. However, if you are considering changing to "5 and Strong" with your partner I really recommend that you both buy Andrew Robson's (AR) excellent book

Strong Notrump Five-card Majors

in its yellow cover.

Also, consider subscribing to his Webcast "Strong and Fives", £7.99 a month.
Much of what follows is based on the devices and protocols which he favours.

The version I will be demonstrating today is very close to the version that the junior England teams are being taught. Strong and Five, 2 over 1, inverted minors and short Club.

Because this system is still unfamiliar to many club players, we should announce or alert bids which they will assume to mean something different. I have tried to note these in the text.

Opening weak hands

Opening weak hands without a 5 card Major.

There are two commonly used devices to overcome this problem. Often it will be a hand which you would have opened 1NT when playing that as 12-14.

Better minor. Simply start by bidding your best minor, which will be at least 3 card (do the arithmetic, this must be true if you don't have a 5 card Major). This gives partner plenty of room and does not need alerting or announcing. I am showing this but not covering it today,

Prepared Club. As favoured by AR. With no 5 card Major and fewer than 4 diamonds, open 1 ♣. (This must be announced as "could be as few as 2"). If you do have four diamonds, open 1 ♦, which needs no alerting. This also gives partner every chance of showing a four card Major. (See WALSH later). This is the version I will be concentrating on today

Opening weak hands with a 5 card Major.

This is the strength of the system, bid your 5 card Major! On rule of 20.

Your rebids after partner replies

If partner has replied with a suit bid at the one level, there are two possibilities.

> If you have 4 of their suit, bid it just 1 more level up. (remember you have a weak hand)
>
> If you don't, your rebid is 1NT, which has now become 12-14 and should be alerted

If your partner has bid 1NT, with your weak hand, just pass and let them play it.

Other responses and introducing 2 over 1

2 over 1 is probably the most important advantage of this system. Bidding a 2 level bid over partner's opening 1 of a different suit, is treated as "natural and forcing to game and announced as such. This allows both players to continue to describe their hands. It improves the chances of finding a game or slam contract but does create some difficulties.

There are exceptions. Here is an expansion

♣ are used as an example of a minor being bid ♥ as a Major

1♣ Pass 2♣	forcing to 3♣
1♥ Pass 2♥	weak support
1♥ Pass 2♣	**forcing to game**
1♥ Pass 2♠	Partnership agreement.
1♣ Pass 2♦	Partnership agreement
1♣ Pass 2♥	Partnership agreement
But 1♠ Pass 2♥	is a game force

The Partnership agreement bids are because some players are now playing "weak jump shifts". In any case, with game going points and a Major over partners 1 of a minor, why not just bid your Major at the 1 level and see what partner's rebid is? However, if you want to treat 2 Major over 1 minor as a game force, you can. Make sure your partner agrees!

Some specific examples

Suppose partner has opened 1♣. With 6 points or more, give priority to showing a 4 card Major. This is known as WALSH. Because partner may well have 4 of a Major herself, it is important to show yours, more important than agreeing their Clubs (more later) or showing a 5 card diamond suit. e.g.

♠	J 7 6
♥	K 9 4 2
♦	A Q 8 5 2
♣	6

Bid 1♥ rather than show your Diamonds.

It follows from this that 1NT over a minor,

- denies a 4 card Major,
- denies good support for opener's minor
- becomes 6 points to about 10.

Agreeing partner's minor; (inverted minors)

Because 2 over 1 is a game force, special consideration needs to be given to supporting opener's minor. If it is 1 ♦, we know that she has at least 4 Diamonds and if we have no 4 card Major, Diamonds may be the best contract. 2 ♦ would be a forcing to 3 ♦ so the minors are **"inverted".** With 5 Diamonds and 10 points, bid 3 ♦.

If partner has opened 1 ♣, they may have only 2, so supporting Clubs you would need 6, or a very good 5. 3 ♣ is the weaker bid, 2 ♣ is forcing to 3 ♣.

<u>An example of a game force.</u>

Partner opens 1 ♠, opponents pass. Your 2 ♣ says, "I have enough points for game, continue to describe your hand". Here is an example.

♠	A 8 5
♥	A Q 62
♦	K 9 3
♣	7 5 2

Whilst you could show ♠ support straight away (you know that you have 8), bidding Spades would restrict the bidding, set up the game force, you can always bid 4 ♠ later. And you have left open the bidding for other possibilities (maybe a slam 👌)

Any interference by the opponents cancels the 2 over 1

<u>A further complication</u>

Partner has opened 1 ♥ and you have

♠	Q 7 6
♥	9 3
♦	A Q 8 5 2
♣	Q 7 2

This is clearly not enough to force to game, so you can't bid 2 ♦. Which brings us to the **wide ranging NT.**

Over opener's Major, 1NT becomes 6 points up to a poor 12. This must be alerted.

Reminder

Over partner's minor, 1NT is now 6-10 and denies a 4 card Major

Over partner's Major 1NT is now 6 to a poor 12

Opening 1NT

This now becomes 15-17 and all your need to do is adjust all your arithmetic by 3pts! Stayman and transfers still apply as does a quantitative 4NT, now 17pts.

The NT rebids

Almost the biggest change. A 1NT rebid is now 12-14 (which you would have opened as a weak NT in ACOL). You should alert or announce this if playing with people who don't know Strong and Five. The 2NT rebid over a 1 level response is 18-19. You might like to explore Checkback Stayman with your partner, it's quite useful in this structure.

Stronger hands

All of these are unchanged. A 2NT opener is 20-22 and 2 ♣ is whatever you currently play. I recommend 23 points or a game force hand.