



Issue 10: May 2007 BridgeHands Newsletter

More Notrump Bidding Gymnastics

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Dear Bridge Friend,

Welcome to ***Bridgehands*** eMag Newsletter, Issue 10. Recall in our last newsletter, we established the foundation for Notrump basics, covering hand shape, strength, and hand evaluation criteria. In this issue we will conclude our discussion on Notrump bidding and responses with additional bidding scenarios.

Counting up the numbers, our next stop is the **Rule of 8** in our the "Rules of . . ." The Rule of 8 offers a handy guide to help us find the best line of play finessing when holding AKJxx in one hand opposite xxx in the other hand.

Note: Viewing the hands below requires your EMAIL reader to use "fixed fonts" (not proportional). If you have problems reading this document, please view our [online web-based copy](#) or [Adobe Acrobat PDF file](#) suitable for printing.

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More Notrump Gymnastics - Bidding and Responses

Before we continue our quest for sound Notrump bidding, let's have a quick review of Notrump strength requirements:

Points - the 1 Notrump opening range is a cornerstone of the partnership's system, influencing other 1 level bids and rebids. Here are some common point ranges to open 1 Notrump:

15-17 This is the modern treatment today, offering a good compromise between its frequency of occurrence and the safety of an achievable contract when partner has a poor hand.

16-18 This was popular in yesteryear, certainly a solid range with a greater safety range. However, since more points are required, the player has fewer opportunities to open 1 Notrump.

Opening 1 Notrump with 13-15 is common with Precision players since they open 1 Club with almost all 16+ HCP hands (an artificial conventional bid). Common systems such as Standard American have a huge range when opening a hand in a suit contract at the 1 level, with as few as 12 points and as many as 21 points. While the Precision system requires much memory work associated with artificial bids, an argument can be made for the advantages of bids expressing a narrower point range. At any rate, all Bridge systems wisely use a narrow point range to evaluate an opening Notrump call.

Did you know that "on the other side of the pond" (from the perspective of those in the United States) there is another popular system to open 1 Notrump with 12-14 points? It's the Acol system, originally created at North London Bridge Club located on Acol Street, England. Playing Acol, players get to open 1 Notrump far more often than the 15-17 point players or those playing the 13-15 point Precision system. When an opponent opens 1 Notrump with weaker values, it becomes a bit of a hindrance - the opponents are no longer able to bid at the 1 level since the Notrump bid is the highest ranking denomination at a given level. So the Acol 1 Notrump bid is a bit of a preemptive bid, opening the bidding with a balanced hand and minimal values. Opening 1 Notrump with 12-14 points is also the standard for the Kaplan-Sheinwold system, formerly a popular system for aspiring Bridge players until the Precision system emerged.

As if those were not enough variations, a few creative players open 1 Notrump with 14-16 points. Some play an even weaker notrump opener when non-vulnerable and this 14-16 HCP range when vulnerable. Players who like split notrump ranges call it "variable notrump" bidding - opponents who hate it call it "chicken notrump" - get it? The players bid a higher range when vulnerable to avoid getting whacked by the opponents with a penalty double.

That leaves the favorite for those who fear no evil, opening 1 Notrump with 10-12 points! Talk about a preemptive range with no concern of painful penalties, this is it. Enter the "Kamikaze" notrump. Oh, by the way, a minority of frisky Bridge players use (misuse?) methods that permits them to open 1 Notrump with less than 10 points; in some jurisdictions like North America, the Laws state prohibit the responder from using any conventional responses like Stayman and Jacoby Transfers when partner opens 1 Notrump with less than 10 points.

Okay, having taken a tour of how some Bridge players get creative with their 1 Notrump opening range, let's get back to our 15-17 point 1 Notrump opener. We will begin by considering balanced hands that are above or below this point range, those with 12-14 points and those with 18-21 points (above 22 points, many systems open strongly at the 2 level).

We typically bid a suit at the 1 level and rebid 1 Notrump with 1-3 points below our Notrump opening range. Thus, a 1 Notrump rebid normally shows a hand with 12-14 points (or a shapely 15 pointer).

1 minor - 1 major;
1 Notrump

1 Notrump rebids usually show the same shape as the Notrump opener. This is somewhat controversial depending on partnership agreements, which may also involve agreements on reverses and other conventions. How about this scenario?

1 minor - 1 Spade;

Since the responder may hold a four card major, the opener often does not hold four cards in the major suit. Lacking four card support, the opener's options are limited to rebidding Notrump or a minor suit. Incidentally, after a 1 Spade response, rebidding 1 Notrump should truly show a balanced hand with 2-3 Spades. Holding a short Spade suit, we should bid a minor. Here are some common scenarios:

1C - 1S
1N

Rebid 1 Notrump with a balanced shape, as:
3=2=4=4, 2=3=4=4, 2=4=3=4
(legend: Spades=Hearts=Diamonds=Clubs)

1C - 1S
2C

Rebid 2 Clubs with an imbalanced hand lacking
stoppers in a short suit, as:
2=3=2=6, 1=3=4=5, 3=1=4=5

Recall our prior lesson on captaincy. When a player makes the cheapest Notrump bid or rebids a prior suit at the lowest level, these bids show a minimum hand and are intended to be signoff bids. Of course, with an invitational 10-12 point hand or a 13+ point game-going hand, the responder is not obligated to pass.

Today most Bridge players open 2 Notrump with 20-21 points and a balanced hand. Thus, rebidding 2 Notrump shows opener's range is above the 15-17 point range associated with the 1 Notrump opener and below the 20-21 point 2 Notrump opening bids. So opener's 2 Notrump rebid promises exactly 18-19 points.

S K 2
H K 2
D Q 10 2
C A K Q 4 3 2

[xxx] [xxx]

S Q 4 3
H Q J 4 3
D K 3 2
C 10 6 5

How many points is North's hand worth? We count 17 High Card Points and add 2 extra points for the running Club suit with great honors. So perhaps 1 Club is the best opening bid. If responder bids at the 1 level (probably a major suit), opener can rebid 2 Notrump showing a hand worth 18-19 points. Notice South's flat hand - what should South bid if North opened 1 Notrump?

With the 4-3-3-3 shape lackluster honors and 8 points, South should pass a 1 Notrump opening bid. But in our scenario where opener began with 1 Club, responder would bid 1 Heart with 6+ points and opener can rebid 2 Notrump. North is showing a hand worth 18-19 points - now South can comfortably rebid 3 Notrump and the partnership finds a comfortable game.

As we have seen, the responder generally passes with flat shape and less than invitational values necessary to discover game. With invitational values, responder dutifully makes a trial bid.

After the Takeout Double, the most popular convention in Bridge is the Stayman convention. After opener begins 1 Notrump, the responder bids 2 Clubs "Stayman" with invitational or above values and 1 or 2 four card majors. Stayman is an artificial convention, forcing opener to either bid a 4 card major or 2 Diamonds lacking support. On the lucky day when 1 Notrump opener holds two 4 card majors, opener rebids "up the line" bidding 2 Hearts (modern treatment). So after responder's 2 Club Stayman ask, opener's rebid of 2 Hearts does not deny a four card Spade suit. Conversely, opener's rebid of 2 Spades indeed denies a 4 card Heart suit. Here's an example of bidding that resolves the quandary when opener has four cards in both majors suits.

S A Q 3 2
H K 9 8 7
D A K 2
C 4 3

[xxx] [xxx]

S J 6 5 4
H 4 3 2
D 4 3
C A K Q 2

1N - 2C;
2H - 3N;
4S - Pass;

Fearless North doesn't worry about the worthless Club doubleton (a believer of our Rule of Anticipation) and opens 1 Notrump. South responds with 2 Clubs (Stayman). Next, opener rebids the lower 4 card major, 2 Hearts. Not having found a fit in responder's Spade major, responder assumes opener does not have 4 Spades and attempts to signoff in a 3 Notrump game with a nice 10 HCP hand. But wait a second - opener North can infer that since partner bid Stayman and did not have a 4 card Heart suit, responder must have 4 Spades. Otherwise, responder would not bid Stayman and simply invite game by bidding 2 Notrump. Thus, opener corrects 3 Notrump to 4 Spades and the partnership still finds their 4-4 major suit fit. Long live "up the line" major suit bidding after Stayman. So here's a word of caution to all the busy bidders who love to try new gadgets - avoid bidding Stayman without a four card major, since opener may correct a 3 Notrump signoff to 4 Spades!

Good responders have other methods to show signoff, invitational, and forcing bids with long major suits that are otherwise difficult to bid. While we will not explore Jacoby Transfers in this lesson, let's look at a few more Stayman-related methods.

When responder has less than 6 points, a shortage in Clubs without a suit stopper (Ace or King) and no 5 card major, we imagine partner will have a difficult contract if we pass opener's 1 Notrump bid. With this holding, the Garbage Stayman bid is an excellent treatment to win more tricks than simply passing partner's 1 Notrump opening bid. By the way, the Garbage Stayman does not require a partnership agreement - the responder is prepared to pass any 2 level suit rebid made by opener. Here's an illustrative holding:

1N - 2C;
2x - PASS!

Of course, since the opponents own at least one half of the points in the deck, they may enter the bidding. Perhaps it's their auction anyway - certainly we do not wish to compete when we can clearly see the opponents have most of the points. Here's an example of our Garbage Stayman:

S A 4 3 2
H K 9 8 7
D A K 2
C Q 3

[xxx] [xxx]

S 7 6 5
H Q 6 5 4
D Q 6 5 4 3
C 2

On the above hand, playing in a 1 Notrump contract could be quite costly. The opponents are likely to take 5 or 6 Club tricks and certainly the Heart Ace. But playing in a 2 level suit gives the opener a good chance to make the contract. Now let's rearrange South's hand slightly, giving responder's hand a primary honor in the singleton Club suit.

S A Q 3 2
H K 9 8 7
D A K 2
C Q 3

[xxx] [xxx]

S 7 6 5
H Q 6 5 4
D Q 6 5 4 3
C K

These hands are identical to the above hands except for the C2 becoming a CK. With a stiff Club Ace or King and no 5 card major suit, the responder usually passes with a minimal hand. Sometimes you will miss a 4-4 fit, other times the Rule of Anticipation prevails and opener had a 5 (or even 6) card Club suit and all is well - but not this time. Unfortunately, there are few guarantees in Bridge - your mileage may vary!

Incidentally, when opponents have a long suit like the Clubs here, they will often enter the auction. If East had a few of West's honors along with the long Club suit, most East players would be eager to enter the auction. This type of bidding may actually save the broke responder as we have witnessed above on South's holdings.

When responder has a 4=5=x=x shape and 0-7 HCP, the Crawling Stayman is a nice treatment. Holding four Spades and five Hearts, responder generally does not expect partner to hold a four card major. In the usual situation where opener rebids 2 Diamonds to deny a four card major, the responder initiates the Crawling Stayman treatment by bidding 2 Hearts. Certainly this bid isn't part of the normal Stayman sequence of rebids and is a conventional treatment. So please do not spring it on your unsuspecting partner without first discussing the meaning of the Crawling Stayman! Playing Crawling Stayman, responder's bidding sequence is 2 Clubs, followed by 2 Hearts (after opener rebids 2 Diamonds). This shows four Spades, five Hearts, and no game interest. Here's the scenario:

1N - 2C;
2D - 2H

Opener Passes with 3 Hearts or corrects to 2 Spades when holding three Spades. Let's see an example with illustrative hands:

S A 2
H A Q 2
D A K 3 2
C 5 4 3 2

[xxx] [xxx]

S K 6 5 4
H K 9 8 7 6
D 5 4
C 7 6

Our Crawling Stayman bidding would go:

1N - 2C;
2D - 2H;
Pass

When opener holds three Spades and an implied eight card fit, opener rebids 2 Spades:

S A Q 2
H A 2
D A K 3 2
C 5 4 3 2

[xxx] [xxx]

S K 6 5 4
H K 9 8 7 6
D 5 4
C 7 6

Of course, on a good day opener will bid a 4 card major and responder generally passes. One exception would be where opener bids 2 Hearts - with a 9 card trump fit and a shapely hand, responder should consider an invitational 3 Heart bid such as this holding:

S A Q 2
H A 2
D A K 3 2
C 5 4 3 2

[xxx] [xxx]

S K 6 5 4
H K 9 8 7 6
D 6 5 4
C 6

Okay, here's one more Stayman-like bid before we wrap-up the discussion on Notrump bidding. This one is a nameless adjunct to the Stayman convention, used to show an invitational hand with 8-9 total points, 5 Spades and 4 Hearts.

On the Crawling Stayman, after opener denied a four card major by bidding 2 Diamonds, responder bids 2 Hearts to begin a signoff sequence. But what would it mean if instead responder rebid 2 Spades instead of 2 Hearts?

1N - 2C;
2D - 2S;

Clearly something different is going on here. This bid shows 5 Spades, 4 Hearts, with 8 or 9 points (actually 7-8 HCP, with 1 extra point for the fifth Spade). Opener should pass with a minimum and no fit. With a major suit fit and extras, opener places the contract in game. With a fit yet an adversity to making a poor choice with questionable values, the opener may be tempted to rebid 3 Spades (3 Hearts is signoff, simply correcting to the best fit); rebidding 3 Spades certainly passes the buck back to the responder, albeit a torturous auction!

Let's conclude our Notrump lesson recapping opener's bidding criteria when holding a five card major. Do you ever open 1 Notrump with a five card suit? If so, when do you count an extra distribution point for the 5 card suit? Inquiring minds must know!

S Q 3 2
H K 3 2
D A 3
C A Q J 3 2

The Club suit may generate 5 tricks (16HCP + 1 distribution point). With the auction: 1N - 2N, opener happily accepts an invitational game.

S A K
H Q J 2
D J 5 4 3 2
C Q J 2

We have several defects here. Do not count extra for 5 Diamonds with a poor suit. The Queen-Jack honors are not desirable in short suits and the Ace-King doubleton is yet another defect. Open 1 Diamond.

S K 2
H 4 3 2
D A 3 2
C A K Q J 2

We normally open 1 Notrump with 15-17 HCP, but this hand is worth 18 points with the lovely 5 card Club suit. Open 1 Club with plans to rebid 2 Notrump after partner's response (showing 18-19 points).

S K 2
H A Q J 3 2
D Q J 2
C K 3 2

If we open 1 Heart and partner bids 1 Spade, what would we bid next? Rebidding 1 Notrump shows 12- 15 points; rebidding 2 Notrump would show 18-19 points. Neither bid describes our hand - our partner will likely pass without 10+ points, missing game. So when we have Notrump opening values and a 5 card Heart suit, consider opening 1 Notrump.

S A Q J 3 2
H K 2
D Q J 2
C K 3 2

Exchanging majors from the above hand, we open 1 Spade with no rebid problems. So with 16 HCP and an extra distribution point for the nice promotable Spade suit, if responder bids 1 Notrump we plan to invite by bidding 2 Notrump with a hand worth 17 points and nice distribution.

The Rule of 8 - How to finesse when holding eight to the Bullet, Cowboy, and Valet

Okay, first the rule and then the explanation why the Rule of 8 is an odds-on winner. Holding an 8 card suit including the A K J with an 8 card fit, it's usually best to cash the Ace before finessing the Jack. However, holding the K Q 10, we should finesse opponents' Jack to our 10.

Imagine the chips are down - you need to win a finesse in a suit to make a critical contract. Assuming you can re-enter South's hand if necessary, what is your best play to win at least three tricks?

A K J 3 2

6 5 4

If you played a low card from South's hand to the Jack, please read on.

What happens when East holds a singleton Queen? If you initially played to the Jack, East wins the critical trick. But if you first played the Ace to test the suit before attempting to finesse the Queen by West, you would be well rewarded seeing the Queen crash with your Ace. You then win the King and the Jack to take your three critical tricks. Okay, now let's consider a different situation - you play the Ace, East plays the 10 and West plays a low card. Hmm, the five outstanding cards are the Q, 10, 9, 8, 7. So what inferences might we make, noting East played the 10 instead of a lower card? East's cards are likely one of these combinations when playing the 10:

1. Q 10
2. 10 9 [x . . .]
3. 10

Now might be a good time for the declarer to pause and review the bidding, opening lead, and plays by the defenders. Considering the [Rule of Restricted Choice](#), it's certainly possible that East is holding the Q-10 combination and was "restricted" to play the 10. Also consider the distribution of other suits. Does either the declarer's hand or dummy contain a singleton or void? If so, it's possible the 10 may be singleton. Its decisions like this that add to the charm of Bridge. May the Bridge forces be with you!

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