



Keeping Up With Conventions

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CONVENTIONS FOR MAJOR SUIT OPENINGS

In the last issue we began looking at how fill out the standard convention card that lists all the bidding and defensive carding agreements of the partnership. You have to use have a completed card when you play in regular club games and tournaments. It is also beneficial to fill out the card with your partner so you know what agreements you have before the game begins.

The card is color-coded:

1. Items in **black** indicate “standard” methods which don’t require any special notification to the opponents.
2. Items in **red** indicate non-standard agreements that require you to alert your opponents if they come up.
3. Items in **blue** (grey) are somewhere in between. They are fairly standard agreements but you have to announce them to your opponents when they apply.

Last issue we looked at the area covering Notrump Opening Bids. In this issue we move on to Major Openings. Here is what this area on the convention card looks like:

MAJOR OPENING		
Expected Min. Length	4	5
1st/2nd	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3rd/4th	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
RESPONSES		
Double Raise: Force	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inv. <input type="checkbox"/> Weak <input type="checkbox"/>
After Overcall: Force	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inv. <input type="checkbox"/> Weak <input type="checkbox"/>
Conv. Raise: 2NT	<input type="checkbox"/>	3NT <input type="checkbox"/> Splinter <input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	_____	
1NT: Forcing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Semi-forcing <input type="checkbox"/>
2NT: Forcing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Inv. <input type="checkbox"/> _____ to _____
3NT:	_____ to _____	
Drury	<input type="checkbox"/>	Reverse <input type="checkbox"/> 2-Way <input type="checkbox"/> Fit <input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	_____	

Five-card Majors?

What would be your opening bid with this hand? If the answer is 1♣, then you are playing five-card majors, the popular style in North America. An opening bid of 1♥ or 1♠ promises a five-card or longer suit. With no five-card major suit, you open the longer minor suit.

Doesn’t everyone play this way? In places such as England, four-card major suit openings are common. These players would consider it strange to open a weak three-card suit when you have two very fine four-card suits. Even some top North American partnerships prefer four-card majors.

However, your partnership is likely with the majority and you would check the box for 5 beside Expected Minimum Length.

Expected Min. Length	4	5
1st/2nd	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Why Are There Two Lines?

A closer examination shows that there are two lines for the expected minimum length. One is for opening bids in first and second position (1st/2nd) and one is for opening bids in third and fourth position (3rd/4th).

Consider this hand. Playing standard five-card majors, this hand would universally be opened 1♣ in first or second position because there is no five-card major. Since partner is unlimited, you may be headed for game or slam and want to be sure to find the best trump suit.

♠ A K Q 4
♥ K 5
♦ J 8 3
♣ 9 7 4 3

If partner passes and you have an opportunity to open in third or fourth chair with a minimum hand, there are tactical considerations. Since partner has fewer than 13 points, your prospects for game . . . and definitely slam . . . are much less. Your side might not even win the auction. If you do end up defending with partner on lead, you’d much prefer that partner lead a spade than a club. Also, an opening bid of 1♠ will make it more difficult for the opponents to enter the auction than an opening bid of 1♣. So, opening a strong four-card major in third or fourth position has a lot going for it.

Since this tends to be the exception rather than the rule, many partnerships place the check mark somewhere between the 4 and 5 for openings in third and fourth seat. In effect, partner will assume that you have a five-card or longer suit if you open 1♥ or 1♠, but won’t be overly surprised if you occasionally show up with a good four-card suit. In this case, the card would look like this:

Expected Min. Length	4	5
1st/2nd	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3rd/4th	<input type="checkbox"/> ✓	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you prefer that 1♥ or 1♠ opening always guarantees at least five cards, check the box under 5 for all positions.

Limit Raises?

Suppose partner opens 1♥ in first or second position. What would you respond with this hand? If the answer is 3♥, showing support and an invitational hand of about 10-12 points, you are playing limit raises. You would check the box for Inv. (invitational) beside Double Raise under Responses.

RESPONSES

Double Raise: Force Inv. Weak

This is the standard use of the double raise of opener's suit. Note that you don't need to indicate that a single raise to the two level shows about 6-9/10 points . . . or that you count dummy points for shortness when considering how strong a response to make.

What If There Is an Overcall?

What if you hold the \spadesuit A 8 4
same hand opposite \heartsuit Q 10 8 4
partner's 1 \heartsuit opening \diamondsuit K Q 9
bid but the opponent \clubsuit 7 6 3
on your left makes an overcall of 1 \spadesuit ?

If you would still jump to 3 \heartsuit to show an invitational hand, you would check the Invitational box beside After Overcall:

After Overcall: Force Inv. Weak

The modern style is toward treating a jump raise as preemptive (weak) after an overcall. Why? The opponent's overcall has made two new bids available: a double and a cuebid. Most partnerships use the double as takeout (negative) but the cuebid can be used to show a limit raise or better in opener's suit. So, with the above hand, you would cuebid 2 \spadesuit rather than jumping to 3 \heartsuit . That frees up the 3 \heartsuit jump response to be a weak bid in competitive auctions, designed to make it difficult for the opponents to find their best spot.

Whether your partnership treats the jump raise as invitational, strong (forcing to game), or weak, just check the appropriate box. Notice that any of these styles are considered standard. You don't have to alert the opponents. It's up to them . . . or you if the shoe is on the other foot . . . to look at the convention card or ask if they want to know what your jump raise shows.

The Forcing Raise?

Now suppose you \spadesuit A 7 6 2
hold this hand and \heartsuit Q 9 8 4
partner opens 1 \heartsuit . \diamondsuit K Q 9 4
With 11 high-card \clubsuit 3

points plus 3 dummy points for the singleton club, you have enough to commit the partnership to game.

Since a jump raise to 3 \heartsuit would only be invitational if you use limit raises, most partnerships use some conventional method to describe a forcing (game-going) raise. The most popular method is Jacoby 2NT. A 2NT response to a major suit is artificial, showing four-card or longer support and a hand worth 13 or more points. Opener then has ways to show a minimum hand or extra distribution or strength. If that's your style, check the box for 2NT beside Conv(entional) Raise.

Conv. Raise: 2NT 3NT Splinter

This box is red, indicating you must say "Alert" if partner makes this conventional response. Since some responses to this convention are also artificial, the partnership will need to alert them as well.

Some partnerships would respond 4 \clubsuit with the above hand, a splinter bid showing support for hearts, shortness in clubs, and enough strength for game. If your partnership also uses this convention, check the appropriate box.

If you don't have a conventional forcing raise in response to a major suit, you wouldn't check any of these boxes. You would probably respond in a new suit with this hand, planning to show the heart support and strength on your rebid.

If you would jump to 4 \heartsuit with this hand, that's fine. However, you should mark under Other "raise to four level" because the standard meaning of a jump to 4 \heartsuit is as a preemptive raise, not a strong raise.

Two-Over-One?

A popular modern trend is toward a two-over-one style where a new suit response at the two level is usually forcing to game. A consequence of this style is that a 1NT response to a major suit is typically played as a forcing response instead of an invitational response . . . or semi-forcing if responder is a passed hand.

If your partnership plays a forcing 1NT response, you would check the appropriate box. If your 1NT response is non forcing, showing 6-9 or 10 points, you don't need to mark anything.

Other Notrump Responses?

If you use the Jacoby 2NT convention, your 2NT . . . and perhaps 3NT . . . responses are artificial. If you use a more natural style, a 2NT response would typically show an invitational balanced hand of 11-12 points or a game-going balanced hand with 13-15 points. You would then fill in the appropriate ranges for your 2NT and 3NT response (16-17?). Otherwise, leave them blank. This is usually more applicable to responses to a minor suit (next issue). Natural responses in notrump don't need to be alerted.

Drury?

Suppose you pass \spadesuit Q 8 2
with this hand and \heartsuit K 7 6 3
partner opens 1 \heartsuit . \diamondsuit K 9 5
With 11 high-card \clubsuit K 8 3
points you have enough to make a limit raise to 3 \heartsuit . . . and, if that's your style, read no further.

A popular tactic at duplicate bridge, however, is to occasionally open "light" in third or fourth position . . . hoping for a small plus or to get the partnership off to the best opening lead. If partner has opened with 10 or 11 points, a jump to 3 \heartsuit might get the partnership too high.

A popular solution to this dilemma is the Drury convention. A response of 2 \clubsuit is artificial and asks if opener has a real opening bid. Originally, a rebid of 2 \diamondsuit by opener was used to show the "light" hand. The modern trend is to play Reverse Drury, where a rebid of the original suit shows no interest in getting higher. If you play that version, you would respond 2 \clubsuit with this hand and pass opener's rebid of 2 \heartsuit . You would fill out the card like this:

Drury : Reverse 2-Way Fit

And, unless you play any other fancy conventions over a major suit, you're done. \blacklozenge