

AUTHOR OF GETTING INTO THE BIDDING



TWO OVER ONE

A FIRST COURSE

BILL TREBLE





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LESSON 1

THE FRAMEWORK

Just this past weekend, I was playing on the Internet when our opponents had this pair of hands:

♠ A J 8 7 5 2	♠ 6
♥ 8 4	♥ A K 10 7 5 2
♦ Q	♦ A 6 4
♣ A J 9 7	♣ Q 10 3

This pair was playing Standard American and the auction proceeded:

West	East
1♠	2♥
2♠	3NT
pass	

On a diamond lead, when dummy's queen was covered by the king, 3NT had virtually no chance. Declarer held off until the third round of diamonds but the hearts did not run and the ♣K was offside, so the contract went down.

Since 4♥ is an easy make, you might be curious as to why responder didn't bid 3♥ over 2♠ to show the extra length. The answer is that in Standard, that action would have been non-forcing, suggesting 10-11 points with six or more hearts. Opener would have been entitled to pass with a non-fitting minimum hand. Since East had enough points to be in game, he had to choose between bidding 4♥ opposite what might be a singleton or void in opener's hand, or 3NT.

This hand is a poster boy for the merits of Two-over-One (2/1). If the partnership agreement was that two-level responses in a new suit create a game force, then the auction would have gone:

West	East
1♠	2♥
2♠	3♥
4♥	

The auction becomes game-forcing on East's first bid, so he repeats his long suit the next time around and opener carries on to 4♥. With partner showing at least six of them, West's doubleton ensures there will be an eight-card fit and he has no diamond stopper for notrump purposes.

The 2/1 game-forcing approach is the culmination, at least so far, of seventy years of bidding theory, and has been the most popularly used system amongst the rank and file of duplicate bridge players for about fifteen to twenty years. Why is it in such widespread use? To answer that, we should look at the three major phases in the development of bidding:

- **Goren**, where you open a four-card major and make a two-level response in a new suit on a decent 10 HCP.
- **Standard American**, where you need a five-card suit to open 1♥ or 1♠, but the two-level responses were the same as in Goren.
- **Two-over-One (2/1)**, where a two-level response in a new suit now commits the partnership to game on virtually every auction.

The trend we can identify is towards greater clarity during the early stages of the auction. Five-card majors are a way of quickly determining if an adequate trump fit exists in a major suit. Playing 2/1 has the goal of avoiding the gray area where a partnership is not sure whether a bidding sequence is forcing or passable.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN STANDARD AND 2/1

There are commonly-accepted bidding principles that will apply regardless of which methods you choose. However, there are also some variances in the meaning of the bids, so let's take a quick look at what they are going to be.

Type of Bid	Standard	2/1
Jump raise in a major	3+ card support, 10-11 pts	4+ trumps, 10-11 pts
Jump raise in a minor	5+ card support, 10-11 pts	5+ card support, 10-11 pts
Single raise in a major	3+ trumps, 6-9 points	3+ trumps, 8-9 points
Single raise in a minor	4-5 trumps, 6-9 points	4-5 trumps, 6-9 points
1NT response to a minor	6 to a bad 10 points, no 4-card or longer major	6 to a bad 10 points, no 4-card or longer major
1NT response to 1♥	6 to a bad 10 HCP, denies support or length in spades	6-11 HCP, forcing for one round. May have support for partner's major but denies spade length
1NT response to 1♠	6 to a bad 10 HCP, any shape, denies support	6-11 HCP, forcing for one round, may have support
2NT response to a minor	13-15, no 4-card major	11-12, no 4-card major
2NT response to a major	13-15 bal, 2 of partner's suit, no five-card suit or a major that could be shown at the one-level	game-forcing raise of opener's suit, 4+ trumps and 13+ support points.
3NT response	16-17 balanced, no major-suit length	13-15 balanced, no major-suit length
Two-level suit response	At least a good 10 HCP, one-round force	12+ HCP, forcing to game
One-level suit response	6+ HCP, one-round force, bid suits up-the-line	6+ HCP, one-round force, tend to bid a major ahead of equal or longer diamonds if less than 12 HCP.

The meanings of the Standard bids in the left-hand column reflect the Club Series, which is the first set of introductory bridge lessons published by the ACBL. However, in practice for many the 2NT response to a minor suit has become 11-12 and a jump raise in opener's major is often agreed to promise four-card support. Many pairs that retain Standard bidding principles incorporate certain features of 2/1, so that they play a hybrid of the two methods. When we get to Lessons 7 and 8, many of the 'bells and whistles' I describe can easily be added to a Standard convention card, and are not exclusive to a 2/1 system.

On the last item from the chart above, remember that responding at the one-level does *not* deny a game-going hand. If partner opens 1♦ and you have:

♠ A K 4 2 ♥ J 9 6 5 ♦ 3 ♣ A K 5 2

You'll bid 1♥ just as you were taught in bridge school. Some people get confused and think that because they are playing 2/1 that they have to make a two-level response immediately on this good a hand. As always, however, you want to find out whether there is a heart or spade fit, and then place the contract in game.

DRAWBACKS AND ADVANTAGES OF 2/1

Many critics of 2/1 identify several drawbacks:

- Because the 1NT response to a major-suit opening is forcing, the partnership is unable to play that contract.
- Since opener has to bid over partner's 1NT response to a major-suit opening, there is no assurance that he has an unbalanced hand if he bids a minor suit at the cheapest level.
- There's also some ambiguity if responder bids a forcing 1NT and then goes back to opener's major at the two-level. In Standard, that would always be a two-card preference because he didn't raise immediately. In 2/1, it will usually be that kind of hand, but could also be three-card support and 5-7 HCP, not enough for a constructive raise. If the opponents compete at some point, the decision-making gets a bit trickier.
- In Standard, if opener's rebid is at the three-level (even a raise of a minor or a new suit), he is showing extra values. In a 2/1 landscape, once the two-level response is made,

opener is expected to take the most natural action on his rebid and there are no guarantees as to hand strength.

However, there are also tangible advantages to playing two-over-one. The main ones are:

- It will reduce the number of partnership mix-ups as to whether or not an auction is forcing.
- Once the game force is established, both partners will have the opportunity and room to look for slam. There's a certain degree of responsibility involved, however, and many partnerships are guilty of falling into the "auto cuebidding" trap.
- You can define the major-suit raise hands more tightly in terms of point-count and/or the number of trumps you have.
- The 1NT forcing response allows responder to bail out in his long suit with 6-9 HCP.

There are some additional challenges for responder in a 2/1 environment, of which these are the main ones:

- Once you respond a forcing 1NT, there will sometimes be a choice of actions to take on the second round of bidding, and it may not be the easiest of decisions.
- How do you show the 'almost game-forcing' hands of 10-11 HCP with a six-card or longer suit? We'll address this topic in a subsequent lesson.

MAJOR- AND MINOR-SUIT AUCTIONS IN 2/1

Pure 2/1 auctions rarely occur when the opening bid is 1♦ (and cannot occur when the opening bid is 1♣!). You can usually bid a new suit without going to the next level and it is a one-round force. If partner opens 1♥ or 1♠, your choices are more limited as a change in suits generally involves going a level higher. Over a major-suit opening, the three paths responder will usually follow are:

- Raising
- Bidding a forcing 1NT
- Introducing a new suit at the two-level

Of these three options, the change of suit at the two-level is the one that commits the partnership to game. What, then, is needed for a two-level response in a new suit?

Two-level responses are similar to opening bids

In general, if you'd have opened a hand, it qualifies as a 2/1 response if partner beats you to the punch. However, when both partners are using long suits in their evaluation, it's easy to find yourself overboard in a non-making game when the auction is concluded. So without an immediate fit for partner's suit, 12 points is the minimum you should have for a two-level bid.

The other rule of thumb concerns the number of cards responder should have to introduce a new suit at the two-level. If you bid hearts (2♥ over partner's 1♠), that will guarantee at least five of them, like an opening bid in a major suit. However, a 2/1 bid in clubs or diamonds could be made on a four-card suit, just as a 1♣ or 1♦ opening could be. The minimum length of responder's two-level bid is equivalent to that suggested by an opening bid of the suit.

If partner opens 1♥, what do you respond on the following hands?

1. ♠ A J 6 5 ♥ 7 4 ♦ A K 9 7 ♣ Q 10 3
 2. ♠ K J 9 4 ♥ 8 ♦ A Q J 8 2 ♣ K 5 4
 3. ♠ 10 7 6 ♥ K 3 ♦ A K J 5 ♣ K 10 8 4
 4. ♠ K 7 2 ♥ 4 ♦ Q 10 9 8 7 3 ♣ A 6 5
 5. ♠ 6 4 2 ♥ K 4 ♦ A J 9 8 7 2 ♣ K 5
 6. ♠ 6 ♥ Q J 4 ♦ K 7 4 2 ♣ A J 8 6 5
 7. ♠ A 5 2 ♥ 7 ♦ K Q 10 9 5 ♣ A J 6 4
1. 1♠. First order of business is to find out if there is a 4-4 spade fit. That could be lost if you bid 2♦ instead.
 2. 2♦. With game-forcing values and 5-4 distribution, *always* bid the suit with the greater length first.
 3. 2♣. Although the diamonds are stronger, responding in that suit could miss out on a 4-4 club fit. When you have enough values for game but no five-card suit, respond 'up-the-line' with your four-card suits, even at the two-level.
 4. 1NT forcing. In Standard, this hand would respond 2♦, but it's not good enough to insist on game, so you can't go to the two-level on your first response in 2/1. Another drawback to this hand is the lack of a fit or even tolerance for opener's major suit. Because partner has to bid over your 1NT, you can attempt to catch up later.
 5. 2♦. One more high-card point and a fitting card in opener's suit, so the hand can be upgraded to a two-level response.
 6. 2♣. With the singleton to go with your 11 HCP, the hand is too good for an invitational raise to 3♥. You describe the

hand by making a 2/1 response to begin with and subsequently raising the major.

7. 2♦. With 14 HCP, you have sufficient values to force to game despite the lack of support for hearts.

OPENING BID GUIDELINES IN 2/1

In a 2/1 environment, you shouldn't open flat hands of 11 HCP. The balanced patterns are 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2 and 5-3-3-2. If game-forcing two-level responses are permitted with 12, then opening such mediocre hands will land you in games that are more likely to fail than they are to succeed.

With unbalanced hands that are just short of 12 HCP, you can open if the points are 'hard' (aces and kings) and/or concentrated in your long suits. Otherwise, you should refrain from taking initial action.

Do you open the following hands?

1. ♠5 ♥KQ10954 ♦A73 ♣Q98
2. ♠K ♥Q98765 ♦QJ4 ♣K75
3. ♠AJ1082 ♥Q1087 ♦A53 ♣9
4. ♠A9754 ♥6 ♦QJ85 ♣A62
5. ♠73 ♥A10765 ♦AK94 ♣86
6. ♠K9865 ♥Q7 ♦A2 ♣Q973

1. Yes. The long suit is robust, and the ♣Q is the only card that may not produce a trick. It's too good a hand for a weak 2♥ bid.
2. No. The hearts are much poorer, the hand is aceless, and who knows whether the singleton king is going to be a relevant card.
3. Yes. No rebid problems, unbalanced hand, decent quality in your long suits. Even if partner makes a 2/1 response on 12 HCP and you end up in 3NT, your spot cards may be sufficient to bring it home.
4. No. The suits are much worse, and a 2♥ response by partner is going to make you feel absolutely sick as you have no adequate rebid.
5. Yes. The hearts aren't fantastic, but there are no rebid problems and you have three quick tricks, which can often make all the difference in a borderline game contract.
6. No. It's a marginal hand with a nebulous value in the doubleton ♥Q. Since you have the master suit, you can pass initially and overcall spades later.

HOW 2/1 ASSISTS RESPONDER IN DEFINING HANDS WITH MAJOR-SUIT SUPPORT

In Standard, responder has only two options for supporting opener's major holding fewer than 12 HCP: the single raise (6-9) and the jump raise (10-11). Both actions show three-card or longer trump support.

Playing 2/1 allows us more ways to raise due to the forcing 1NT response. Here's how it works:

- 6-7 points with support — respond 1NT and then go back to two of partner's major.
- 8-9 points with support — raise immediately to two of partner's major.
- 10-11 points with exactly three-card support — respond 1NT and then follow up with three of opener's major.
- 10-11 points with four-card or longer support — raise directly to three of opener's major.

Here are some examples to illustrate, with partner having opened 1♥:

♠ 8 4 ♥ K 9 7 ♦ J 10 8 3 ♣ A 7 6 4

2♥ 8 HCP and two good features to the hand, the king of partner's suit and the outside ace. The doubleton spade could also be useful as a ruffing value.

♠ J 7 2 ♥ K 9 3 ♦ Q 6 5 4 ♣ 10 8 5

1NT forcing. Your next bid will be 2♥, at which point opener will know you cannot have 8-9 points with support as you failed to make the direct raise.

♠ A 5 2 ♥ K 8 7 6 ♦ K 4 ♣ 9 6 5 3

3♥. This promises at least four trumps and 10-11 points.

♠ K 6 4 ♥ K 9 7 ♦ A 10 6 5 ♣ 8 3 2

1NT forcing, and then 3♥ next round. Advertises exactly three-card support and 10-11 points.

EXAMPLE HANDS

HAND 1

<p>♠ 9 6 4 2 ♥ 8 3 ♦ Q J 9 8 4 ♣ 8 5</p>	<p>♠ A 3 ♥ Q J 9 4 ♦ 5 2 ♣ A K J 6 2</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="margin: 0;">N</p> <p style="margin: 0;">W E</p> <p style="margin: 0;">S</p> </div>	<p>♠ J 5 ♥ 10 5 2 ♦ K 10 7 3 ♣ Q 10 7 3</p>
	<p>♠ K Q 10 8 7 ♥ A K 7 6 ♦ A 6 ♣ 9 4</p>		

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♣	pass	2♥
pass	3♥	pass	4NT
pass	5♥	pass	6♥
all pass			

North responds 2♣ with 15 HCP and a good club suit. This is a game-forcing auction now, so when opener introduces hearts, the raise to 3♥ is actually more encouraging than a jump to game, as we'll see in a later lesson. Opener asks for aces with 4NT, and settles into 6♥ when partner shows two.

THE PLAY

The lead will be the ♦Q. With trumps behaving, slam is a fairly good proposition. As it turns out, the ♠J falls on the second round, so making the contract is a breeze. If the spades didn't behave so kindly, there would have been another chance for declarer in the club suit.

HAND 2

	♠ 7											
	♥ Q 10 8 3											
	♦ Q 9 2											
	♣ K 8 6 3 2											
♠ K 9 4 ♥ 6 5 ♦ K 6 3 ♣ A Q 10 9 4	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A J 8 6 5 3 ♥ K 4 2 ♦ A 7 5 ♣ J	
	N											
W		E										
	S											
	♠ Q 10 2											
	♥ A J 9 7											
	♦ J 10 8 4											
	♣ 7 5											

West	North	East	South
		1♠	pass
2♣	pass	2♠	pass
4♠	all pass		

In contrast to the first hand, West has just barely enough for his two-level response and shows that with the jump to 4♠, precluding any slam tries by opener.

THE PLAY

The lead is probably going to be the ♦J. Declarer might lose four or more tricks if the missing honors are sitting badly.

The hand you don't want to give up a trick to here is North, who can play a heart through your unprotected king. Fortunately, you can avoid that by using what we call a ruffing finesse in the club suit. Win the diamond in hand (you're going to need the ♦K later on), then play the ♣J to the ace and run the queen. If North covers, you trump, play two rounds of spades ending in dummy, and then run the clubs from the top, discarding red-suit losers from your hand. If North plays low on the second club, toss a heart or diamond from hand. You don't mind South winning the club as he can't switch to hearts without letting your king score as a trick.

HAND 3

<p>♠ K 10 8 4 ♥ 9 8 ♦ Q J 6 2 ♣ Q 9 4</p>	<p>♠ 5 2 ♥ A J 10 7 2 ♦ A 8 4 3 ♣ A 6</p>	<p>♠ Q 9 6 3 ♥ K 5 ♦ K 10 7 ♣ J 10 8 3</p>									
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	N										
W		E									
S											
<p>♠ A J 7 ♥ Q 6 4 3 ♦ 9 5 ♣ K 7 5 2</p>											

West	North	East	South
	1♥	pass	3♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

Opener has 13 HCP and is not brimming with extras. However, responder has promised at least four-card support with the direct jump. With the same point-count and only three hearts, he would have bid 1NT (forcing) and then 3♥. Since North knows there will be adequate trumps to ruff possible losers, he carries on to game.

THE PLAY

The fourth trump is indeed quite useful here, as declarer will now be able to ruff the third and fourth diamonds, either before or after trumps are drawn.

Make the fourth heart a third small diamond instead, and game would have a much worse chance of making.

NOVICE/INTERMEDIATE

THE EASY WAY TO SWITCH TO 2/1

Are you familiar with Standard bidding? Do you find your partners want to play 2/1, and your opponents already do? Then this is the book for you.

No bells or whistles, just the plain, simple stuff — it teaches you everything you need to know to move over to a 2/1 game-forcing system. It's a comprehensive eight-lesson course, and includes dozens of full-deal examples that can be used to practice your cardplay as well as your bidding.



BILL TREBLE (Winnipeg, Canada) is an expert player, teacher and two-time winner of the Canadian Open Pairs Championships, in 2000 and 2002. His previous book for Master Point Press is *Defending at Bridge: A first course*. Bill's wife Sue, also a bridge teacher, wishes he would pay more attention to the advice in his books.



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