

Raising on Three

Bidding sequences in this paper all have the opponents passing. Opponents bid are thus not shown.

Weak NT

I prefer a weak No Trump to a strong one, for a number of reasons:

- It occurs more frequently (twice as often)
- It has a very powerful pre-emptive effect
- There are numerous mechanisms in place for finding major fits and getting out of trouble
- It rarely goes wrong

Awkward Sequences

Both $1\heartsuit - 1NT$ and $1\spadesuit - 1NT$ are difficult to deal with. Because partner requires 10 points to bid at the 2 level, the 1NT could be almost any hand with 6–9 points. Moreover, sometimes a 5–3 major fit is missed.

Wouldn't it be nice if we knew whether opener had a 4 or a 5 card suit? Of course that is precisely what the 5 card major system (5CM) does (you open a minor with only 4 in a major). The (big) problem with 5CM is that you really need to play a Strong NT, and to my mind the disadvantages of that compared to a Weak NT more than outweigh the benefits.

Raising on three

Fortunately there is another option: raising on three. This means that if your partner opens a major, and you only have three of them (and 6–9 points) you raise to 2 instead of bidding 1NT.

How does your partner know if you have 3 or 4 (or more)? The answer is that the subsequent bidding will tell them, unless it goes $1\spadesuit - 2\spadesuit$ passed out (in which case you may be playing in a 4–3 fit at the two level – not usually a problem).

How does this work? Let's assume you open $1\spadesuit$ with four cards (therefore intending to rebid NT), and partner raises to $2\spadesuit$. Just like with a 1NT response, partner has 6–9 points. If you have <16, pass (maximum 24 points), 16–17 bid 2NT, 18–19 bid 3NT. The NT rebid tells partner you have exactly 4 spades – partner will convert to spades if they have 4 (or more).

More than 9 points and three of partner's major? Bid another suit at the two level – no need to raise on three

Let's look at some hands (remember opponents pass throughout):

Examples

Opener	Responder
♠ KQJ2	♠ A84
♥ AJ3	♥ 72
♦ KJ8	♦ AT93
♣ Q98	♣ T765

1♠-2♠-2NT-3NT

Opener bids 1♠, intending to rebid 2NT. Responder cannot bid at the 2 level (not enough points) so rather than bidding 1NT, bids 2♠. Opener knows this only guarantees 3 spades, so bids 2NT (showing exactly 4 spades and 16-17 points). With only 3 spades and 8 points, responder bids 3NT.

Compare this to

Opener	Responder
♠ KQJ2	♠ A843
♥ AJ3	♥ 72
♦ KJ8	♦ AT9
♣ Q98	♣ T765

1♠-2♠-2NT-4♠

Opener bids 1♠, intending to rebid 2NT. Responder has cannot bid at the 2 level (not enough points) so rather than bidding 1NT, bids 2♠. Opener knows this only guarantees 3 spades, so bids 2NT (showing exactly 4 spades and 16-17 points). With 4 spades and 8 points, responder bids 4♠. With a weaker hand responder should bid 3♠.

And to

Opener	Responder
♠ KQJT2	♠ A84
♥ AJ3	♥ 72
♦ KJ8	♦ AT93
♣ Q9	♣ T765

1♠-2♠-3♠-4♠

Opener bids 1♠, intending to rebid 2NT. Responder cannot bid at the 2 level (not enough points) so rather than bidding 1NT, bids 2♠. Opener now knows they have a fit (8+ cards) in spades, so bids 3♠ inviting partner to game.

Opener	Responder
♠ KQJT	♠ A843
♥ AJ3	♥ 742
♦ KJ8	♦ AT9
♣ Q92	♣ A65

1♠-3♠-4♠

The 3♠ bid from responder guarantees 4 spades. What if responder only has three though?

Opener	Responder
♠ KQJT	♠ A84
♥ AJ3	♥ 74
♦ KJ8	♦ AT7
♣ Q92	♣ AT765

1♠-2♣-2NT-3♠-3NT

Responder can afford to bid at the two level. Opener's 2NT rebid shows 15–19 and is effectively game forcing (Rebidding NT shows 15+ points. A 2 level response shows 10 points, making at least 25 points between the two hands).

Responder bids 3♠ to show a 3 card suit (knowing that opener will not pass below game) and opener, with only 4 spades, reverts to NT.

Compare this to:

Opener	Responder
♠ KQJT6	♠ A84
♥ AJ	♥ 74
♦ KJ8	♦ AT7
♣ Q92	♣ AT765

1♠-2♣-2NT-3♠-4♠

Opener knows there is a 5–3 fit so raises to 4♠.

An exception: (there's always one!)

With 4333, 3 spades do not raise to 2♠ but bid 1NT instead

Opener	Responder
♠ KQJT6	♠ A84
♥ AJ	♥ T74
♦ KJ8	♦ AT7
♣ Q92	♣ T876

1♠-1NT-2NT-3NT

Although you have a 5–3 fit in spades, the spades in the short hand have no value – you don't have any ruffing opportunities. Decline to show your 3 spades and raise partner's NT.

The same thing applies if you are stronger:

Opener	Responder
♠ KQJT6	♠ A84
♥ AJ	♥ T74
♦ KJ8	♦ AT7
♣ Q92	♣ AT76

1♠–2♣–2NT–3NT

Although you have a 5–3 fit in spades, the spades in the short hand have no value – you don't have any ruffing opportunities. Decline to show your 3 spades and raise partners NT.

Opening 1H

The above example have all used spades. It works (almost) as well in hearts. In spades opener either has 5 or is planning on rebidding NT. With hearts there is the possibility that opener is 4441 with a black singleton, but this is quite rare and can be ignored.

The only difference in the bidding is that if you have a 4+ card spade suit, bid it in preference to 2H. So with

Responder
♠ A843
♥ 872
♦ AT
♣ T976

After partner's opening 1♥, bid 1♠ in preference to 2♥.

Responders Suit

You can apply a similar approach to responder's bid.

Opener	Responder
♠ KJ8	♠ AT84
♥ AJ	♥ 74
♦ KQJ96	♦ AT7
♣ Q92	♣ AT76

1♦–1♠–2♠–2NT–3NT

Responder knows your 2♠ only guarantees 3, so rebids 2NT. Opener thus bids 3NT.

With:

	Opener		Responder
♠	KJ86	♠	AT84
♥	AJ	♥	74
♦	KQJ96	♦	AT7
♣	Q9	♣	AT76

1♦-1♠-2♠-2NT-4♠

Responder knows your 2♠ only guarantees 3, so rebids 2NT, showing only 4. Opener knows about the 4-4 fit, so bids 4♠.

Caveat Ludio

As with all bidding systems, this is an agreement you must have with partner. Don't raise on 3 if you haven't agreed it beforehand!