



# Adventures in Bridge

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## *This Week in Bridge*

### **(314) Responding to 1NT with a Game Forcing Hand**

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Level: 2

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#### **General**

When we hold a hand with enough values to insist on game opposite our partner's 1NT opening bid, life is a bit simpler. We no longer have to worry about keeping the auction at a low level while trying to describe our hand. Our new ceiling (level we must describe our hand below) for bidding is 3NT! This means we have far more room to describe our hand and determine the best possible contract. Of course, we must ensure that we make clear forcing bids and do not stop short of game, but otherwise we have a much easier bidding situation than when we hold an invitational hand. Let's take a look at our options for how to make use of this bidding space and try to reach a good final contract.

#### **Game Forcing Hands with Length in the Majors**

Our top priority when we know we are going to game is to determine if we have a Major suit fit. With a single-suited hand that has a 5+card Major then we need to explore a fit in that Major suit. We do so by using a transfer.

#### *Example 1*

♠ AQT843

♥ K72

♦ 8

♣ J43

1NT    4♥\*

4♠    Pass

With a 6-card Major and 10 HCP we simply make a Texas Transfer and play in game in our long suit.



*Example 2*

♠ KQ872

♥ J4

♦ A83

♣ Q92

1NT    2♥\*

2♠    3NT

Here we transfer to our 5-card ♠ suit and show our values by bidding 3NT. This lets Opener make a choice of games.

With a hand that has length in both Majors, we need to spend more time communicating our shape to partner in order to locate a fit (if one exists) before we get to 3NT.

### **5/4 Majors Hands with Game Forcing Values**

With 5/4 in the Majors (either suit longer) and enough values for game, we start by using Stayman to look for a 4-4 fit first. If that fails (partner bids 2♦) then we search for a 5-3 fit next by jumping to the 3-level.

*Example 3*

♠ K843

♥ AQ932

♦ Q6

♣ 84

1NT    2♣

2♦    3♠\*

We bid Stayman to look for a 4-4 ♣ fit first. When that fails, we now look for a 5-3 ♥ fit. Playing Standard bidding, we would jump to 3♥ to show our 5-card ♥ suit and see if partner has 3-card support. If we play Smolen (a gadget designed to “right side” the contract) we would jump in our 4-card suit, bidding 3♠\*, showing 4-card ♠, 5-card ♥, and game forcing values.



## 5/5 Majors Hands with Game Forcing Values

With 5/5 in the Majors and game forcing values, we transfer to ♠ (our higher-ranking suit) and bid 3♥ next (our lower ranking suit).

### Example 4

♠ AJ843  
♥ AQ873  
♦ 84  
♣ 4  
1NT    2♥\*  
2♠    3♥

Opener can now choose which game to bid – 4♠, 4♥, or 3NT. Since we are in a game forcing auction, bidding 3♠ is stronger than bidding 4♠, applying the principle of fast arrival.

*Note: If we have a 5-card Major and a 5-card minor with game forcing values we bid similarly, transferring to the Major and rebidding 3-minor.*

## Balanced Game Forcing Hands

With a balanced hand and 10+ points we still went to look for a Major suit fit. With a 4-card Major (at least one) we use Stayman.

### Example 5

♠ KJ93  
♥ A65  
♦ K932  
♣ 93  
1NT    2♣

—      —  
If we use Stayman and partner bids 2♠, then we raise to 4♠. If partner answers 2♥ then we rebid 3NT, implying 4-cards ♠ (and partner can correct to 4♠ if they also have 4-card ♠). If partner rebids 2♦, then we just bid 3NT and the auction will end there.

*Note: Some partnerships use 3♣\* as Puppet Stayman and would use it when they hold a 3-card Major to search for a 5-3 fit.*

1NT    3♣\*  
3♥\*    4♥

*Here 3♥ would show a 5-card ♥ suit.*

*Another Note: With a 4333 hand, we usually do not use Stayman and simply bid 3NT; such a balanced hand is not interested in a 4-4 fit opposite a 1NT Opener.*



## Game Forcing Minor Suit Oriented Hands

With a game forcing hand with a 5-card minor suit we simply bid 3NT without any length in a Major suit. With a 6-card minor suit we usually want to play 3NT. With 6322 hands (or 6331 with a singleton honor), we have little interest in another contract and simply bid 3NT. With a 6-card minor suit, game forcing values, and shortness, we transfer to the minor and bid our shortness.

### Example 6

♠ 8

♥ A83

♦ KQ9862

♣ Q53

1NT    2NT\*    (Transfer to ♦)

3♦      3♠\*

This auction is game forcing, shows our long ♦ suit, and shortness in ♠. Opener can now decide where it is best to play the contract.

*Note: Hands with game forcing values and length in both minors are difficult. Usually we just bid 3NT, unless we have a gadget to deal with these hands.*

## Conclusion

When we hold enough values for game opposite partner's 1NT opening, we must use our bidding tools to search for a Major suit fit. Though we have space available to do this, we must be careful to make forcing bids; as Responder it is our responsibility to ensure our side reaches game. Describing our hand below 3NT is relatively straight forward (unless we are highly distributional). Remember that our goal is generally to reach 4M when we have a Major suit fit and otherwise play 3NT. Most of the time we will not play 5m unless we are fairly certain that 3NT is going to fail. Make sure you know your tools for exploring a fit and be sure to get your side to the best game – it's your responsibility as Responder!