

Bridge Theory for the Practitioners

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30. The Semi-Forcing Notrump, Part II

This is a continuation of my column on Semi-Forcing Notrump. I will discuss issues related to passing the semi-forcing NT after opening one of a major (1M).

When responder bids 1N over a major, semi-forcing, she would have 6-11 high card points (hcp) and only up to 2 cards in opener's major. The Limit Raise hand is separated from the 1N semi-forcing hand and a structure was discussed in my previous column on this topic. I recommend passing after a 1M – 1N auction with a 5332 shape and 12-bad 14 hcps.

- **What is a bad 14? And for that purpose what is a good 14?**

A bad 14 is what you expect not to produce game when partner is at the top of her range i.e. typically 11 hcps.

A bad 14 might look like:

AJxxx KJx Qxx QJ

With this hand open 1S and when partner bids 1N, pass. You will like the result more often than not.

A good 14 might look like:

AQTxx KTx KTx Qx

i.e. good suit structure and at least couple of Tens.

- **What to do with a good-14 or even a 15-16 count hand with a 5332 shape after the bidding goes 1M – 1N?**

You will have a problem here. Responder could have 10-11 points and game is definitely possible. So you cannot pass 1N. You do not have a side 4-card suit to bid. And finally you do not want to rebid 2N as that would show a much better hand. What to do now that we have exhausted all our options?

In situations like this, one must question the basic premise. Should I open 1M with this hand? The answer is no because if you do open 1M, you get into this sort of impossible situation when the auction goes 1M – 1N. So the remedy is?

Open 1N with a 5-card major but only with a 5332 shape. And don't forget to mark the box in your convention card where it says 5-card major common with 1N opening.

Chakrabarti Revision of Strong 1N opening:

- Good 14 to 17 balanced hand.
- Might have a 5-card major; if it does then the shape of the hand must be 5332.
- The 14 count balanced hand must have a 5-card suit, major or minor, and/or lots of Tens.
- The 17 count balanced hand would not have a) any 5-card suit -- either major or minor or b) 4-4 in both majors. The reason for these restrictions is simple. You want to be in game with a good 17 count hand opposite responder's good 7 count hand. But if you open 1N, partner would pass with *all* 7 count hands.

At this stage you must be worried that if you open 1N with a 5-card major, a 5-3 major fit might be lost. This problem was solved by Hall of Famer Kit Woolsey and Steve Robinson in an article in *Bridge World* in 1977. In that article however, Woolsey gave the credit to Neil Silverman of New York for the development of the concept of *Puppet Stayman*.

Responses to 1N opening:

2C Stayman; whatever way you like to play

Whatever else you want to play like Jacoby or Texas Transfers

3C Puppet Stayman; Game Forcing; 10+ hcp; has at least one 3 card major

I play a different variation with my regular partner but here I will give the Woolsey Prescription for general use:

Opener's rebids after 1N – 3C

3D = I have one or both 4 card major

3H = I have 5 Hs

3S = I have 5 Ss

3N = no 4 or 5-card major.

Continuations after 1N – 3C – 3D –

Responder bids the 4-card major she does not have or 3N if she is not interested in a 4-4 fit (was looking for a 5-3 fit). Is she has both majors she bids 4D.

3H = 4 Ss

3S = 4 Hs

4D = both majors 4-4

3N = no 4-card major

Two further worthwhile points:

- **Why do we have both 2C and 3C asking for majors? Can we not just use 2C to cover both regular and Puppet Stayman?**

Yes, you can. However, if you want to play the so-called Garbage Stayman (weak hands with both majors), you do not want partner to respond 2N when he does not have a 4 or 5 card major. I have written some notes named “Puppet-Garbage Stayman” which avoids this problem. It is, however, a bit complex and I do not want to propose it to a general audience.

- **Will I not miss a S fit if I open 1N with 5 Ss and partner has say 6 count and 4 Ss?**

Yes, sometimes you will. But you will have more good boards mainly because 5332 shaped hands are not productive. Remember, a 67% game wins the event. That means, a full one third of time the results will not go your way and you have to take it on the chin with a grin.

In one example of this, this exact problem showed up at the real Bridge table in a recent tournament. I opened 1N with 5 SS and 5332 shape and partner passed with 6 count and 4 Ss. Both sides were non-vulnerable. I made + 90 after some struggle. It turns out they can make 3H. If I open 1S they double and find their H-fit and we must go to 3S to protect against -140 with 3H making their way. 3S, however, does not make and you end up with either -50 undoubled or – 100 doubled. Our +90 was a shining star with all the marbles.

Wonderful game, this Bridge.