

Lesson 6 by Roger Lord

Strong Balanced Opening Bids

The term “balanced” pertains to a 13-card hand with a distribution consisting of 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, or 5-3-3-2, in any suits. The term “semi-balanced” pertains to a hand with 5-4-2-2 or 6-3-2-2. The “strong” balanced and semi-balanced opening bids discussed here comprise ranges from 18 to 37.

The lowest range for natural opening bids that fit in the strong category is 18 through a square 20, or 17 with a good five-card suit. With these hands, we open one of a minor with three or more cards, or one of a major with five or more cards. Responder (opener’s partner) bids at the one-level if he has as much as six HCP, or an ace and a jack, or a king-queen in one suit. Over a response of one of a suit, opener jumps to two notrump, with certain exceptions. Over a response of one notrump, responder either bids two notrump or, with a maximum, jumps to three notrump.

Standard procedure mandates that subsequent bidding is natural, although there are several conventions and more homemade treatments in use by partnerships. Responder may pass over opener’s two notrump. Any bid he makes is forcing. Responder’s rebid of his own major shows five or more, is unlimited, and searches for a 5-3 fit. The rebid of a new suit searches for a 4-4 fit, and if the suit is a minor, it may be part of a slam auction. See the examples on following pages.

By the way, a double-jump rebid by opener to three notrump (for example, one diamond – one heart – three notrump) is intended to play there, with a source of tricks (a long running suit), but with no fit for partner (in fact, possibly with a singleton in responder’s suit).

The next range is 20 good HCP through 22. With these hands, the opening bid is two notrump. Responder may pass, or get to game with any five points or with an ace. With no five or four of a major, responder bids three notrump (through a square 11 HCP), or four notrump (a good 11 or any 12, quantitative, invitational, not forcing), or, with more, Gerber four clubs or some forcing sequence.

Holding a five-card or longer major, responder transfers (three diamonds for hearts or three hearts for spades), regardless of strength. When opener accepts the transfer (bids three of the major), responder may pass with a bad hand, so opener should jump to game (or cuebid) with a maximum and a good fit. Any non-game rebid by responder is natural and forcing. Instead, if responder rebids three notrump, opener passes with two of the major, or goes to four of the major with three or more.

An initial jump to four diamonds is a transfer to four hearts, or a jump to four hearts is a transfer to four spades. Opener will either pass or bid Blackwood. A slower sequence – a three-level transfer followed by game in the major – shows six or more of the major and is a slam invitation.

Holding a four-card major and game-going values, responder says three clubs, Stayman, over which opener bids 3 diamonds to deny a major, or names the major (hearts first with both). After three diamonds, or after three of the non-fitting major, responder bids some number of notrump, unless responder has a five-card major to show. After opener’s three hearts and responder’s three notrump, opener goes to four spades with 4-4 in the majors.

This auction shows 4-4 in the majors. Responder is searching for a 4-4 spade fit (he has already found out that there is no 4-4 heart fit).

5. Responder: S KQ64 H J9542 D Q42 C 8
- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| Opener | Responder |
| 1 Diamond | 1 Heart |
| 2 Notrump | 3 Hearts |
| 3 Spades | 4 Spades |

Responder's three hearts shows five cards, after which he raises opener's spade suit.

6. Responder: S 9 H AK103 D 842 C A10874
- | | |
|------------|-----------|
| Opener | Responder |
| 1 Club | 1 Heart |
| 2 Notrump | 3 Clubs |
| 3 Diamonds | 3 Hearts |
| 3 Spades | 6 Clubs |

Responder bids one heart, then raises his partner's clubs. After three honor-showing bids, responder can confidently go to six clubs. Don't even consider removing the final bid to six notrump!

7. Responder: S A1053 H 75 D Q10763 42
- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| Opener | Responder |
| 2 Notrump | 3 Clubs |
| 3 Hearts | 3 Notrump |
| 4 Spades | Pass |

When you bid Stayman over 2 notrump, you always have at least one four-card major. Therefore, after first bidding hearts, opener knows to go to four spades over your three notrump.

8. Responder: S 8 H QJ82 D 75 C AQ10743
- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| Opener | Responder |
| 2 Notrump | 3 Clubs |
| 3 Spades | 4 Clubs |
| ? | |

Responder first looks for a heart fit, then shows his club suit. We strongly recommend that in this and similar sequences, the bid of four clubs not be Gerber. Not only will Gerber interfere with showing clubs, but also it is bound to cause a mix-up at some time. Gerber should be used only to ask for aces immediately over opener's first notrump bid.

9. Responder: S 97 H A10764 D Q65 C 1082
- | | |
|-----------|------------|
| Opener | Responder |
| 2 Notrump | 3 Diamonds |
| 3 Hearts | 3 Notrump |

Opener will choose between three notrump and four hearts.

10. Responder: Q10654 H 3 D 852 C 10765
- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| Opener | Responder |
| 2 Notrump | 3 Hearts |
| 3 Spades | Pass |

You're probably better off playing three spades than two notrump. If opener has a great hand with four spades, he should bypass three spades and get to game even though his partner might be about to pass. For example, opener might hold S AJ92 H A73 D KQ107 C AK.

11. Responder: S J54 H Q75 D A10643 C A2	
Opener	Responder
2 Notrump	4 Notrump
5 Clubs	5 Diamonds
?	

Responder makes a quantitative slam try. Opener's five clubs says that his hand was good enough to continue, and he bids clubs to suggest playing six clubs. Responder doesn't fit clubs, but maybe partner fits diamonds, so he bids that suit. Opener then places the contract.

12. Responder: S 107 H 852 D 98653 C K92	
Opener	Responder
2 Clubs	2 Diamonds
2 Notrump	3 Notrump

That king is all you need to bid game over opener's 23-24 or a good 22 HCP.

13. Responder: S KJ8652 H 95 D 62 C 532	
Opener	Responder
2 Notrump	4 Hearts
4 Spades	Pass

The jump transfer is used either to sign off or to follow up with Blackwood. With a hand which is worth a slam invitation but not a slam force, responder first bids three hearts to transfer, then four spades to confirm the slam try in spades.

14. Responder: S QJ762 H K10985 D 4 C 87	
Opener	Responder
2 Notrump	3 Hearts
3 Spades	4 Hearts

The second bid of four hearts by responder is natural, showing five hearts along with the five spades. On a hand with five spades and only four hearts, responder starts with Stayman rather than with a transfer.