



<p><i>This series of articles began in January, 2008</i></p>	<p>What Should we Play?</p> <p>Part 5</p> <p>1-of-a-major</p> <p>By Larry Cohen</p>	<p>Grand Asia Bridge Cruise w/ Larry Cohen</p> <p>Larry will give his unique "vu-graph" lectures daily.</p> <p>Enjoy Regent's 6-star luxury cruises with a bridge program hosted by 23-time National Champion, Larry Cohen—Fall 2009.</p>
		

1-of-a-Major Openings

Last month, we concluded the 1-of-a-minor section. Now, in part 5 of this series ([click here for all the articles](#)) we delve into major-suit openings on the one-level.

Opening 1♥ or 1♠

In some countries (like England) and in some decades (like the 1940's), 4-card majors were in fashion. Most of my readers (assuming Bob Hamman is not one of my readers), favor 5-card majors. The only time we might open 1-MAJ with 4 is in 3rd seat and in that case it would typically be a chunky suit such as KQJ9.

So, for this article, we presume 5-card majors.

Let's get one of the tricky side issues out of the way: What to do with a 5-card major and a 5 or 6-card minor. For example, let's examine the opening bid with these hands:

- A) ♠KQ1054 ♥4 ♦62 ♣AQJ32
- B) ♠KQ1054 ♥4 ♦6 ♣AQJ832
- C) ♠A ♥KQJ54 ♦AKJ76 ♣65
- D) ♠A ♥AQJ62 ♦AJ7652 ♣5

- A) There are differing opinions on how to handle 5-5 in the black suits. Some espouse starting low with 1♣ and hoping to bid spades twice to show 5-5. These days, most players prefer to start with 1♠ (to make sure they get their five-card major introduced while the auction is still low enough). There is no right or wrong—each way has plusses and minuses.
- B) With 6-5 in the blacks, most players would bid 1♣ to start, and then hope to be able to bid spades twice. Still, there are some who prefer starting with 1♠ (not many, though).
- C) It is a bit different with red suits. Opening 1♦ and then trying to bid hearts will often lead to “reversing.” For example: 1♦-1♠-2♥ is a reverse showing extra values. But, *in no case should you ever open 1♦ with 5-5 in the reds*. Start this hand 1♥, planning to jumpshift in diamonds.
- D) This hand is strong enough to open 1♦, then bid hearts twice. That would show 6+♦ and 5+♥. With the same shape and only 11 HCP, I’d recommend starting with 1♥.

1NT with a 5-card Major

The age-old question. What do you open each of these hands?

- A) ♠KQ1075 ♥QJ4 ♦Q52 ♣AJ
- B) ♠AQ1075 ♥K4 ♦A76 ♣QJ2
- C) ♠A2 ♥KQJ54 ♦KJ6 ♣Q65
- D) ♠32 ♥AKQJ2 ♦AQ9 ♣765

Most theorists today advise opening 1NT if in range and balanced—even with a 5-card major. I concur. If you open 1♥H with hand C), for example, and partner responds 1♠, what would you rebid? There is no good rebid (because rebidding 1NT shows 12-14 and rebidding 2NT shows 18-19). I prefer to get it off my chest the first time and open 1NT to show 15-17.

Might we miss a major-suit fit? Yes. But even when we do, it’s possible notrump plays just as well. Do I always open 1NT with a balanced hand and a 5-card major? Almost always.

Exceptions: With 5-4-2-2, I prefer to open in the five-card major. Also, I try not to be too extreme. Hands A,B,C are fine 1NT openings, but I’d draw the line at D). That hand looks so “hearty” and lopsided that I think 1NT would be inappropriate. If you want a general rule, I’d say, open all 5-3-3-2 hands in range with 1NT, unless the doubleton is two low ones.

Responses To 1-Major

This is a rather large topic, that I will summarize as follows:

- 1) You must decide whether a new-suit 2-level response is Game-Forcing. If so, then a 1NT response is Forcing (or maybe semi-forcing). The 2/1 system will be covered elsewhere in this series.
- 2) The only 1-level response that can occur is 1♠ over 1♥. This shows 4 or more spades. With 4+ spades and 3 hearts the “general” rule is this: If you have only one bid to make, then raise the hearts. If you plan on bidding more than once, show the spades first, then raise hearts. Notice the quotes around “general.” This is not etched in stone.
- 3) Normal Raises: The raise to 2-MAJOR is typically 6-10 in support. Those using a forcing notrump typically choose to define the raise as 7+ - 10 in support. In standard, a raise to 3-MAJOR is Limit (invitational). The “book” says it shows 4 trump, but I don’t mind if it is done with 3 trump. A raise to 4-MAJOR is weak, usually 5 trumps and about 0-8 HCP.
- 4) Other Raises: These days it is fashionable to use other artificial raises. Some use Bergen Raises. If you do, be sure you and your partner play it the same way (there are many variations), and make sure to discuss passed-hand bidding and interference. The **Jacoby 2NT** is popular. [Click here](#) for my article on that convention. If you play Splinter Bids, be sure to discuss whether 1♠-4♥ is a splinter or Natural (otherwise, be prepared for a train crash). Also, be sure to discuss whether 1MAJ-3NT is artificial (some play it as 4-3-3-3 with 3 trump, 13-15 and stoppers in all side suits; others play it as a “good raise” from 1 to 4).
- 5) Make sure you know whether 1♥-2♠ is strong or weak. Play it the same way as your partner!

Next month – What to do in competition (they overcall or double). Also: responding to 3rd/4th seat major-suit openings.

For descriptions of most conventions mentioned in this series, see the **ACBL page** on [Commonly Used Conventions](#).

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