

## Responding to a major by *Derrick Browne*

Last week's column was on responding to a minor. This week we consider responding to a major opening, again incorporating material from leading bridge authority Larry Cohen (following his invitation to do so, with acknowledgement). While some countries like England favour 4-card major openings, we will assume the more popular 5-card major style.

Firstly, what do you do with a 5-card major and a 5-card or 6-card minor?

S KQT54  
H 4  
D 62  
C AQJ32

With 5-5 in the black suits, some prefer to start low with 1C then to bid spades twice. These days, most players prefer to start with 1S. This follows the general rule of starting with the higher-ranked of two 5-card suits.

S KQT54  
H 4  
D 6  
C AQJ832

With six clubs and five spades, most players would bid 1C to start, then hope to bid the spades twice to show five cards there (and, by inference, longer clubs).

S A  
H KQJ54  
D AKJ76  
C 65

Start this hand 1H, planning to jump shift in diamonds. In no case should you ever open 1D with 5-5 in the reds..

S A  
H AQJ62  
D AJ7652  
C 5

An auction like 1D : 1S, 2H promises extra values in opener's hand, a "reverse". This time you are strong enough for that. You intend to then bid the hearts again, showing five hearts and longer diamonds. However with the same shape and only 11 HCP, start with 1H to keep it lower when you bid your other suit on the next round.

Should you open 1NT with a 5-card major? Nowadays, most theorists advise opening 1NT if in range (we'll assume 15-17) and balanced:

S AQT75	S A2
H K4	H KQJ54
D A76	D KJ6
C QJ2	C Q65

Open 1NT. Say you were to open 1H with the second hand, for example. If partner responds 1S, what would you rebid? There would be no good option – 1NT would show 12-14 while jumping to 2NT would show 18-19. Better to get the hand off your chest straight up with a 1NT opening. Might we miss a major fit? Yes. But even when we do, it's possible notrump plays just as well.

S 32  
H AKQJ2  
D AQ9  
C 765

Cohen says he "almost always" opens 1NT with a balanced hand and a 5-card major, but tries not to be too extreme. This hand looks so "hearty" and lopsided that he thinks 1NT would be inappropriate. With a small doubleton, consider opening the 5-card major rather than 1NT.

Let's finish with responses to the major opening. Nowadays some players use artificial raises but barring any such agreement, the raise to 2-major (e.g. 1H : 2H) is typically 6-10 points, while the raise to 3-major is limit (invitational; the "book" prefers four trumps for this, but Cohen doesn't mind if it is done with three trumps). A raise to 4-major is weak, usually five trumps and about 0-8 HCP.

A shift to 2H (1S : 2H) promises five cards. Otherwise a simple change of suit by responder e.g. 1H : 1S promises a 4-card suit. With four spades and three hearts in reply to a 1H opening, Cohen suggests as a "general" rule that if you have only one bid to make, raise the hearts. If you plan on bidding more than once, show the spades first, then raise hearts. "This is not etched in stone," he adds.