

MARVIN VS FIVE-CARD MAJORS

An opening bid of 1♣ or 1♦ with a three-card suit is quite common in five-card major systems. Forcing club system bidders may even open 1♦ with a weak doubleton and a light hand. The following defense is aimed at punishing these practices. It may be applied selectively, e.g., against vulnerable opponents only. It applies only to direct action taken by an unpassed hand, and only against an opening that may be shorter than four cards. Some five-card majorites guarantee four diamonds with a 1♦ opening, so the defense does not apply against their 1♦ opening. Balancing and passed hand actions are standard. See section 11-1, Reopening the Bidding, and section 8-5, Defensive Bidding by a Passed Hand.

Defense Against a One Diamond Opening

-- A double of 1♦ shows a notrump hand of two possible ranges, 16-18 HCP or 21-22 HCP, including Qxx or better in diamonds. With 19-20 HCP, bid 1♥ and follow with an appropriate notrump bid, just as you would normally double and then bid notrump with such a hand (see section 9-1, Takeout Doubles). With diamonds weaker than Qxx, a 1♥ takeout is probably a good alternative.

The reason for (reluctantly) excluding 19-20 HCP hands is that the doubler will sometimes have to bid 2NT between two bidders later in the auction, a dangerous action with only 19-20 HCP. You can cheat a trifle on the 16 HCP requirement when the diamonds are extra good (e.g., KJ97). Be sure to count a little more for tenaces like AQ, AJx, KJx, etc. Sitting over the opening bidder makes such holdings more valuable than their normal point count (and makes opener's honors worth less).

The double of 1♦ puts opener in a bind right away if his diamond suit is short. The opponents may have no place to go, and even if they do, they may have difficulty finding it. (Try to devise a system for locating the best contract after a double--it's not easy.) The double has constructive as well as destructive purposes. A 4-4 major suit fit, or even a minor suit fit, can sometimes be found when a 1NT overcall would have been passed out.

-- A 1♥ overcall is artificial, forcing, a takeout bid. Partner ("advancer") responds as to a takeout double. An advance of 2♦ is a normal forcing cue bid, while an advance of 3♦ is natural, invitational. A 1NT advance would be unusual, but would be necessary with a very weak 3=3=4=3 hand. Is it dangerous for advancer to bid 1NT with a bust hand? Sure, but no more dangerous than having West overcall 1NT instead of doubling. You'll have lots of company.

-- A 1♠ overcall is natural, too good (or spades too weak) for a preemptive 2♠ overcall.

-- A 1NT overcall is forcing, showing a simple heart overcall, too good (or hearts too weak) for a preemptive 2♥ overcall. Partner bids 2♥ to sign off, an action that requires no strength at all. Other advances are the same as if the overcall had been a natural heart bid. For instance, a 2♦ bid is a standard cue bid response to the overcall, while 3♣ or 3♦ is natural (invitational).

South	West	North	East
1♦	1NT	Pass	2♦ - standard cue bid
			2♥ - signoff
			2♣/2♠ - not forcing
			2NT - natural, invitational
			3♣/3♦/3♥ - invitational

-- A 2♣ overcall is artificial and forcing, showing a strong (i.e., eight playing tricks) jump overcall in some suit, or an eight-trick notrump hand based on a solid six-card minor plus stoppers. With a standard club overcall, too good for a (preemptive) 2NT call, bid 3♣ if you are strong enough, otherwise pass. Partner bids 2♦ (forcing) over 2♣ to find out what you have, or may bid a very good suit (also forcing):

South	West	North	East
1♦	2♣	Pass	2♦?
Pass	2♥/2♠/3♣/3♦		- strong jump in this suit
			2NT - natural, solid minor, stoppers

One quick trick is enough to raise the 2NT bid. If opener's partner sticks in a bid (e.g., 2♦), 2NT can be used for the query. The solid suit for an eight-trick notrump hand is probably clubs, but could be diamonds. See section 8-3, Strong Jump Overcalls, and section 8-4, Notrump Overcalls.

-- Bid 2NT with a preemptive jump overcall in clubs, 3♣ with an intermediate club overcall, pass with a minimum club overcall.

-- A 2♦ overcall has the same meaning as a cue bid over a normal (e.g., four-card) diamond opening. With a natural diamond overcall, just pass and hope to act later if you can't double (see below) or bid 3♦. You may find that opener has a real diamond suit, or that you can eventually double a notrump contract for a diamond lead, or that you can balance with a diamond bid later..

-- Jump overcalls in a major or in diamonds are preemptive (but not very weak at the two level--about the same as a weak two bid). After a 2♥ or 2♠ overcall, subsequent bidding follows the same rules as for weak two bids.

When advancing the weak preemptive overcalls, use the methods for responding to a preemptive opening. See Section 7-2, Weak Two Bids, and Section 7-3, Preemptive Three Bids.

Bidding After a Double

-- Unless advancer has indicated weakness by not doubling an opposing 1NT bid, his two-level bids have the same meaning as if doubler had overcalled 1NT naturally. All conventions are operative. See section 8-4, Notrump Overcalls. If doubler has a 21-22 HCP hand, he will have to use his ingenuity to disclose the extra strength somehow (e.g., jumping to 3♥ or 3♠ in response to Stayman, raising 3NT to 4NT, bidding 2NT in response to a Jacoby transfer).

-- With a weak hand (0-7 HCP) that would have passed a normal 1NT overcall, advancer can bid a four-card major at the one level (Use Jacoby with five, unless extremely weak). The doubler will pass with good

support (four cards, or three plus a ruffing value). A free bid of 1♠ (over RHO's 1♥) is also weak, 0-7 HCP. After a "weakness response," no subsequent pass by either partner is forcing:

South	West	North	East
1♦	Dbl	Pass	1♥ - weak
2♦	Pass	- not forcing	
		Dbl - business, maybe 21-22 HCP	
		2♥ - 16-18 HCP, four hearts	
		2NT/3♥ - 21-22 HCP for sure	

South	West	North	East
1♦	Dbl	1♥	1♠ - weak
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♣ - still weak!

East probably has four spades, five clubs, and a weak unbalanced hand that is unsuitable for notrump. West should pass unless he has more spades than clubs. Even though it is at the two level, the last bid is natural, not Stayman, because 1♠ showed weakness.

-- Passes of an opposing 1♥ or 1♠ bid by either partner are forcing unless advancer has indicated weakness (which would have to be via a 1♥ bid). Pass of 1NT bid over the double is not forcing. Passes at the two level are forcing only if advancer has previously indicated some strength (e.g., by passing the double of 1♦). Forcing passes will help prevent the opponents from getting out of trouble, as when the next hand to bid is strong but cannot double a runout bid.

-- Advancer can pass the double with a few high cards and a fair diamond holding, knowing that doubler has something in diamonds and lots of defense. Sometimes advancer will pass with a weak hand but long diamonds. If opener then runs to 1♠ and doubler passes (forcing), advancer can bid 2♦, not forcing, if the runout bid comes around:

South	West	North	East
1♦	Dbl	Pass	Pass
1♠	Pass	Pass	2♦ - weak, long diamonds
			1NT - up to 7 HCP

Other possible actions by East:

South	West	North	East
1♦	Dbl	Pass	Pass
1♥	Pass	Pass	1♠ - weak, four spades
			1NT - 7 HCP maximum
			Dbl - business

The 1♠ bid would be appropriate with ♠Q987 ♥7 ♦KQ32 ♣9643. It denies the strength required for a game try opposite 16-18 HCP, the same message given by the 1NT bid. Had North raised to 2♥, a 2♠ bid would have the same meaning as when the bidding goes 1♦-1NT-2♥-2♠ in standard bidding (five or more spades, not invitational).

-- Advancer's pass over a redouble is also to play. In fact, a redouble is completely ignored, whether it is "S. O. S." or not:

South	West	North	East
1♦	Dbl	Rdbl	Pass - Business
			1♥/1♠/1NT - weak

Unlike the situation after a takeout double, East's pass says he is ready to defend 1♦ redoubled. This and any other action by East is the same as if the redouble had not occurred. East can't pass the redouble with short diamonds, even with a good hand, because a pass shows a desire to defend against 1♦ redoubled.

Is it dangerous for advancer to bid 1NT with a bust hand? Sure, but no more dangerous than having West overcall 1NT instead of doubling.

-- If third hand bids 1♥ or 1♠, a double is for business, as are all subsequent doubles by either partner. A one-level business doubler should have at least four cards in the opposing suit, and partner should have two or more to pass the double. (Defending a one-level contract with 3-3 trumps may not be profitable.) A pass by advancer is forcing.

South	West	North	East
1♦	Dbl	1♥	Dbl - business
			Pass - forcing
			1♠ - weak, four cards
			1NT - weak, both minors

Since doubler can't have a singleton, he will always pass a business double. Although the pass is forcing, it promises no strength whatsoever. West can double 1♥ with only 16 HCP, however, because East will pull the double to 1NT (or a forcing two-level bid) if he decides that his hand is not good enough to defend against 1♥. Pulling a double of 1♥ to 1♠ is a stronger action (but still weak, 6-7 HCP) than bidding 1♠ immediately. For the 1NT bid, a sort of advance rescue, the minors can be as short as 4-4. (A natural 1NT bid would be illogical in this situation, since West will bid 1NT if East passes).

Two-level bids have the same meaning as if doubler had overcalled 1NT naturally:

South	West	North	East
1♦	Dbl	1♥/1♠	2♣ - Stayman
			2♦/2♥ - Jacoby transfer
			etc.

After advancer's forcing pass, doubler clarifies his hand if he can't double for business:

South	West	North	East
1♦	Dbl	1♥	Pass - forcing
Pass	Dbl	♠104 ♥AJ98 ♦AQ108 ♣KQ2	
		1NT - ♠AJ8 ♥K10 ♦AQ108 ♣Q72	
		1♠ - ♠AJ98 ♥104 ♦AQ108 ♣KQ2	
		2NT - AK8 ♥K10 ♦AQ108 ♣AJ2	

2♥ - AK98 ♥102 ♦AQ108 ♣AKJ

After the 2♥ cue bid, a 2NT bid by advancer can be passed because overcaller has shown his hand pretty exactly: 21-22 HCP and no heart stopper. After the notrump rebids by doubler, the usual notrump conventions apply.

See section 8-4, Notrump Overcalls.

-- Third hand may sometimes bid 1NT over the double:

South	West	North	East
1♦	Dbl	1NT	Pass - not forcing (weak)
			2 any - natural, weak
			2NT - artificial, forcing
			3 any - invitational
			Dbl - business

The 2NT bid and jumps to three of a suit are probably based on a distributionally strong hand that may not have much in high cards (in view of the failure to double 1NT). Doubler assumes that advancer's 2NT bid is offering a choice of the minors and bids 3♣ or 3♦, but it could be based on any two suits. If advancer then bids a new suit (forcing), opener raises or bids his next-best suit:

South	West	North	East
1♦	Dbl	1NT	2NT
Pass	3♦	Pass	3♥ - forcing
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♣ - second suit, not forcing

When Second Hand Passes or Overcalls Naturally

Fourth seat's defensive actions when partner passes or overcalls naturally are standard. The meaning of a 2♦ overcall of a third seat response to 1♦ depends on what the response was. For instance, 2♦ is natural over a new suit response:

South	West	North	East
1♦	Pass	1♠	2♦ - natural bid
			Dbl - takeout

See section 10-4, Direct Cue Bid Overcalls. Reopening calls in the fourth seat (i.e., after 1♦-P-P) are also standard. See section 11-1, Reopening the Bidding.

Defense Against A One Club Opening

The defense against a 1♣ opening is similar, except that 1♦ is the takeout call, and the meanings of 2♣ and 2♦ are reversed:

South West

- 1♣ Dbl - 16-18 HCP or 21-22 HCP, at least Qxx in clubs.
 1♦ - takeout, forcing
 1♥/1♠ - natural overcall
 1NT - normal diamond overcall
 2♣ - normal cue bid
 2♦ - strong jump in some suit
 2♥/2♠/3♣ - preemptive, but 2♥/2♠ not very weak
 2NT - preemptive diamond overcall
 3♦ - intermediate diamond overcall

A double of 1♣ shows a notrump hand of two possible ranges, 16-18 HCP or 21-22 HCP, including Qxx or better in clubs. With 19-20 HCP, bid 1♦ and follow with an appropriate notrump bid, just as you would normally double and then bid notrump with such a hand (see section 9-1, Takeout Doubles). With clubs weaker than Qxx, a 1♦ takeout is preferable.

After a double of 1♣, advancer can bid 1♦ to ask for a major. This denies the strength required for a 2♣ Stayman bid, and may be based on a complete bust. Bid 2♣ (Stayman), not 1♦, if game is a possibility opposite 16-18 HCP. If you bid 1♦ and then raise partner's major suit bid, he will know that the raise is merely a competitive move and you are not interested in game. Similarly, if you bid 1♦ and then bid 1NT or two of any suit, doubler must pass unless he has both majors or a big hand:

South	West	North	East
1♣	Dbl	Pass	1♦ - asks for major
Pass	1♠	Pass	1NT/2♣/2♦ - signoff
Pass	2♥/Pass	- 16-18 HCP	
		2NT/3 any	- 21-22 HCP

The 2♣ or 2♦ signoff implies four hearts and at least a five-card minor.

The 2♦ overcall of 1♣ is forcing, of course. Advancer bids 2♥ if he would pass a strong jump overcall in hearts, 2♠ if he would pass a spade jump but not a heart jump. Higher suit bids are natural, forcing. He can bid 2NT to inquire:

South	West	North	East
1♣	2♦	Pass	2NT?
		3 any suit	- strong overcall in that suit
		3NT	- solid minor plus stoppers

Reopening an Opposing Auction

One auction that is very poor for five-card majorities is a minor suit opening, a major suit response, and a 1NT rebid:

South	West	North	East
1♣/1♦	Pass	1♥/1♠	Pass
1NT	Pass	Pass	?

Since opener is reluctant to raise a major without four trumps, he can easily end up in a 1NT contract when there is a good 5-3 major suit fit. If East reopens in the auction above, South can show three-card support for North and possibly reach a better contract. East should therefore be slow to reopen the bidding unless North's pass denies five cards in his suit or he has North's suit well under control (which might call for a double of 1NT). See section 8-8, Reopening Doubles of 1NT Responses and Rebids.

When There's a 1NT Response to a Major Opening

Five-card majorites play a 1NT response to a 1♥ or 1♠ opening as forcing. The subsequent bidding may be wildly inaccurate, given the wide range (6-11 HCP) and unrestricted distribution of the 1NT bidder, plus the restriction that opener must have a six-card suit to rebid it.

Overcalling the 1NT response, besides being somewhat dangerous and generally unnecessary (since 1NT is forcing), may relieve opener of a serious rebid problem. He can just pass (or double) instead of having to bid a three-card minor, for instance. One effective overcall is a 2♠ bid, which can really jam their bidding. It is a safer bid than 2♣ or 2♦, since neither opponent is likely to have four spades, especially if they are playing Flannery. (But some Flannery bidders play that a 1NT response to 1♥ may include four spades, so watch out for that.) If opener's rebid is 2♣ or 2♦ and everyone passes, a trump lead should be automatic. The dummy is sure to have a singleton or void in opener's major, and you don't want to sit back and watch a cross-ruff develop.