

Two Over One Game Force –

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Part 1: Why 2/1 is Better than Standard

I. Introduction

Two-Over-One Game Force is when an unpassed hand makes a non-jump new suit response at the 2-level over partner's major suit opening in an uncontested auction. Such a response is forcing the partnership to the game level (at least). Neither player can pass below game.

The points required to make a 2/1 GF response are usually 13 HCP, or 12 HCP with extra trick potential or a fit for partner. Salt to taste.

The "NOT"s

This means that -

- a) it is NOT played by a passed hand
- b) it is NOT NECESSARILY played over a 1D opening
- c) it is NOT played in response to an overcall
- d) it is NOT played when the opponents interfere with a bid or double over opener
- e) less-than GF hands may NOT make a two-over-one response
- f) it is NOT alertable

II. Substandard American

The Beef with Standard Bidding: too many non-forcing bids force both sides to guess a lot.

2/1 provides more bids to show

- extra length
- a second suit
- delayed support
- slam interest

all below the level of 3N. Plus, it's not a brain drain.

Examples that demonstrate problems with standard bidding:

1. *Responder must force to game without finding major suit length*

Playing Standard American, North, opener, has one of these 2 hands:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| a. AJxxx | b. AJxxx |
| AJxxx | AJxx |
| x | xxx |
| Kx | K |

and the auction begins 1♠-2♣-2♥ as it should. South has a game forcing hand, say, one of these two:

- | | |
|--------|--------|
| c. Q | d. xx |
| Kxx | x |
| KQx | KQxx |
| Axxxxx | AQJxxx |

First let's consider that opener has (a) and responder has (c). After 2♥, South must choose between 3♦ (4th suit game forcing) to get more information, or 3NT (2NT and 3♣ would be non-forcing, and 3♥ would promise 4 hearts). If South chooses 3N, North should not remove to 4♥ lest South have (d). If South chooses 3♦, North has an easy 3♥ rebid and game is found. So 3♦ is the answer then.

But what if North has (b)? Over 1♠-2♣-2♥-3♦, she is stuck. If she rebids 3♥ that shows 5, 3♠ would show 6 (or a great 5), and 4♣ would show at least a doubleton. This might seem a little contrived. For instance often 3N will play well despite a 5-3 heart fit (or 6-2 spade fit), but in general it is better to play in the 8 card major fit when one hand has a singleton.

2. Responder must force to game somehow without stoppers in the side suits.

- | | |
|---------------|----------|
| North: AJxxxx | South: x |
| x | AQJ |
| Qx | AKJxxx |
| KQxx | xxx |

- | | |
|----|----|
| 1♠ | 2♦ |
| 2♠ | ? |

Here, North rebids 2♠, waiting, and South is stuck. 2NT and 3♦ are nonforcing, but she has a GF hand. 3♣ would not be a problem on length (we all fudge minor suit length sometimes) but it is not descriptive at all (North here could raise clubs). 3♥ is correct in terms of stoppers, but what if North had:

- AJxxxx
 xxxx
 Q

AK

North raises 3♥ to game and South is stuck when 3N is clearly best. So this is an impossible problem.

3. Opener's raise of the 2-level response hamstrings responder

North:	AQJxx	South:	Kx
	x		xx
	Kxxx		AQxxx
	Kxx		Qxxx

North opens 1♠, and South responds 2♦, having too much for a non-forcing 1N response. North has an easy 3♦ raise. Now what should responder do? Is North maximum or minimum? Does North have 3 or 4 card support? Does North have a ♥ stopper or 6 spades? Another impossible problem.

4. Opener's 2NT rebid is impossible to read.

North:	AJTxx	South:	xx
	Kxx		Qxx
	xx		AJ9xx
	AQx		KJx

North opens 1♠ and South responds 2♦. North has a classic NT rebid – all suits stopped, tolerance for partner, only 5 in the opened suit. Does South continue to game or not? North may have 12 HCP or may have 14 (or a bad 15 if played that way). Or should North have anticipated this problem and rebid 3NT. What should opener have rebid with 17-19 balanced then? This is a tricky subject, and SAYC leaves these questions unanswered.

5. Showing stoppers and finding the best fit is a complete guess.

North:	AQJxxxx	South:	x
	Kx		Axxx
	A		KQxxx
	xxx		AQx

North opens 1♠ and South responds 2♦ and North rebids 2♠. South, to cater to opener's 6♠-4♥ rebids 3♥. North, with no ♣ stopper rebids 3♠. South now is not sure if North is showing a 7+ card suit (or great 6) or just denying a club stopper, so South must guess whether to raise to 4♠ or bid 3N, not to mention whether slam is in the offing or not. If South rebids 3N, then North passes 3N and finds partner with just one club stopper, or

bids 4♠ and finds partner with the actual hand (a perfecto for declaring – protecting the clubs from the lead).

6. *Showing slam interest is near-impossible.*

North:	AJxxx	South:	Kx
	KQxxx		AJxx
	Kx		AQJxx
	Q		Jx

The auction begins 1♠-2♦-2♥, and South now cannot bid 3♥ (nonforcing) but is a bit too good for 4♥. What if North has 16 HCP? Basically both sides are about 12-16 HCP and there is no way for either side to do anything cooperative. Maybe South could bid 3♣ (GF) and then 4♥, but without prior agreement, it's anybody's guess.

North:	AJxxx	South:	Kx
	xxx		Ax
	AQJx		Kxxxxxx
	K		Qx

Here it is not responder but opener that has extra values, but no intelligent way to show it after 1♠-2♦. To bid 3♦ is to risk partner passing, and to bid 4♣ is not even well-defined, but it might even be a 5-5 ♠-♣ hand. What can North do? South is not going to take any steps towards slam.

The result of all these little problems is one of three solutions:

1. Practice, discuss, and develop arbitrary agreements (and thus not Standard American) to minimize the number of guesses. (e.g. 1♠-2♣-3♣ = game forcing by agreement).
2. Bid quickly to avoid giving unauthorized information to partner, but the decision tends to be hasty and without full due consideration.
3. Bid slowly, choosing the least harmful guess, at the cost of giving lots of unauthorized information to partner.

I have seen #1 in use to good effect – a bad system played well is better than a good system played badly. I don't think I would be writing this article if I thought that was an acceptable solution.

#2 is the best solution on-the-fly with a new partnership.

#3 unfortunately is the norm at the club level, whether they know it or not. But it is not their fault. **The system is to blame!**