

Two-Over-One

by Eric Rodwell



Eric Rodwell is known for his highly developed skills in creating integrated bidding systems at world class levels. He also used his technical expertise to co-author the bestselling JOY OF BRIDGE with Audrey Grant and David Lindop. Even though bidding styles change, the foundation laid out in this book is still relevant. The introduction of marathon bids set the stage for Two-Over-One, a popular adaptation to standard bidding.

A bidding system should keep both partners comfortable and confident that they understand the information being exchanged during the bidding conversation. Knowing when you have to bid again and when you can pass, is an important part of being at ease. In the JOY OF BRIDGE, in addition to sign-off, invitational and forcing bids, we introduced the *marathon bid*, a bid that was forcing to game. The message sent by this bid gets us in the right position to understand what is referred to as a 2/1 (two-over-one) game force.

Another idea introduced in the JOY OF BRIDGE that is also relevant to our discussion is that one player, usually the responder, is the captain and decides **HOW HIGH** and **WHERE** to place the contract.

A Starting Point: The Bidding Messages

A review of the JOY OF BRIDGE bidding messages is a good starting place for a discussion of 2/1.

The Bidding Messages

Each bid made during the bidding conversation sends a message to partner. As in any conversation, it is important to have the message understood. Each bid carries one of four possible meanings:

Sign-off	●
Invitational	●
Forcing	●
Marathon	★

Sign-off Bids

A sign-off bid is like the warning on a stop sign...STOP! When you make a sign-off bid, partner is expected to Pass.

HOW HIGH and **WHERE** have been determined and there's no need to search further.

For example, suppose West opens 1NT. When responder, East, puts the partnership in a game contract, it's a sign-off bid and opener is expected to pass.

WEST	EAST	
1NT	4♠	● HOW HIGH: Game WHERE: Spades
1NT	4♥	● HOW HIGH: Game WHERE: Hearts
1NT	3NT	● HOW HIGH: Game WHERE: Notrump



Responder can also sign off in partscore:

WEST	EAST	
1NT	2♠	● HOW HIGH: Partscore WHERE: Spades
1NT	2♥	● HOW HIGH: Partscore WHERE: Hearts
1NT	2♦	● HOW HIGH: Partscore WHERE: Diamonds

(If the partnership is using Jacoby Transfers, responder will sign off by transferring and then passing.)

When you, or your partner, make a sign-off bid, the message is clear: Stop; Don't bid any more; Pass.

Invitational Bids

An invitational bid can be symbolized by a triangular sign with the idea 'proceed with caution.'

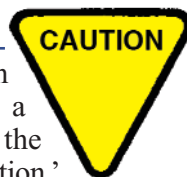
When you make an invitational bid, partner may pass or bid again with the values to warrant improving the contract or moving toward a game.

For example, suppose West opens 1NT. Responder, East, can invite opener to bid game by raising to 2NT. Similarly, responder can invite opener to slam by raising to 4NT.

WEST	EAST	
1NT	2NT	● HOW HIGH: Not sure: Partscore or Game WHERE: Notrump
1NT	4NT	● HOW HIGH: Not sure: Game or Slam WHERE: Notrump

Opener is invited to make the final decision. Opener can Pass with a minimum for the 1NT opening—15 points or a 'poor' 16 (no 9's or 10's). Opener can accept with a maximum—17 points or a 'good' 16.

The opening bid of 1NT itself is an invitational bid: partner may pass or bid to a different final contract. Opening bids at the one level: 1♣, 1♦, 1♥, 1♠ also fall into the 'yellow' category.



Forcing Bids

A forcing bid is like the green signal on a traffic light...GO. When the captain is unsure about **How High** and/or **Where** the partnership belongs and needs more information, a forcing bid is made. Partner must bid again.

After an opening bid of 1NT, the Stayman convention is an example of a forcing bid. Responder needs to know whether opener has a four-card major to decide **Where** the partnership belong and may also be unsure about **How High**.

WEST	EAST	
1NT	2♣	● How High: Partscore, Game or Slam Where: Notrump, Hearts, or Spades

Opener is forced to bid unless the opponent on opener's right bids or doubles. Responder may then make a sign-off bid, an invitational bid, or another forcing bid.

Marathon Bids

While a forcing bid tells partner to bid, it does not commit the partnership to game. Partner doesn't have to bid again unless you make another forcing bid. This can sometimes make the auction awkward as you have to continually be concerned about the bidding message of each call.

To make the bidding simpler, some bids are *forcing to game*. Both players must continue to bid until at least the game level is reached. They are called *marathon bids* because both players keep bidding until they reach the finish line.

After a marathon bid, **How High** has been determined...at least game...and the partnership can focus its attention on **Where**. Marathon bids allow the captain to explore which game to play without fear of the bidding stopping too soon.

Using standard methods after an opening bid of 1NT, responder's jump to 3♥ or 3♠ is a marathon bid.

WEST	EAST	
1NT	3♠	★ How High: Game Where: Spades or Notrump
1NT	3♥	★ How High: Game Where: Hearts or Notrump

Opener is expected to take the partnership to game in the major suit with three-card or longer support. Otherwise, opener bids 3NT.

This is a simple case since opener's next bid will put the partnership in game but you will encounter further examples as we progress.

2/1 Game Force

How do you know if a bid is sign-off, invitational, forcing, or marathon? You and your partner decide before the game. It's like choosing a song. With a little practice you get used to the sounds. In many cases, your intuition will guide you, and after a while, you will start to see a pattern.

A familiar guideline is that **a new suit by responder is forcing**—unless responder has already passed. If you open 1♦ and partner responds 1♥, you are expected to bid again. Now consider this auction:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	2♣	

East's 2♣ bid is referred to as a *2/1 response*: a non-jump, new suit response at the two level after partner has opened one of a suit. There are six possible 2/1 responses:

	OPENER	RESPONDER
1)	1♦	2♣
2)	1♥	2♣
3)	1♥	2♦
4)	1♠	2♣
5)	1♠	2♦
6)	1♠	2♥

In standard methods, responder's 2/1 response is forcing, but it does not commit the partnership to game. **Playing the 2/1 game forcing system, a 2/1 response is a marathon bid★, forcing to at least game!**

In standard methods, responder needs only about 10 or 11 points to make a 2/1 response since it doesn't commit the partnership to game.

Playing 2/1 game force, responder needs 13 or more points to make a 2/1 response since it commits the partnership to at least game.

An important feature of a bidding system is that it saves bidding space where it is most needed. Notice that a 2/1 response showing 13 or more points does not use up extra room on the bidding ladder. But the marathon message it carries gives us more room to decide **How High** and **Where**.

Consider these two hands:

WEST	EAST
♠ A K 8 6 5	♠ 9 4
♥ A 10 8	♥ 6 2
♦ Q 7	♦ A K 4
♣ 10 4 2	♣ A K Q 9 7 5

Using standard methods, the auction would begin this way:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2NT	Pass	?	

East now has a difficult choice. Game is sure but there could be a slam. East can't rebid 3♣ because it isn't forcing; the 2♣ response didn't commit the partnership to game. If East jumps to 4♣, it might take the partnership beyond the best spot of 3NT. If East manufactures a forcing bid, such as 3♦, the auction could then become confusing. East will probably settle for 3NT and slam will be missed.

If the partnership plays 2/1 as game forcing, the auction can comfortably start this way:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♠	Pass	2♣★	Pass
2NT	Pass	3♣	

The 2♣ bid committed the partnership to game, so East's 3♣ rebid is still forcing. It shows interest in going beyond 3NT since East could raise to 3NT with no interest in any other contract. However, the partnership can still stop in 3NT if West doesn't like clubs.

On the actual deal, West has a good hand for clubs and can raise to 4♣—still forcing. The partnership will have no trouble reaching slam.

Already 2/1 game force is starting to pay dividends! More next issue. ♦