

# The Simplified Club System

## Introduction

Standard American bidding has a number of problems. For example, it is certainly desirable when in a suit contract for the partnership to have eight cards in the trump suit and for one of the partners to have at least five cards in the suit. If each partner has four cards, an opposing player will also have four cards, or more, about one third of the time, substantially weakening the value of the trump suit to declarer. And if the partnership is 4-3 in the trump suit, one of the opponents will have at least as many trump cards as declarer about two thirds of the time. On the other hand, if the partnership is 5-3 or better, the risk of declarer losing control of the trump suit are extremely small.

All of this suggests that there are great advantages in having the opening bidder bid a suit only if he has at least 5 cards in it. Standard American has recognized this in adopting the five card major rule. However, Standard American makes a one no trump bid artificial, indicating extra strength, and thus has no natural bid to indicate a balanced distribution. Instead, Standard American has the better minor rule, making bids of both one club and one diamond artificial, indicating either a biddable minor or a balanced distribution with as few as three cards in the suit bid. This often gives responding bidder a problem and generally complicates the resulting bidding sequences.

A second problem is that an opening bid can have a wide range of points, from 13 to 20. Because a partnership can usually make game with 26 points between them, the responder feels compelled to bid with as few as 6 points for fear of missing a game. On the other hand, responder cannot make a jump raise without enough points, namely 13, to ensure game opposite a minimum opening. Thus, after a one heart – two heart sequence, for example, the partnership knows very little about its strength, and could wind up at the three level with barely more than half the points in the deck.

Moreover, this is not the end of the conventions. New conventions are developed to address the problems with “natural” bidding and to fill holes in the system until the system becomes more conventional than natural: limit raises, new minor forcing, Jacoby no trumps, fourth suit forcing and Jacoby transfers, to name a few. A well known bridge columnist publishes a bidding quiz almost every Friday, each one with three or four bidding situations and a “what do you bid now” question. Think what it says about the complexity of Standard American that this columnist can think up nearly 200 bidding situations a year, year-in and year-out, where the right bid is not obvious. And he doesn’t even use many of the conventions adopted in the name of Standard American bidding.

The Simplified Club System tries to address the basic problems of Standard American by replacing three artificial bids – one club, one diamond, and one no trump – with one: a one club bid used to open all hands with 16 or more high card points or 17 or more points counting distribution. This allows the one no trump bid to be used naturally, indicating opening points and a balanced distribution. Using no trump for balanced hands means that opening bids of a suit indicate at least five cards in the suit in most cases. The one

exception is hands with 4-4-4-1 distribution, the only unbalanced hand with no five card suit, and these are opened with the lowest ranking four card suit.

As the name implies, the Simplified Club System does not try for highly sophisticated, complex bidding sequences which can describe any hand accurately. Rather, it is intended for the player who is no longer a beginner but has not yet developed the level of card sense required for accurate bidding using Standard American methods, to understand the nuances of those 200 hands the columnist comes up with every year. For that player, the Simplified Club System should be fairly easy to learn and should improve bidding accuracy significantly. The experienced tournament player is not likely to find the Simplified Club System useful. However, it has been our experience that the Standard American systems are sufficiently complex that the average or even somewhat above average player makes enough bidding errors to cancel out any benefits of the system over a simple system like the Simplified Club.

In general, the bidding in the Simplified Club System is natural reflecting what is known about the partnership distribution and points. However, a number of useful conventions are used which the Standard American bidder will be familiar with. The conventions include:

Blackwood: This is the standard Blackwood convention in which a bid of four no trump after a suit has been settled on is a request for partner to show how many aces he has, bidding four clubs with all four or none of the aces, four diamonds with one ace, four hearts with two, and four spades with three. Roman Keycard Blackwood could also be used by partnership agreement.

Stayman: There are many versions of the Stayman Convention. The one used in the Simplified Club System is as follows: When a player bids two clubs over a one no trump bid by partner, the partner must rebid (a) two diamonds with no four card major, (b) two of his four card major with one four card major, or (c) two no trump with both four card majors. The partner has no discretion in replying to the two club bid.

Gerber: The form of the Gerber bidding is like Standard American, a bid of four clubs asking for aces. A response of four diamonds means none or four, four hearts means one, four spades means two, and four no trump means three. Under Standard American, Gerber can only be used when no trump has been selected as the "suit" for the partnership. The Simplified Club System expands the use of Gerber slightly. A bid of 4 clubs is Gerber whenever it could not be a natural bid. Examples of where a four clubs bid is Gerber are highlighted in the discussion of specific bidding sequences below. One fairly common example is a jump to four clubs over an opening bid of one of a major.

Cue Bids: Whenever a suit has been decided upon, that is, bid by one partner and raised, either directly or with an intervening bid, by the other partner, the bid of a new suit indicates both strength, at least two points above the minimum number of points the partner could have for the previous bidding, and control of the suit, either an ace or a void. When the partnership has already shown enough points for game, a further cue bid

indicates slam interest. When a partner wants to show strength but does not have any controls that have not already been cue bid, he bids the cheapest no trump, a “suitless cue bid,” but only if it is clear that the no trump bid is not natural, that is, that the hand should not be played in no trump. This suitless cue bid is a unique feature of the Simplified Club system.

When we say that the bidding sequences are natural in light of what is known about point count and distribution, that means that a number of the rules used in Standard American, which one might think of as being natural, are not used. For example, as noted above, a single raise of an opening one level bid in Standard American can be very weak, as few as 6 points. Thus, Standard American requires a game going hand to be jump bid (or to use a waiting bid in another suit if the partnership is using limit raises). With the Simplified Club System, you know the opening bidder has limited points and can pass with a much stronger hand without worrying about missing a game. Thus, a single raise is invitational, asking opener to indicate whether he has a minimum or a maximum, and there is no need for a jump bid convention. Indeed, jump raises of an opening bid are generally preemptive in nature.

Before we start covering the details, let’s spend a little time on the theory. The Simplified Club system is based on the assumption that it takes 20 combined partnership points for declarer to make a one level contract, 22 combined points to make a two level contract, 24 points for a three level contract, 26 points for a four level contract, 28 points for a five level contract, 32 points for a small slam and 36 points for a grand slam. Experience indicates it is a pretty good assumption given the inaccuracies in the point count as a measure of the playing strength of the hand. Looking at just the combined partnership points also ignores the fact that, particularly for no trump hands, the playing strength declines as the strength between the hands becomes unbalanced. A 12 point hand opposite a 12 point hand is odds on to make three no trump, but a 24 point hand opposite a zero point hand is likely to struggle to make one no trump. This is because developing the maximum tricks in a suit frequently depends on being able to lead from the right hand, and as the point count becomes more unbalanced, the ability to lead from the weaker hand when you want to is reduced, particularly in no trump where you cannot use ruffing to get to the weaker hand.

When we talk about points, we mean high card points for a no trump bid and high card points plus distribution for a suit bid. High cards are counted the usual way: four for an ace, three for a king, two for a queen and one for a jack. Distribution points can be calculated in a number of different ways, all of which are essentially equivalent. The way we like is to add a point for each card in a suit above four when you are bidding your suits. When supporting partner’s suit, count one for a doubleton, two for a singleton and three for a void with three card support. With four or more cards in support of partner’s suit, count one for a doubleton, three for a singleton and five for a void. Thus, the following hand:

♠ A Q 10 9 4  
♥ 8  
♦ K J 7 3

♣ K 10 6

would have 13 points bidding no trump (presumably after partner bid hearts) 14 points when first bidding spades or diamonds, 15 points bidding clubs in support of partner's club bid, and 16 points bidding diamonds in support of partner's diamond bid.

A fundamental rule of the Simplified Club System is that a hand should make an opening bid whenever it has at least half the points needed to make game in the chosen suit or no trump. Without this rule, there is the possibility that a hand that could make game would be passed out by the partnership. Thus, a hand with balanced distribution, that is, a no trump hand, should be opened with 12 points, a major suited hand with 13 points, and a minor suited hand with 14 points.

A basic goal of the Simplified Club system is to have most opening bids define the opening bidder's strength within at most a four point range. Thus an opening no trump bid shows 12 to 15 points, and an opening major suit bid shows 13 to 16 points. We fudge the rule a bit for minor suited hands in order to simplify the bidding of strong hands and say the a minor suit opening bid shows 14 to 16 points, just a three point range. All stronger hands are opened with the one club bid, that is, no trump hands with 16 or more (high card) points and major or minor suited hands with 17 or more points (including distribution).

In general, responses to opening bids are constructed so that the partnership knows within two points whether it has strength for game and, in most cases, at least one of the partners knows whether it is a game going hand. For example, if a player opens one heart and the partner bids two clubs (a two over one bid) the response promises eleven points so the partnership must have at least 24 points, within two of game in a major. If either opener or responder has a couple of extra points, that player knows there are points for game.

After an opening suit bid and response, the bidding for the most part follows the standard rules: a bid of a new suit promises at least four cards and is a one round force; rebids of a suit promise at least one more card than previously shown; a bid of the cheapest no trump shows weakness, specifically no more than one point above the previously shown minimum. (After a no trump opening, as in Standard American, most bidding sequences have conventional meanings.) There are no artificial bids, no fourth suit forcing or special meanings for a reverse. Jump bids, which are also one round forcing, and unforced raises of partner's suit are the only bids that promise extra strength, at least two points above the previously shown minimum. If one of the partners knows there are enough points for game, it is that partner's job to keep the bidding open through a series of one round forcing bids until game is reached (or until the partner realizes there is such a misfit that game is unlikely). Once a fit is found, the partners use cue bids to further define their point count and show controls. The application of these rules to specific situations is described in more detail in the sections that follow and is outlined in the Appendix under Section C, Finding a Fit.

The following sections describe the usual bidding sequences following each type of opening bid: one no trump, one club, one of a major, one diamond, and two clubs. The

descriptions are at a summary level. Limited examples of hands are given, and it may be useful for the reader to think of examples and how the sequences would work with them. In the alternate, of course, the reader can download the Simple Club program and practice on an unlimited number of hands.

## **The One No Trump Sequences**

As noted above, a hand with balanced, or no trump, distribution with about half the points needed for a no trump game is opened one no trump in the Simplified Club System. A balanced hand with 12 points opposite another balanced hand with 12 points will most likely be able to make three no trump. Thus, a balanced hand with 12 points should be opened so as not to risk passing out a hand that could make game. Hands with 16 or more high card points are opened one club, and the one no trump bid is used for balanced hands with up to 15 high card points (as noted above, distribution points, if any, should not be counted when bidding no trump.)

A balanced distribution is defined in the Simplified Club System as one of three “shapes”: 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, and 5-3-3-2 where the five card suit is a relatively unattractive minor, say Q-10-x-x-x.\* When you open one no trump, you must have balanced distribution. You are absolutely promising your partner that you have at most one doubleton (and no singletons or voids) and also that you do not have a five card major or a strong five card minor. You are **not** promising a stopper in every suit.

Because balanced distributions are so common (the probability of being dealt a hand with no trump distribution is about 35%) one no trump is the most common natural opening bid in the Simplified Club System.† It is also the opening bid which, other than the big club bid itself, is the most different from Standard American. As a result, a fairly detailed look at the bidding sequences starting with one no trump is called for, even though, compared with Standard American Yellow Card, the bidding is quite natural.

The sequences following a one no trump opening depend first on the responding bidder’s distribution and second on the responder’s point count.

### **Balanced Distribution.**

When the responder also has balanced distribution, he should bid as follows (as with the opening bid, distribution points are not counted):

With 0-11 points, the responder should pass.

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\* Many players would say that a hand with 5-3-3-2 distribution and a relatively weak five card major should be opened one no trump.

† Actually, the most common opening bid is the artificial one club. The distribution of opening bids, not counting preempts, is: one club, 28.2%; one no trump, 25.2%; one of a major, 23.8%; one diamond, 12.3%; and two clubs, 10.5%.

With 11-12 points, the responder should bid two no trump. Opener will pass with 12-13 points. With 14-15 points, the partnership has enough points for game, and the only issue to resolve is whether it should be in no trump or a suit. With no four card major or five card minor, it is very unlikely that there will be an attractive trump suit, and opener will bid three no trump as a shut out. Otherwise, opener will look for an eight card suit fit as follows: If opener has one or more four card majors, he will bid his (lowest) four card major at the three level. Responder will raise to game with four card support and otherwise bid three no trump. If opener bid three hearts and responder does not have four card support but does have a four card spade suit, responder will bid three spades, and opener will raise to game with four card support or bid three no trump without it. If opener has a five card minor, he bids it at the three level. Responder decides whether to bid three no trump or game in the minor. In making that decision, responder should keep in mind that opener's minor suit is not strong and that making five of a minor takes more points than making three no trump. Thus, responder should generally bid the minor suit game only if he has an outside doubleton (which, together with opener's doubleton, adds a couple of points to the partnership point count) and four card or good three card support, say A-x-x, or Q-J-10. These bidding sequences have been described in detail here, but the fact is that they are all quite natural.

With 13-16 points, the responder will bid three no trump directly unless he has a four card major suit. If so, responder will use the Stayman Convention to see if there is a 4-4 major suit fit. With a 4-4 fit, responder will bid game in the major. Otherwise, responder will bid three no trump.

With 17 or more points, the responder bids four clubs as Gerber, asking for aces, either directly or after using Stayman to find a major suit fit. After opener's response to the four club bid, a bid of four no trump is a sign-off. A bid of five no trump after asking for aces is invitational to slam. Opener will bid six with 14-15 points and will otherwise pass. Typically, responder will use the sign off when two aces are missing and will use the invitation with 17-18 or a poor 19 points. With a good 19 points or better, responder should bid six no trump on his own. After asking for kings, five no trump is a sign-off. Thus, responder has a choice of asking for kings or making an invitational bid but not both, and will have to decide whether knowing about point count or knowing about kings is more important in the slam decision. If Stayman reveals a 4-4 major suit fit, responder goes right to Gerber. After asking for aces, a bid of five of a major is also invitational, and opener will pass with 12-13 points.

### **Unbalanced Distributions**

With an unbalanced distribution, the chances are good that you will wind up in a suit contract. Because you will need a little bit more in the way of points to make game, you can afford to pass with up to ten points. Indeed, if your long suit is a minor, you should pass with up to 12 points. What about those rare cases when your partner opens one no trump and you don't have the points but you know the hand will play better in your suit, typically where you have a 6 plus card suit that has little or no chance of running in no

trump. In that case, you bid your suit at the two level, or the three level if it is clubs (so that it will not sound like Stayman). This is a shut out bid, and opener will always pass.

The following descriptions are written in the order in which you classify your hand. In other words, if your hand falls into two categories, you would bid it as the first category described here. For example, if you had a four card major and a five card minor, you would look at the directions for bidding with a four card major.

### Five Card Major

With a five card major and 13-16 points, you know you have the points for game. Your only question is whether opener has at least three card support of your suit. To find that out, you bid three of your major. Opener will bid three no trump with two card support and game in your major with three or more card support. Responder will always pass this bid unless he has a true two suiter (5-5-x-x or 6-5-x-x where the 6 card suit is a minor) as described below. If you have 5-4-x-x distribution, you should pass. You might miss a four-four fit. You might even miss a four-four fit that would play better than three no trump, but bridge is a game of probabilities, and the probabilities are that three no trump is where the hand will play the best.

With 17 or more points, you use the sequences above to find whether the suit will play better in your suit or no trump, and then you use Gerber, cue bids or Blackwood to explore slam possibilities. Note that there is no natural use of the four club bid in these sequences, so four clubs will always be Gerber. In addition to these conventions, where opener has bid four of the major, a bid of five is a slam invitation which opener will accept with a maximum.

What if you have 11-12 points? Now you need to not only whether opener has three plus card support for your major but also whether opener has a maximum opening that can support a game bid with your marginal hand. As mentioned above, a bid of two of your major would be a shut out and a bid of three promises enough points for game opposite a minimum opening. What can you do? The simple answer is to ignore the problem, passing with 11 points and bidding three of the major with twelve. You may occasionally wind up in a four of a major game with only 24 points between you, but that won't happen often. The alternative is to use the Stayman Invitational convention, described below in the optional conventions section.

In the rare case where you have a true two suiter, that is, two five card suits or 6-5-x-x distribution with the five card suit a major and the six card suit a minor, you can bid game in your other five card suit over opener's three no trump bid knowing that opener has at least three card support. That is the only situation where you would bid over partner's three no trump bid. If you are using the Stayman convention for marginal hands and have been able to bid your major at the two level, you may bid your other five card suit at the three level over opener's two no trump bid, again knowing that opener has

three card support. Opener will always pass this bid unless he has a maximum and your second suit is also a major. You would not have enough points for a minor suit game.

### Four Card Major

With one or both four card majors and 13-16 points, responder will use Stayman to see if there is a four-four fit in the majors. If so, responder should bid game in the major directly. (A raise to three would show a five card suit and be invitational if you are using Stayman for marginal hands.) If there is no major suit fit, responder's distribution, being unbalanced (a balanced distribution hand with a four card major was covered above) must either have a five plus card minor or a 4-4-4-1 shape. If there is a five card minor, use the bidding for a five card minor described below. If there is a six plus card minor, follow the rules for bidding a six card suit. If responder has 4-4-4-1 distribution, it is almost always best to be in three no trump. True, there may be a four-four fit in a minor, but by Murphy's law, if you try to find it, it will turn out that opener has a five card suit opposite your singleton and there is no playable trump suit. So with 4-4-4-1 distribution, bid three no trump.

With one or both four card majors and 17 or more points, responder will still use Stayman to see if there is a four-four fit in the majors. If there is, responder will have to jump to four clubs (Gerber) or four no trump (Blackwood). Any other bid would either be a shut out or invitational and would risk missing a possible slam. If there is no four-four fit in the majors, you bid the hand according to your second suit or, if you are 4-4-4-1, as if you had balanced distribution.

### Five Card Minor

With a five card minor and 13-16 points, responder will bid a Stayman two clubs and then bid three of his minor over whatever opener bids. Opener will respond three no trump with two card support. With three plus card support, opener will bid four of the minor with 12-13 points and five of the minor with 14-15 points. As with the five card major sequences, responder will almost always pass a three no trump bid. However, if responder is 5-5 in the minors, he should usually bid game in the other minor. Note that, if you have 5-5 in the minors, any game you are headed for would be in a minor suit, which needs a point or two more than a no trump or major suit game. Thus you would generally start the Stayman sequence with 14 or more points instead of 13 or more. With 13 points or less, you should bid a two diamonds or three club shut out. This is the only time that bidding a suit shut out over one no trump is appropriate without a six card suit. 5-5 in the minors is a difficult distribution to bid, but luckily, it only occurs in about 0.7% of the hands.

After the five card minor sequences ending in three no trump, the responder knows a great deal about opener's distribution. For example, assume responder's suit is diamonds, that is, he bid three diamonds before opener made the three no trump bid. We can construct the following table:

Opener's Response to Stayman	Opener's Distribution			
	Spades	Hearts	Diamonds	Clubs
Two Diamonds	3	3	2	5
Two Hearts	3	4	2	4
Two Spades	4	3	2	4
Two No Trump	4	4	2	3

This knowledge allows responder to make bids that might otherwise seem surprising. For example, where opener's Stayman response was diamonds and responder has a couple of extra points and a good three card club suit, say with two honors, responder can bid five clubs, knowing that opener has a five card club suit, albeit a weak one. This would give the following auction which, at first blush, appears unusual: 1NT – 2 clubs – 2 diamonds – 3 diamonds – 3NT – 5 clubs.

With 17 or more points, responder should be thinking about slam possibilities. He should start out with the same sequences to locate a fit. Over a three no trump bid by opener, responder can use Gerber to help with the decision. Where opener has supported responder's minor, Gerber will be unavailable and, as in Standard American, Blackwood will be of little use. However, responder will have quite specific information about opener's point count and a good idea of opener's distribution and should be able to decide fairly accurately whether slam is in the cards.

#### Six Plus Card Suit

With a suit of six or more cards, you know that you have at least an eight card fit with your partner, and you can be quite sure that you should be playing in a suit. (Those who are familiar with the gambling three no trump bid would say that is an exception to the rule.) Therefore, if you have the points, 13 if your six card suit is a major and 14 if it is a minor, you should bid game in your suit directly. Note that, in the rare case of a 6-5-x-x two suiter where the five card suit is a major and the six card suit is a minor, you would, following the hierarchy rule, treat the hand initially as a five card major to explore whether you had a 5-3 fit or better in the major and, for hands with 11-12 points, whether opener had a maximum or a minimum. You would also generally want to treat a hand with a six card major and 11-12 points as if it had a five card major.

If you have enough points for slam, 19 or more, you can go directly to Gerber to find out about aces. With a marginal hand, 17 or 18 points, you may also want to use some of the bidding techniques above to find out the quality of your fit. In other words, you pretend your six card suit is a five card suit to find out if opener has three or four card support. You would be much more willing to go to slam with 17 points and three or four card support of your six card suit than with only two card support. Note that if opener has raised your three of a major bid to four, you can bid four no trump as Blackwood, raise to five as a slam invitation, or cue bid, also showing slam interest

Let us look at how this bidding would work with a few hands. Because the Simplified Club system is so different from Standard American, in the comments after the hands, we

describe how the hand would be bid using ACBL Standard Yellow Card as an example of Standard American. Of course, we are not ACBL Yellow Card experts, and given the ambiguities in the system, we would not be surprised if there is a difference of opinion about how these hands would be bid under it.

<b>NORTH</b> ♠ A Q 10 9 ♥ 8 7 3 ♦ K J 7 3 ♣ K 6  <b>SOUTH</b> ♠ K 8 6 5 ♥ A K 9 4 ♦ 10 4 ♣ A 7 4	<b>HAND</b>	<b>BID</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>
	North	1 NT	12 – 15 points, balanced
	South	2 C	Stayman, asking for majors. 13+ points
	North	2 S	Four card spade suit, denies four hearts
	South	4 S	Eight card fit, points for game. Not enough to consider slam
	North	Pass	

Under Standard American bidding, North would open one diamond, South would respond one heart, and North would then bid one spade. A raise by South to two spades or three spades would show fewer than 11 or 13 points, respectively, and would mostly end the auction, something South would not want to do. South could jump directly to four spades, but that would probably be taken as a shut out and would miss a slam if North were near the maximum of the 13 – 18 points range shown by his bidding. South's best bid is probably two clubs, fourth suit forcing, to allow South to better gauge North's hand. On the other hand, North could bid one no trump instead of one spade. That would limit North's hand to 14 high card points (because he did not open one no trump) but would usually be interpreted as denying a four card spade suit. South would then bid two spades, a game forcing reverse bid, and North would probably bid four spades, showing his previously hidden suit. In the alternative, South could have responded two no trump to North's opening diamond bid. That would accurately portray South's strength but would usually be interpreted as denying a four card major. Thus, North would most likely bid three no trump, ending the auction. In any event, this is one of those hands where the right bid under Standard American is not clear.

<b>NORTH</b> ♠ K 10 7 5 ♥ K 6 ♦ Q 10 6 ♣ A 8 7 4  <b>SOUTH</b> ♠ 9 ♥ A Q 10 8 7 3 ♦ A K J 7 ♣ K 5	<b>HAND</b>	<b>BID</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>
	North	1 NT	12 – 15 points, balanced
	South	4 C	Gerber, asking for aces. Implies 19 or more points. Responder knows there is at least an eight card fit in Hearts
	North	4 D	One ace
	South	6 H	Eight card fit, points for slam. Three suits have first round control.
	North	Pass	

Under Standard American, the bidding for this hand would go:

HAND	BID	COMMENT
North	1 C	13 – 21 points, no five card major
South	2 H	17 + points, at least four hearts
North	2 S	Four spades, 13 – 18 points
South	3 H	Likely six card suit.

At that point, North has a choice between bidding three no trump or four hearts. Four hearts is definitely the better bid in spite of the slight risk of winding up in a seven card fit and would allow South to push on to slam, but the choice is not completely clear. South might pass out three no trump on the grounds that the apparent misfit makes slam unlikely.

<b>NORTH</b> ♠ K Q 10 ♥ K Q 7 3 ♦ 9 3 ♣ K J 10 6  <b>SOUTH</b> ♠ 8 6 ♥ A 4 ♦ A K 10 7 4 ♣ Q 9 8 2	<b>HAND</b>	<b>BID</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>
	North	1 NT	12 – 15 points, balanced
	South	2 C	Stayman, asking for majors. 13+ points (or 11-12 and five card major if playing Stayman invitational)
	North	2 H	Four card Heart suit, denies four Spades
	South	3 D	Five card suit, asking for three card support
	North	3 NT	Only doubleton support
	South	Pass	Points for game but not enough for slam.

South knows that North has seven cards in the majors and exactly two diamonds and therefore must have four clubs. Thus, five clubs is a possible bid. However, making five clubs would require North to have an early stopper in spades and some club honors. With that holding, three no trump is a better bet, and in the Simplified Club system (as in Standard American) there is a strong preference for bidding three no trump instead of

game in a minor. Nevertheless, this is a case where there could be discussion under the Simplified Club system about which is the better bid.

The Standard American bidding on this hand would start out: North bids one club; South bids two no trump showing his strength and denying a four card major; and North bids three no trump, knowing there is no heart fit. South might be tempted to respond one diamond “up the line” to North’s opening bid, but that would give South a problem when North bids one heart. Bidding diamonds or clubs below the four level would show a hand much weaker than South has. A fourth suit forcing bid is not available at the one level. Bidding a no trump game directly would be risky without knowing about the spades, but that would be South’s best option.

<b>NORTH</b> ♠ K Q 10 ♥ 9 3 ♦ K Q 7 3 ♣ K J 10 6  <b>SOUTH</b> ♠ 8 6 ♥ A K 10 7 4 ♦ A 4 ♣ Q 9 8 7			
	HAND	BID	COMMENT
	North	1 NT	12 – 15 points, balanced
	South	3 H	Five card Heart suit, 13+ points
	North	3 NT	Only doubleton support
	South	Pass	Knows North has at least 3 Spades and 3 Diamonds so is comfortable with 3NT

This is the same hand as the last one with hearts and diamonds switched. This time, South does not know about North’s four clubs and is not tempted to bid five clubs. Make one of the spades a fifth club, however, and South will run to five clubs over three no trump. In Standard American bidding, the two no trump response is unavailable because of the heart suit. South should respond one heart to North’s opening diamond. North would have a choice of bidding one no trump or two clubs, and South might bid clubs or rebid hearts. In any case, North would likely wind up bidding three no trump, ending the auction.

### The One Club Sequences

In the Simplified Club System, all balanced hands with 16 or more high card points\* and unbalanced hands with 17 or more points (counting distribution) are opened one club. Responder bids one diamond with fewer than seven points. With seven points or more,

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\* If you ever get a hand with balanced distribution and 25 or more points, forget one club and bid two no trump directly. If you play bridge three or four hours a week, you should get a hand like that about once every ten years. The two no trump opening is forcing to game. With 0-5 points, responder will bid game directly. With 5-8, responder will bid a five card major at the three level or three clubs as Stayman. These bids are slam tries. Opener’s responses to Stayman are the same as at the two level except that, with both majors, opener will bid three hearts. Opener’s response to three of a major will be three no trump with two card support and four of the major with three plus card support.

responder will bid one no trump with balanced distribution and a five plus card suit with unbalanced distribution, at the two level if it is a minor. The problem distribution as usual is 4-4-4-1. With that distribution, responder bids his (best) four card minor.

### Bidding Sequences over One Diamond

After a one diamond response, opener bids according to his distribution and point count.

With balanced distribution, opener bids one no trump with 16-19 points. Responder follows the bidding sequences for a weak no trump opening with the point count requirements reduced by four.

With 20-23 points and balanced distribution, opener would bid two no trump over one diamond. With 0-3 points, responder will pass. With 4-6 points, responder will bid (a) three no trump with balanced distribution; (b) three of a five card major, opener bidding 3NT with two card support and game in the major with three plus card support; (c) game in a six plus card suit; or (d) bid three of the better minor, which may be a four card suit with the old problematical 4-4-4-1 distribution. After a 3NT response to a five card major bid, responder will usually pass, but will bid a five card minor at the four level if he has one. After a minor suit response to 2NT, opener will bid a four card major, raise the minor with four card support or, if neither of those bids are available, 3NT. None of those bids are forcing, and opener will generally pass with a minimum hand.

If opener has unbalanced distribution, he will bid his best suit over the one diamond response. A bid of a major promises a five card suit. A bid of a minor promises a five card suit or 4-4-4-1 distribution. If opener has 17-20 points, he bids his suit at the cheapest level. The partnership then knows that the chances of making game are about zero, and the goal is to find a reasonable suit, i.e. at least seven cards between the two hands, and pass. Thus, responder will pass one of a major with two card support and two of a minor with three card support. Without even that support, responder will bid a five card suit or, if he has none, the cheapest no trump. Opener will (a) pass with two card support, but if not, (b) rebid his suit with six plus cards, but if not, (c) bid his second suit with a true two suiter (5-5-x-x or better) but if not, (d) bid (or pass) a no trump bid.

If opener has 21 points or more, he jump bids in his suit. This is a one round force. Responder will make a weak bid – a single raise with three plus card support or the cheapest no trump without that support – with 0-3 points. With 4-6 points, responder will bid a new suit or jump to game in opener's suit. Over a major suit bid, responder could also jump to three no trump and would likely do so with a doubleton or less in opener's suit and no good five card suit of his own. Over a minor suit bid, three no trump is a weak bid (not a jump), and responder will usually temporize with a suit bid at the three level, which could be of a weak four card suit. A new suit bid is a game force, and opener will (a) raise responder's suit with four card support; (b) re-bid his suit with six plus cards; (c) bid his second suit with unbalanced distribution, 5-4-x-x or better; or (d) bid three no trump with semi-balanced distribution, e.g. balanced except for shortness in responder's suit.

## Bidding Sequences over One of a Major

When responder bids one of a major, he is promising (a) a five plus card suit and (b) at least seven points. The partnership job is, first, to find an eight card or better fit, preferably in a major, or settle on no trump if there isn't one and, second, to find out if the partnership has the couple of extra points above the minimum so as to be able to make game. To find a fit, the partnership uses normal bidding practices, namely:

1. If a partner realizes there is an eight card or better fit in the other partner's suit, raise it.
2. If you re-bid your suit without support, you are promising one more card in the suit than you promised before.
3. With balanced or semi-balanced (e.g. balanced except for shortness in partner's suit) distribution and no un-bid five plus card suit, bid no trump.
4. A new suit should not be bid without at least four cards.

Note that, if opener bids a suit over one of a major, he is promising at least five cards in that suit, because, without a five card suit and without support, he would be balanced or semi-balanced and would bid no trump.

Before a fit is found, it is usually the case that one of the partners knows if there are enough points for game, responder with 9 or more points or opener with 19 or more points. If you are the partner who knows that, you should make forcing bids, namely a bid of a previously unbid suit or a jump bid in a previously bid suit, as required to keep partner from passing below game. A bid of a new suit is forcing for one round but ambiguous as to points. A jump bid of a previously bid suit shows a couple of extra points over those previously shown.

If you are at the minimum end of your point range (i.e. 7-8 points for responder, 17-18 points for opener) you do not know if there are the points for game and should make a weak bid. The weak bids are:

- i. rebidding your rebiddable suit at the current level
- ii. if forced, rebidding your rebiddable suit up one level (not a jump)
- iii. supporting one of partner's suits at the current level
- iv. bidding the cheapest available NT
- v. and, of course, passing.

Bidding the cheapest no trump and passing always indicate minimum points. The other weak bids are ambiguous as to points but are non-forcing and may be passed by partner with minimum points even with a seven card fit.

As a general bidding rule, if you do not know there are points for game but have two extra points not previously shown, you should bid according to the normal bidding practices above, a bid that may look like a weak bid or may be forcing. That general rule has no applicability here because, if the bidding has gone one club – one of a major, the

partner with a couple of extra points will know that there are enough points for game and will always make a forcing bid.

After a suit fit has been found, strength is indicated by making strong bids or weak bids. When the bidder's partner has not limited the strength of his hand, a weak bid means a minimum hand within the previously defined range. Thus, a weak bid as the first bid after a suit has been selected means 7-8 points for responder and 16-17 high card points or 17-18 points counting distribution for opener. After the bidder's partner has made a weak bid, limiting the strength of his hand, the bidder decides whether to stop short of game or bid game in the chosen suit, and a strong bid is a try for slam.

When a suit has been bid and raised, the cheapest return to the selected suit is weak. All other bids are strong. The bid of a new suit is a cue bid showing an ace or a void in the suit. A no trump bid is strong for point count but denies any aces or voids other than those already shown. When a suit has been first bid at the two level, a raise to three is weak, and a jump raise to four is strong. A single raise to the two level of a suit bid at the one level is neither weak nor strong.

Over a (natural) one no trump bid, the partnership uses a modification of the standard no trump sequences to both decide on a suit (or no trump) and indicate the strength of their hands. The modifications are all logical changes to reflect what the partnership already knows about its strength and distribution. For example, with a one no trump opening bid, the partnership may have as few as 12 points total, and responder knows that opener has no more than 15 points. Thus, a shut-out bid – the cheapest available suit bid – is both needed and appropriate, and other bids, such as Stayman, have to cover both strong hands and hands that are invitational to game. After a 1 club - 1 of a major – 1 no trump sequence, the opening bidder has not limited his hand, so a shut-out bid would be inappropriate, and the partnership has enough points to reach the three level, so a shut-out bid is not necessary. We can make what used to be shut-out bids invitational and then make other bids which were invitational forcing to game.

Thus, after a 1 club - 1 of a major – 1 no trump sequence, we can make the cheapest available suit bid invitational, showing minimum points (7-8), a 5+ card suit (6+ cards if a rebid of the major) and, by implication from a decision not to bid 2NT, an unbalanced hand. With a minimum (16-17 high card points) opener will (a) if responder bid a new suit, pick the best option between passing, returning to opener's original suit and bidding 2NT and (b) if responder has rebid his suit showing 6+ cards, choose between passing and bidding 2NT. As with the standard no trump sequences, a direct raise by responder to 2NT is also invitational, but here, invitational means 7-8 points and 5-3-3-2 distribution. Opener will pass with a minimum. Any other bid by opener is strong (18+ high card points) and forcing to game. Opener will bid three no trump with fewer than 24 points. With 24+ points, opener will usually bid 4 clubs as Gerber, but could bid a suit at the three level which would be a cue bid showing a control and asking responder to show a control, if he has one, or to bid 3NT if not.

Any other bid by responder after a 1 club - 1 of a major – 1 no trump sequence, specifically Stayman or three of a major, is strong (9+ high card points) and forcing to game. The Stayman sequences are the same as for a one no trump opening, except, of course, for the point count requirements, and the three of a major bid is the same except that, if it is a rebid of the responder's initial major, it promises a 6+ card suit, and opener should raise to game with two card support and bid 3NT otherwise. (If opener bids anything else, it is a cue bid and a slam try, implying support of the major and over 20 points. If opener bids game, showing 17-20 points, and responder bids on, that is also a slam try, indicating 13+ points.) Note that responder should not bid game directly with a 6+ card suit because that makes exploring for slam very difficult when opener has a very strong hand.

The cases where responder bids one no trump, either directly (1 club – 1NT) or in a 1 club – 1 heart – 1 spade – 1 NT sequence, are described below in the “Bidding Sequences Over a One No Trump Response” section. Responder may also bid no trump when opener has bid a lower ranking suit at the two level in response to responder's one of a major bid. With less than three card support and with 5-3-3-2 distribution or with 5-4-3-1 or 5-4-2-2 distribution where the four card suit is lower ranking than opener's suit and would have to be bid at the three level (a strong bid), responder will want to bid two no trump with 7-8 points. The 2NT bid is weak, and opener can pass with a weak hand.

With a strong hand, responder should bid 3NT over opener's two level bid with 5-3-3-2 distribution where the doubleton is in opener's suit. Otherwise, responder should bid his second suit, at the three level if necessary, before bidding no trump. The bid of a new suit at the three level is strong.

### Bidding Sequences Over a One No Trump Response

When responder has balanced distribution and 7+ points, he bids one no trump over a one club opening. Opener uses the modified no trump sequences described above, counting as a minimum hand one with 16-17 high card points or 17-18 points counting distribution. In deciding on his responses, responder will classify his hand as a minimum with 7-8 points. So, for example, opener will raise one no trump to two no trump with a balanced, minimum hand. Responder would pass with a minimum, bid three no trump with 9-13 points, and use cue bidding or Gerber as a slam try with 14 or more points.

The bidding sequences are essentially the same when the bidding has gone 1 club – 1 heart – 1 spade – one no trump. The only real difference is that opener's rebid of spades at the three level shows a 6+ card suit instead of a five card suit, consistent with the general bidding guidelines.

### Bidding Sequences Over Two of a Minor

If responder has an unbalanced hand without a five card major, he will either have 4-4-4-1 distribution or a five plus card minor. With 5-3-3-2 distribution, responder will almost

always bid one no trump. But with 4-4-4-1 distribution, a six plus card minor, or a two suited hand (at least 5-4-x-x) with a five card minor, responder will bid two of his (better) minor. Opener will raise with four card support, to three with a minimum and to four with a couple of extra points. Responder will then decide whether to go to game, pass the three bid with a minimum, or cue bid to show slam interest. With less than four card support, opener will bid a suit at the two level. In the case where opener's suit is clubs and responder bid two diamonds, opener faces the problem that the bid of a new suit at the three level would be strong, indicating 19 or more points. Thus, with a minimum and the only biddable suit being clubs, opener would ordinarily bid 2NT, although with a 6+ card suit, he may bid three clubs even with a minimum, recognizing that the playing strength of such a hand often exceeds its point count.

Responder will raise opener's suit bid with four card support (or bid three clubs over 2NT with four plus clubs). Otherwise, he will rebid his suit with six or more cards and will bid the cheapest no trump with semi-balanced distribution (4-4-4-1 or 5-4-3-1 with the short suit having been bid by opener. Obviously, if opener has bid 2NT and responder has a minimum short in clubs, a pass is in order. With a two suiter or three suiter (5-4-2-2, 5-5-x-x, or 5-4-4-0), responder will bid a second suit. This tells opener that responder's first suit has five cards, and opener can now support it with three cards. Opener can also rebid his suit with five cards, and should do so if it is a major, giving responder a chance to show support with three cards.

At this point in the bidding, the partners should have a good idea about each other's distribution and point count. Based on that, they should be able to select the best contract.

Let's look at how this all works with a few hands:

<b>NORTH</b> ♠ K Q 6 ♥ 9 3 ♦ A K Q 7 3 ♣ K 10 6  <b>SOUTH</b> ♠ 9 7 4 ♥ A J 8 7 4 ♦ 10 4 ♣ Q 8 7	<b>HAND</b>	<b>BID</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>
	North	1 C	17+ points or 16 high card points
	South	1 H	7 + points, five plus card Heart suit
	North	2D	Five plus card Diamond suit, 17+ points, at most two Hearts.
	South	2 NT	Minimum hand (7-8 points), exactly five Hearts, denies a four card Spade suit.
	North	Pass	Minimum hand. No fit in Spades, Hearts or Diamonds, fit in Clubs possible but unlikely. Insufficient points for 3NT.

If the partnership understood that a no trump opening promised a stopper in each suit, Standard American bidding would likely go: North, one diamond; South, one heart; North, two Diamonds; South, two Hearts (showing 6-10 points and a five card suit); North, two no trump (invitational to game); South, pass. If the partnership allowed a no trump bid without a stopper in each suit (Standard American does not require it) the

bidding might be: North, one no trump; South, two diamonds (Jacoby transfer); North, two hearts; South, pass. That bidding would have the advantage of having the weak hand be dummy, but two hearts is a slightly less desirable contract compared with two no trump.

<b>NORTH</b> ♠ K 10 ♥ A Q 10 7 3 ♦ K 9 ♣ K J 10 6  <b>SOUTH</b> ♠ Q 9 7 4 ♥ J 8 ♦ A 10 5 4 ♣ 8 7 4	<b>HAND</b>	<b>BID</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>
	North	1 C	17+ points or 16 high card points
	South	1 NT	7 + points, balanced hand, no five card major
	North	2 H	Five plus card Heart suit, 17 - 18 points.
	South	2 S	Four card Spade suit, ambiguous as to strength, one round force. A pass would also be acceptable for a minimum hand with a seven card fit.
	North	2 NT	Denies 4 card Spade support. Unwilling to bid 3 Clubs with a minimum, semi-balanced hand.
	South	Pass	Minimum hand (7-8 points) opposite minimum hand, unwilling to go to the three level (e.g. 3 Diamonds)

<b>NORTH</b> ♠ A Q 10 ♥ A K J 7 3 ♦ 8 7 3 ♣ A 6  <b>SOUTH</b> ♠ K 8 ♥ 10 9 6 ♦ K 10 6 4 2 ♣ K 7 4	<b>HAND</b>	<b>BID</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>
	North	1 C	17+ points or 16 high card points
	South	2 D	8+ points, five card Diamond suit (or 4-4-4-1 with a singleton Club)
	North	2 H	17+ points, five card Heart suit
	South	3 H	Eight card fit
	North	3 S	Cue bid: 19+ points, control of Spades
	South	3 NT	Extra points (9+) but no controls to show
	North	4 H	No additional points to show (shows 19-20).
	South	Pass	No more than 30 combined points, stop at game.

<b>NORTH</b> ♠ A K 10 8 7 ♥ A J 8 3 ♦ - ♣ A J 10 6	<b>HAND</b>	<b>BID</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>
	North	1 C	17+ points or 16 high card points
	South	1 D	0 - 6 points
	North	1 S	17+ points, five card Spade suit

<b>SOUTH</b> ♠ 9 ♥ 10 9 6 ♦ K 10 6 4 2 ♣ K 7 4	South	1 NT	4 – 6 points, at most one spade
	North	2 C	Bad hand for no trump, worth a try at a second suit
	South	Pass	Seven card fit is acceptable.

## The One of a Major Sequences

With 13 – 16 points and a five or more card major, one should open with one of the major. The responsive bidding to one of a major is very much like standard American except that responder knows opener has no more than 16 points. In standard American, a hand opening with a one level bid can have 20 points and responder feels compelled to bid with as few as 6 points for fear of missing a game. In the Simplified Club System, responder can be comfortable passing with less than ten points, and will often pass with a mediocre ten.

If responder has three or more card support, the major is almost always the right trump suit\*, and the only real question is whether the partnership has enough points for game. If responder has a good ten points or more, game is at least a possibility, and responder will raise opener to two of the major. In the Simplified Club System, this is a one round forcing bid. Opener will show a maximum (15-16 points) by bidding a cue bid, or 2NT if there is no cue bid available. With a minimum, he will simply raise the major suit to three. Responder will then have an accurate count of opener's points and can decide whether to go to game, pass, or cue bid as a slam try. Because all hands with support and game possibilities respond to a one of a major opening with a raise to two, raises to three or four of the major can be used as preemptive bids.

If responder does not have at least three card support, the partnership has to locate a trump suit, and try to do so without getting to too high a level. If responder has 0-7 points, he should pass. The partnership may already be at too high a level, and if the opponents do not take you out with their own bid, they have probably missed an opportunity for at least a part score. If responder has 8-10 points, the partnership can likely afford to get to the two level. Nevertheless, responder should pass with a doubleton. The partnership will have more than half the trumps, and finding a better fit below the three level is unlikely. With a singleton or void in opener's suit, responder must bid, but should do so at the one level, either one spade over one heart with a five plus card spade suit or one no trump. Over a one spade response, opener can (a) with three card support, pass with a minimum or raise to two spades with a maximum, (b) rebid his heart suit with six plus cards (responder will pass but can rebid spades if void in hearts with 6+ spades), (c) bid a new five card suit at the two level (responder will pass with 2+ card support and otherwise will rebid his 6+ card suit), or (d) bid one no trump (responder will pass or bid a 6+ card suit). Over a one no trump response, opener will (a) with a semi-balanced hand (5-3-3-2 or even 5-4-2-2), pass with a minimum and bid 2NT

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\* There may be cases, particularly with weak three card support and a good six or seven card suit, where responder will want to pretend, at least for one round, that he has a doubleton in partner's major.

with a maximum (b) rebid a 6+ card major (responder will generally pass, even with a void), or (c) bid a new suit at the two level, which could be a four card suit (responder will pass with three card support, bid his own 5+ card suit at the two level, or bid 2NT).

When responder has 11-12 points, the partnership can likely afford to get to the three level and might even have a game if opener has a maximum. Responder should bid a five card suit, at the two level if necessary, or one no trump. As noted in the previous paragraph, opener will raise a one level bid to two with a maximum and support, and responder will generally raise to game, e.g. 2 spades to four, 2 no trump to three. If opener makes one of the other bids, which could be a maximum, responder must be careful not to make a weak bid, namely the cheapest rebid of responder's suit (or no trump, if that is what responder bid) that could be passed with a maximum hand. Any other bid shows at least 11 points, and opener should be driving to game with a maximum, i.e., 15-16 points. Some examples:

<b>NORTH</b> ♠ K Q 10 5 3 ♥ 9 3 ♦ K 8 7 ♣ K 10 4  <b>SOUTH</b> ♠ 8 6 ♥ A K 10 8 6 4 ♦ A 4 ♣ Q 9 8	<b>HAND</b>	<b>BID</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>
	South	1H	13 – 16 points, 5+ card Heart suit
	North	1S	Five card Spade suit, 8 to 12 points
	South	2H	6+ Hearts – non-forcing bid suggests weakness
	North	3H	Two card support of Hearts, 11 to 12 points. (with fewer points, would have passed – a raise after a non-forcing bid strongly suggests strength in the upper end of the previously shown range.) Invites game.
	South	4H	15 points (counting distribution) is in the maximum range. Accepts game invitation.

<b>NORTH</b> ♠ K Q 10 5 3 ♥ 9 3 ♦ K 7 ♣ K Q 10 4  <b>SOUTH</b> ♠ 8 6 ♥ A K 10 8 6 ♦ A Q 10 4 ♣ 9 8	<b>HAND</b>	<b>BID</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>
	South	1H	13 – 16 points, 5+ card Heart suit
	North	1S	Five card Spade suit, 8 to 12 points
	South	2D	5-4 in Hearts and Diamonds
	North	2NT	Not a return to NT, so shows 11-12 points, 5-3-3-2, 5-4-2-2 or 5-4-3-1 distribution, at most two Hearts, three Diamonds. Promises stoppers in Spades and Clubs.
	South	Pass	13 points (not counting distribution in no trump) is a minimum hand.

A bid by responder at the two level promises at least five cards and 11 points. It is forcing for one round. With a minimum, opener will (a) raise responder's suit with three or better card support, (b) rebid his suit with 6+ cards, (c) bid his second suit, or (d) bid

two no trump with a semi-balanced hand. Responder can pass any of those bids except for the bid of a new suit and, with fewer than 13 points, should make a weak bid, e.g. a return to opener's first suit, a single raise of the second suit or a bid of 2NT, if he must bid. With a maximum, opener knows that the partnership has enough points for game when responder bids at the two level and should make a forcing bid – a jump raise, a jump rebid, or a new suit bid – with an eye towards bidding to game. With a semi-balanced hand, opener could bid 3NT directly over a two level response.

When responder has 13 or more points, the partnership should be headed for game. Responder must bid at the two level for fear of being passed out. It is also responder's duty to drive to game, continuing to make forcing bids until game is reached (or until he finds such a horrible misfit that game is unlikely). As noted above, forcing bids are bids of a new suit, jump raises and cue bids. Any other bid can be passed out by a minimum hand.

We note here that there is one case where the natural bid of a new suit is not a one round forcing bid, specifically the one of a major, one no trump, two of a minor, two of respondent's five plus card suit, for example, one spade, one no trump, two clubs, two hearts. As described in the paragraph on 8-10 point responder hands, that sequence shows responder has fewer than two spades, fewer than three clubs, at least a five card heart suit and 8-10 points. Opener can, and often will, pass that bid. If responder has a five card suit and 11+ points, responder should bid the five card suit directly at the two level to show his strength and length even if he thinks the hand should ultimately play in no trump.

With 16 or more points, responder should be thinking about slam. The bidding starts out the same as with 13 points, but the responder keeps making forcing bids until he decides on slam or not.

Some examples:

<b>NORTH</b> ♠ A 10 6 5 3 ♥ 9 ♦ K 7 3 ♣ K Q 10 4  <b>SOUTH</b> ♠ 8 ♥ A K 10 6 5 ♦ A 10 ♣ A J 9 8	<b>HAND</b>	<b>BID</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>
	North	1S	13 – 16 points, 5+ card Spade suit
	South	2H	Five card Heart suit, at most two Spades, 11+ points
	North	2NT	5 spades, at most 2 hearts, 13-14 points, no other 5 card suit
	South	3C	4+ card club suit, one round force
	North	4C	4 card club support
	South	4D	Ace of Diamonds, interest in slam, i.e. 18+ points (with no slam interest, would have bid 5 clubs.)
	North	4S	Ace of spades, interest in slam (because points were previously limited, cue bid does not promise extra points, but suggests nice features, in this case, an outside singleton and very good club support. Note: denies control of Hearts.)
	South	6C	Accepts the suggestion – partner’s ace of spades and doubleton heart suggest excellent playing strength.

<b>NORTH</b> ♠ A K Q ♥ 9 3 ♦ K Q 8 7 5 ♣ Q 10 4  <b>SOUTH</b> ♠ 8 6 ♥ A K 10 8 6 ♦ A 10 4 ♣ K J 8	<b>HAND</b>	<b>BID</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>
	South	1 H	5+ card heart suit, 13 – 16 points
	North	2 D	5+ card diamond suit, at most 2 hearts, 11+ points
	South	3 D	3+ card support, still 13-16 points
	North	3 S	First round control of spades, 13+ points
	South	4 H	Ace of hearts, 15-16 points, denying control of clubs
	North	6 D	16-19 points (with 20+ points, would have tried for grand slam) taking a bit of a chance on the club suit.

### The One Diamond Sequences

The bidding sequences beginning with one diamond are essentially the same as the one of a major sequences with one big difference: a player opening one diamond could have 4-4-4-1 distribution. Responder should make the working assumption that opener has a five card diamond suit but should be alert to the possibility that the suit only has four cards. Where this makes the biggest difference is that, after a raise of one diamond to

two, the bid of a new suit by opener is not a cue bid. Rather, it is the bid of a four card suit and signals that opener has 4-4-4-1 distribution. Responder will return to diamonds with a four card suit or support opener's second suit with four card support. With neither, responder will bid his own suit, with opener retreating to no trump if responder's suit is his singleton. (Some people might prefer to adopt the convention that, after a one diamond – two diamond sequence, the bid of a new suit by opener indicates 4-4-4-1 distribution, and the new suit is the opener's singleton. Responder then picks the suit, or no trump, in which the hand is to be played. This would obviously be a matter of partnership agreement.) With a legitimate 5+ card diamond suit, opener would, after a one diamond-two diamond sequence, raise to three diamonds with a minimum or would bid two no trump, the "suitless cue bid," to show strength.

Another difference relates to the preference for major suit games. If opener bids one heart and responder has 3 card support and a five card spade suit, responder would generally show the heart support rather than bidding spades. The bias is reversed when the opening is one diamond. With support for diamonds and a five card major, responder should usually ignore the diamond support and bid the major.

Finally, because of the probability that the hand will be played in a minor suit and the extra high card points needed for a minor suit game, opener should generally have 14 points to open one diamond. Of course, if opener has, for example, two four card majors, he may decide that the hand is not likely to play in a minor and no extra points are needed. This is one of those areas of judgment.

## **The Two Club Sequences**

The two club sequences are driven by the strong preference for major suit and no trump contracts complicated by the fact that the bidding starts at the two level. Because of that, if you have 5-3-3-2 distribution with a five card club suit, you will most often open one no trump rather than two clubs. A two club opening bid virtually promises 5-4-x-x or more unbalanced distribution or 4-4-4-1 distribution with a singleton diamond. Because the bidding starts at the two level and there is a substantial chance of winding up in a minor suit contract, opener should have 14 to 16 points.

If responder has fewer than nine points, he should pass, even with little or no club support. The partnership may already be at too high a level, and the chances of getting too high before finding a fit are just too great to risk it. If responder does not have club support, he should hope the opponents bid or, if they don't, that they got shut out of a good contract.

If responder has nine or more points and a five plus card major, he should bid two of the major even with club support, exploring the possibility of a major suit fit. If opener has three card or better support, he should raise responder's suit. Responder will pass with a minimum hand and raise to game with eleven or more points. If responder bid hearts and opener cannot support hearts but has a four card spade suit, he bids two spades, again searching for a major suit fit. Responder knows that the spade suit is only four cards

because opener did not bid spades first. With eleven or more points, responder will bid three spades with four plus cards support, forcing to game (opener will cue bid if appropriate or bid game in spades without any features to show) or will bid three no trump with a semi-balanced hand. If responder cannot do either of those bids, he either can support clubs (and should do so above the three level if he doesn't want to be passed out) or he has six or more hearts and can rebid them or has a freakish two suiter in diamonds and hearts, in which case he can bid diamonds at the three level. If responder only has nine or ten points, he has to make a weak bid, either passing opener's spade bid with at least three card support, bidding three clubs with at least two card support or bidding two no trump. Opener should pass any of these bids.

If opener cannot support responder's major or bid two spades but has a semi-balanced hand, he should bid two no trump. If opener is not semi-balanced, he either has a six plus card club suit, in which case he should bid three clubs, or has a four card suit lower ranking than responder's suit, in which case he should bid that suit at the three level. At that point, responder will often be in a position to pick the final contract. With a six card major, responder can re-bid it at the three level, and opener will bid three no trump with a singleton or four of the major with a doubleton.

What if responder has nine or more points and no five card major but a five card diamond suit? If responder has only nine or ten points and at least two card club support, he probably should pass, but with eleven or more points or with fewer than two clubs, he should bid two diamonds. The subsequent bidding is just as it is for a bid of two of a major by responder except that opener will always be able to show a second suit at the two level. Note that if opener has 4-4-4-1 distribution and responder has a diamond suit, either the hand will play reasonably well in no trump or responder has a two suiter and a fit in his second suit can be found.

If responder is semi-balanced with 11 plus points and no five card suit, he should bid two no trump. Opener will rebid clubs with a six plus card suit or will bid a four card suit at the three level. If neither of those bids is available, or if opener thinks his long club suit can be run or doesn't like his four card suit, he should bid three no trump. At that point, responder will usually be in a position to pick the final contract.

If responder does not have a five card suit in diamonds or a major and is not semi-balanced, he must have at least four card support for opener's club suit. With twelve or more points, game in clubs should be reasonable, and responder should raise opener's two clubs bid to three. That bid is forcing. Opener will cue bid with 15 to 16 points and a control to show. Responder will then cue bid with slam interest, generally with sixteen or more points, or will bid game otherwise. If responder has fewer than twelve points, he can pass or make a preemptive bid in clubs over the three level.

## **Defensive Bidding**

The Simplified Club system does not have any special rules for defensive bidding, and the Standard American practices are generally adopted. This makes sense because any opening bid by the opponents takes away the one club opening that is the essential cornerstone of the Simplified Club system.

In particular, overcalls can be made with a good suit with as few as 8 points and are limited to no more than 16. With 17 or more points, a take out double followed by the long suit bid is used, effectively a substitute for the one club opening. Take out doubles require 13+ points counting distribution as a supporting hand and imply shortness in opponent's suit and no biddable. i.e. 5+ card, suit (except for the 17+ point hand). Given that the opponents have indicated a suit to attack in no trump, a one no trump overcall should be stronger than a one no trump opening, 15 to 16 points, and promises a solid stopper in the suit bid by the opponents. Preemptive bids are unchanged: a jump overcall to the two level is a standard weak two bid, and a jump overcall to the three level is a standard seven card suit preempt. The partnership can use Michaels cue bids and unusual no trumps by agreement. Those bids are now included in Standard American bidding.

### **Competitive Bidding**

In general, interference bids by the opponents are ignored. There are, of course, times when they cannot be. For example, any bid by opponents over a one club opening eliminates the possibility of a one diamond response but also makes available another bid, the double. When the opponents bid over one club, responder (a) passes with six or fewer points, (b) bids a suit or no trump with 7-8 points and (c) doubles (or redoubles) with 9+ points.

Similarly, a suit bid by opponents over a one no trump opening takes away Stayman. A double of such a bid shows game going points and asks opener to bid a four card or better suit, and two no trump if his only long suit is the one the opponents bid.

Cue bidding the opponent's suit and negative doubles can be adopted from Standard American but are not a necessary part of the Simplified Club system. That is, if the partners agree, a cue bid of opponent's suit shows support for opener's suit and a game going hand, and a negative double (i.e. a double of an intervening opponent bid at the one or two level) shows at least four cards in each un-bid major.

### **Preemptive Bidding**

The Simplified Club system does not address preemptive bidding. However, with all strong hands being opened one club, using weak twos is a natural addition to the bidding arsenal. The guidelines for opening bids or weak jump overcalls at the three or four level can be adopted from Standard American.

## Optional Conventions

There are a number of situations where the basic Simplified Club system is inadequate to give the bidders enough information to select the best contract. A number of conventions have been developed to help address these situations. Because they are not natural bids, it is recommended that they not be adopted when first using the Simplified Club system. However, as you become more comfortable with Simplified Club bidding, you may find some of these conventions useful.

### Stayman Invitational

As noted in the description of no trump bidding, if the person responding to a one no trump opening has 11 to 12 points and a five card major, they want to know both whether the no trump bidder has three card support of the major suit and whether the no trump bidder has a maximum hand supporting a game level contract. The basic Simplified Club system does not provide the tools for that.

The Stayman Invitational convention is designed to address that specific situation. If you have a five card major and 11 to 12 points, you bid two clubs over a one no trump opening. If opener responds with a suit lower ranked than yours (2 diamonds, or 2 hearts when your suit is spades) you bid your suit at the two level. Opener can tell exactly what this means – you have a five card suit because you bid it even though four card support was denied and you have fewer than 13 points because you did not jump directly to three. And you must have more than ten points because you didn't make a shut out bid. He will therefore (a) pass with 3 card support and a minimum, (b) bid 2NT with two card support and a minimum, (c) bid game in your major with three card support and a maximum or (d) bid 3NT with two card support and a maximum. If opener bids your major, either in reality or virtually, by bidding two no trump, you raise to three. This is just what it sounds like, an invitational bid, and opener will raise to game with a maximum.

The case we haven't covered is where opener responds two spades to Stayman and your suit is hearts. This presents a problem. You do not want to bid three hearts because the hand probably should be played in two no trump if opener has a doubleton heart and a minimum hand. To solve this problem, we have a truly artificial bid. Over the two spade bid, you bid two no trump. With a minimum hand, opener will pass with a doubleton heart and bid three hearts with three card support. With a maximum, opener will bid game in no trump with a doubleton heart or in hearts with three card support. Bidding no trump to show a heart suit is certainly unnatural, and this is a difficult sequence to remember at the table. However, it is a logical way to address the problem, and there is no natural reason to bid two no trump over Stayman, so it should be clear that it is an artificial bid.

Stayman invitational also handles the situation where responder has a six card suit with 11 to 12 points. Responder can be reasonably sure that the hand will play well in his major but wants to know if opener has a maximum or a minimum. If playing Stayman Invitational, responder would bid two clubs over the one no trump opening and then bid

his major at the three level whatever opener bids. This tells opener that responder has a six card suit and is invitational to game. Opener will pass with a minimum and bid four of the major with a maximum.

This is an example of bidding using the Stayman invitational convention.

<b>NORTH</b> ♠ A Q J ♥ 9 3 6 ♦ K Q 7 6 3 ♣ K 10  <b>SOUTH</b> ♠ 8 5 2 ♥ A Q J 7 4 ♦ A 4 ♣ 7 4 3	<b>HAND</b>	<b>BID</b>	<b>COMMENT</b>
	North	1 NT	12 – 15 points, balanced
	South	2 C	Stayman, asking for majors. 13+ points or 11-12 and five card major.
	North	2 S	Four Spades, denying four Hearts.
	South	2 NT	Five card Heart suit, 11-12 points.
	North	4H	Maximum hand and three card support of Hearts.

If you were not playing Stayman invitational, South would have raised one no trump to two, which North would have raised to three. Using the Stayman invitational convention gets you to a four heart contract, a significantly safer contract because of the threat of opponents running clubs in no trump.

### Four Diamonds Asking

There are a few occasions where, in deciding whether to push for slam, you want to know whether your partner has a maximum or a minimum hand. This is generally when you are in a no trump sequence because cue bidding is usually an effective way of communicating hand strength in a suit contract. The Four Diamonds Asking convention addresses this situation. Whenever Gerber is available, that is, whenever a four club bid has no natural meaning, a four diamond bid also has no natural meaning, and the Four Diamonds Asking convention uses the four diamond bid as an asking bid in those situations. The other partner responds to the four diamonds bid with four hearts with a minimum hand and four spades with at least two points above the minimum number of points indicated by the prior bidding. Over a four heart bid, a bid of four no trump is a sign-off. Over a four spade bid, a bid of four no trump is Blackwood. With a few exceptions, the four diamond bidder takes control of the bidding and decides the final contract.

The occasions when the Four Diamonds Asking convention is useful are limited, but it can be a valuable tool in those situations. For example, if your partner opens one no trump and you have 17 points with a four card heart suit, you would use Stayman to explore a heart fit. If your partner responded two hearts, you would know you had a fit, but you wouldn't know if partner had a maximum, in which case slam is likely, or a minimum, in which case it is not. Cue bidding is not available in that sequence, so the

four diamonds asking bid is a good way to explore slam. If partner responds four hearts, you would pass. If he responds four spades, you would either bid slam directly or, if you needed to find out about aces, use Blackwood on the way to slam.

### Fit Showing Jump Shift

One of the problems with the Simplified Club system is that, because your first duty is to show a fit, and once a fit is found, subsequent bids of other suits are cue bids, the partnership will miss a second fit. The second fit may be better than the first, and in any event, hands with a double fit often have very good playing strength, allowing game to be bid with one or two fewer points than one would ordinarily expect.

The Fit Showing Jump Shift convention provides some help for this problem. When your partner has opened with one of a major, a jump bid to three of a lower ranking suit shows, first, that you have at least three card support of your partner's major, second, that you have at least five cards in the suit you bid and, third, that you have at least 11 points in support of your partner's major.

With no second suit fit, or with an absolute minimum (13 point) hand, your partner will retreat to his major. With a minimum hand, he will bid the major at the three level. With 15 or 16 points, he will bid game in the major. You will now know enough about your partner's hand to be able to pick the final contract or, if you are slam bound, to use Blackwood or cue bids to explore controls.

With strong support of partner's suit, either four cards with a few high card points or any five or more card support, it is likely that the second suit fit is better than the first. It is also likely that, with more than a bare minimum hand, you can make game. Thus, with 14 or more points, you would raise partner's suit to the four level. This is a game forcing bid. Your partner will decide which suit to play in based on the level of support you have shown for his suit. If he has good support of your major, say three cards and three or more points, or any four or more card support, it will probably be better to play in the major, that is, at the four level, and your partner will bid game in your major. Otherwise, he will bid game in his suit. Of course, if he thinks the hand is slam bound, with 16 points or more, he can make cue bids or use Blackwood to explore slam.

With 14 to 16 points and some support of your partner's suit but not enough to justify a raise, you will cue bid, including the suitless 3NT cue bid if no other is available, to show a double fit and force game. Usually your partner will just bid game in your major or use cue bids or Blackwood to explore slam, but with a significantly better suit than promised, he might bid game in his suit. You can, of course, pass any game bid.

## Appendix

### Essential Elements of the Simplified Club System

#### A. Point Count Basics

1. When counting points bidding your own suit, aces count four, kings count three, queens count two and jacks count one. You give yourself one point for each card above four in a quality suit. Thus, a hand with 5-3-3-2 distribution would get one distribution point, as would a hand with 5-4-3-1 distribution. If you want a “quality standard,” use the four point rule. A good quality suit has four or more high card points, or three points with extra spot cards, say a ten and nine or 9-8-7.
2. When counting point bidding in support of your partner’s suit, high cards count the same as when bidding your own suit, but you count one point for a doubleton, three points for a singleton and five points for a void, and you subtract one point for each card less than four in your partner’s suit.
3. In general, the partnership needs 24 points to bid to the three level (as long as the points are reasonably balanced between the hands) 26 points to bid to the four level, 28 points to bid to the five level, 32 points to bid a small slam and 36 points to bid a grand slam.
4. Keep in mind that point counts at best give an imperfect valuation of the strength of a hand. For example, it is well known that a hand with four card support of a five card suit will play much better than a hand with four card support of a four card suit, and that a hand with a double fit plays better than one with a single fit. However, the point count method described here does not give those hands extra value. We could try to refine the point count method by adding some more rules, but the additional complexity would probably not be worth the incremental accuracy.

#### B. Opening Bid Sequences

1. All strong hands (16+ high card points or 17+ counting distribution) are opened one club.
  - a. A one diamond response shows 0-6 points. Opener will make a jump bid with 21+ points. All other bids by opener can be passed, and the hand should be passed as soon as a 7+ fit is found unless the fit adds enough distribution points to make game likely.
  - b. All other bids by responder show 7+ points. The partnership first finds a suit or picks no trump, and then a cue bid by either bidder shows 2+ points above a minimum bid and forces to game. If responder bids 1NT, opener

uses the NT conventions of Paragraph 2 to explore a fit and game, with the “rescue” bids showing a minimum hand with a five plus card suit and 2NT also showing a minimum hand. All other bids over a 1NT response show a strong interest in game, i.e. 18+ high card points or 19+ counting distribution.

- c. If opener bids 1NT over a one diamond response, the NT bidding sequences in Paragraph 2 are used with responder’s point counts reduced by four. If opener bids 1NT over a major suit response, the Paragraph 2 sequences are used with the “rescue” bids showing 7-8 points and a five plus card suit (or six plus if a rebid of the major).

2. One no trump promises balanced distribution (4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, or 5-3-3-2 with a 5 card minor) and 12-15 points.

- a. A response of two diamonds, two hearts, two spades or three clubs is a shut out “rescue” bid almost always made with a 6+ card suit. Opener will always pass these bids.
- b. With 13+ points and a 5 card major, responder bids three of the major. Opener bids 3 NT with two card support and four of the major with 3+ card support.
- c. With 13+ points and a 6+ card suit, responder bids game directly (unless strong enough to explore slam).
- d. With 13+ points and balanced distribution, responder bids 3 NT, except that, with a 4 card major, responder can first use Stayman to try for a major suit fit.
- e. With all other 13+ point hands, responder bids 2 clubs Stayman. Opener’s re-bids are standard Stayman with 2 NT showing both majors.
- f. With 11-12 points and balanced distribution, responder bids 2NT. Opener raises to game with a maximum.

3. One of a major promises a 5+ card suit and 13-16 points; a one diamond bid promises 14-16 points and a 5+ card suit or 4-4-4-1 distribution.

- a. With 3+ card support, responder raises with 11+ points (but over one diamond, should bid a 5+ card major if he has one) and passes with 10 or less. If either partner cue bids after a raise, game is forced. Note that over 1 diamond-2 diamonds, a new suit bid is natural, not a cue bid, and promises 4-4-4-1 distribution. Opener shows a 5+ diamond suit and extra strength with the suitless cue bid of 2NT.

- b. Without support and 0-7 points, responder passes.
  - c. With 8-10 points and two card support, responder passes. With a singleton or void in opener's suit, responder bids a five card suit or no trump at the one level. [Opener may pass with a minimum, will raise with support and a maximum to cover (d).]
  - d. With 11-12 points and less than three card support, responder bids a 5+ card suit, at the two level if necessary, or 1NT with a semi-balanced hand. If opener raises responder's one level bid, showing a maximum and support, responder should bid game. Responder's two level bid is a one round force. With a maximum, opener will make a forcing bid (a new suit or a jump) over responder's two level bid to drive to game.
  - e. With 13+ points and less than three card support, responder bids a 5+ card suit at the two level or 2NT. If that is a jump bid, game is forced, and the only issue is the best suit (see Section C below). If it is not, responder is responsible for keeping the bidding open with forcing bids (new suits, jumps, cue bids) until game is reached.
4. Two clubs opening promises 14-16 points and a 5+ card club suit or 4-4-4-1 with a singleton diamond.
- a. Responder will bid a 5+ card suit at the two level with 11+ points, which can be shaved to 10 or even 9 points with a good suit and 2 or fewer clubs. Opener will raise with 3+ card support, bid a second (4 card) suit at the two level, bid 2NT with a semi-balanced hand, re-bid clubs with a 6+ card suit or bid a second (4 card) suit at the three level, in that order of preference.
  - b. Responder will bid 2NT with a semi-balanced hand and 11+ points. Opener will bid his lowest 4 card suit, rebid clubs with 6+ cards, or bid 3NT.
  - c. With 4+ clubs and no other 5+ card suit, responder will raise with 11+ points, pass with 10 or fewer. Opener will bid a four card major if he has one. If not, he will bid 4 clubs with a minimum (14 or a poor 15 points) and five clubs with a maximum.

## C. Finding a Fit

### 1. General rules

- a. The bid of a new suit (prior to a fit being found) promises 4+ cards and is a one round force (i.e. partner must bid at least one more time).

- b. A rebid of a previously bid suit shows one more card than previously shown.
  - c. With balanced or semi-balanced (that is, balanced except for shortness in partner's suit) distribution and no unbid 5+ card minor or 4+ card major or rebiddable suit, bid NT. (Also bid NT if balanced or semi-balanced at the three level and bidding an unbid suit or rebidding a long suit would take you to the four level.)
2. If you know there is an 8+ card fit, your first duty is to show it by:
    - a. Passing if you know there are insufficient points for game and partner's bid was not forcing.
    - b. Making a single raise if (i) partner's bid was forcing and you have a minimum hand for your prior bids or (ii) partner's bid was not forcing and you know there are enough points for game or you have 2+ more points than previously shown.
    - c. Jump raise if partner's bid was forcing and you have 2+ more points than previously shown.
    - d. BUT never bid over game unless you are making a slam try (usually by using Blackwood or Gerber)
  3. If you are still searching for a fit and you know the partnership has enough points for game:
    - a. In general, it is your obligation to make a forcing bid, namely a bid of a previously unbid suit or a jump bid in a previously bid suit, as required to keep partner from passing below game.
    - b. First Exception: If you have already shown enough points so that partner knows there are enough points for game, you no longer need to make forcing bids.
    - c. Second Exception: If a jump bid would take you over 3NT and you have a semi-balanced hand, make it a single raise instead.
    - d. Third exception: If a new suit bid would take you over 3NT and you are semi-balanced, bid 3NT instead. (In the alternative, if you have available a less preferred new suit bid available at the 3 level, make that.)
  4. If you are still searching for a fit and you do not know there are enough points for game:
    - a. If you know there are not enough points for game or if you think the partnership is already at too high a level, make a weak bid:
      - i. First choice, pass if not forced and a 7+ card fit

- ii. Second Choice, rebid your rebiddable suit at the current level
  - iii. Third Choice, if forced, rebid your rebiddable suit up one level (not a jump)
  - iv. Fourth Choice, support one of partner's suits at the current level with a 7+ card fit.
  - v. Fifth choice, if none of the above are available, bid the cheapest available NT
  - vi. If partner bid NT and you are not forced, pass. If forced, first choice is to rebid rebiddable suit, second choice is to raise NT.
  - vii. BUT never bid over game.
- b. If you think game is possible:
- i. If you are at the minimum end of your previously disclosed point range, make a weak bid as in 4.a. above (except pass).
  - ii. If you have 2+ undisclosed points, make your best bid according to the general rules in C.1. above. Note: if your best bid would be 2NT and would be the cheapest NT (always weak) bid 3NT instead. Bids of the cheapest available no trump and pass are the two unambiguously weak bids.

#### D. Optional Conventions

1. Stayman Invitational: When playing Stayman invitational, with 11-12 points and a five card major, responder can bid Stayman over a one no trump opening bid and then bid his major. Responder's 2NT bid over NT bidder's 2 spade response to Stayman shows a 5 card heart suit. NT bidder picks the final contract. Examples: 1NT - 2C - 2H - 3H (NT bidder raises to game with a max). 1NT - 2C - 2D - 2S (with 2 spades, NT bidder bids 2NT with a minimum, 3NT with a max; with 3 spades, pass with a minimum, raise to game with a max).
2. Four Diamonds Asking: Whenever 4C would be Gerber, a bid of 4D asks partner to show points. A response of 4H shows a minimum hand, and a response of 4S shows a maximum. Over a 4H response, a bid of 4NT is a shut out. Over a 4S response, a bid of 4NT is Blackwood.
3. Fit Showing Jump Shift: Over an opening bid of one in a major, a jump bid to the three level of a lower ranking suit shows a five plus card reasonable quality suit, at least three card support of the major, and at least 11 points. With no fit for responder's suit, opener will bid 3 of the major with a minimum and 4 of the major with a maximum. With a fit and at least 14 points (opener will bid 3 of the major with just 13 points) opener will (a) bid game in responder's suit with strong (at least 4 cards and a few high card points) support, (b) raise responder's suit to four with at least 3

card support and a minimum or (c) cue bid with support and a maximum. Responder picks the final contract.