

Steve Robinson ACBL Dist 6 wrote :-:

What is the minimum needed to invite opposite a 15-17 notrump at matchpoints?

The notrump opener is an average declarer. In order to answer this question, I asked some of the country's best players four questions. What is the lowest card that you would add to each suit of the following 12-card hand so that you would invite opposite a strong-notrump opener? What spade? What heart? Responder's 12-card hand is ♠A87 ♥765 ♦K432 ♣87.

Some of our experts have given us some concepts to think about.

Grant Baze---“The parameters are shifted considerably given the condition of matchpoints, as opposed toimps or total points.

Matchpoint parameters uniquely include:

1. You never want to lose a hand in the bidding. This means you do not want to make a close decision that is the opposite of what the “field” is likely to do. If you are in the same contract as most of the field, you hope to win the board in the play. Often I have seen 1NT making three score the same as if you had bid 3NT and made three.
2. While 37.5% is the breakeven point for bidding a vulnerable game at imps, and about 45% is the breakeven point for bidding a non vulnerable game at IMPs, matchpoints requires at least a 50% chance to bid game unless you are sure the “field” is going to bid the game.
3. At IMPs, vulnerability might be the determining factor in the decision to voluntarily bid game, but at matchpoints the vulnerability factor is basically irrelevant.
4. 2NT down one at IMPs is annoying but not tragic; at matchpoints 2NT down one may be a disaster.

This simplifies the decision to raise 1NT with balanced hands at matchpoints. All balanced seven-counts pass, all balanced nine-counts raise, and the only decision is with a balanced eight-count. With eight HCPs in a balanced hand at matchpoints, good spot cards, honor concentration, and distribution are the most important factors in determining if you should raise 1NT. 4=3=3=3 eight-counts should be passed, unless you have magnificent spot cards and good honor concentration. 4=4=3=2 eight-counts are better playing hands, and additionally are influenced by the viability of a major suit game. With 4=4=3=2 distribution, you need to take a hard look at spot cards and honor concentration, particularly in the major in which you hope to find a fit. 5=3=3=2 hands are better playing hands, but the honor concentration in the five card suit is the paramount consideration.”

John Hurd---“I think eight HCPs with a five-card suit or with two reasonable four-card suits is the minimum in a balanced hand. This also depends on partner's propensity to open 1NT with a five-card major. If that happens frequently then there is a bigger premium to bidding Stayman.”

Kerry Sanborn---“Eight HCPs with two four-card suits, or a five-card suit; six HCPs (AQxxxx) with a six-card suit (minor or major).”

Mike Passell---“Obviously the risk to reward ratio is much better at IMPs than matchpoints since the gain from a close, well played vulnerable game is great - the same close vulnerable well played hand might only change an average plus into a near top or at times gain almost nothing at matchpoints. To me system comes into play very much at matchpoints. Playing an old fashioned 1NT - 2NT as natural makes it much more appealing to raise on close hands as opposed to the modern methods of always having to go through Stayman and thus giving a lot of information to the opponents.”

Barnet Shenkin---“With the balanced hands as shown normally nine points are required for matchpoints with a point less for vulnerable IMPs.”

Mel Colchamiro---“Minimum to invite opposite a 15-17 in general = nine HCPs or a super eight such as KQ10x/K98x/xx/xxx which is another way of saying nine. Connected honors, no stand-alone queens or jacks, honors in long suits, good spots. “

Matthew Granovetter---“A slightly above average eight points or great seven. Look at the spot cards. Remember that you're entitled to one ten and one nine and one eight on every hand. Also look where they are. If the high spot cards are separated in different suits it may not be as good as if they're in the same suit.”

John Sutherlin---“Aside from the considerations related to opponents, and whether I am in a conservative or aggressive mode; I would invite with any reasonable eight-point hand that was not 4=3=3=3.”

Now that we have some principles, let's see how the experts use them. Which card do we add to the 3-card spade suit to make the hand invitational?

Five experts need AQ87/765/K432/87 to invite. The experts like two 4-card suits and the possibility of playing in spades. They also like the twin honors.

Barnet Shenkin---“AQ87. Potential major-suit game and can start with 2clubs.”

Allan Falk---“AQ87. With only four-card suits and bad spot cards, it is easy to change a plus to a minus by reaching 2NT or 3NT going down; opener can have various maximums that produce no play for game. At matchpoints there is no point in reaching bad games. Here, the spot cards are terrible, so you need full high card values to invite.”

Mel Colchamiro---“AQxx.”

Jill Meyers---“AQxx. Change the spades to AQxx or AJTx. This would give me two 4-card suits with my honors in those suits.”

Steve Garner---“AQ87. Unless I added the 10 of spades, then I would only need to add the jack (AJ108) to invite.”

Ten experts need AJ10x/765/K432/87 to invite.

Eddie Kanter---“AJ102. No wasted jacks or queens. If things don't work out, I am strong enough to bail out in 2NT.”

David Bird---“AJ102. Eight points and no tens is not enough to invite. Remember that you do not lose out only when partner accepts and goes down in game. You lose also when he declines and goes down in 2NT.”

Barry Rigal---“AJ102. With two decent four-card suits this is a marginal invite. With the queen instead I might drive to game. Passing 1NT with the SJ is clearly an option; with an average partner, probably right to do so.”

Chip Martel---“AJ102. Good 4-card suit plus having a major tips balance.”

Susan Picus---“AJ102. My points are in my long suits, it looks like a 9 HCP hand, a clear invitation.”

Grant Baze---“AJ10x. I would bid Stayman; AJ92 I would pass. In the later case, in addition to our other problems, we may need to find the spade 10 to make game.”

Zeke Jabbour---“AJ10x. If we fail to make a spade connection, at least it will provide a potential source of tricks for notrump. Tens are frequently a valuable asset, especially at notrump. At IMPs, I might be tempted even without the ten.”

Dave Berkowitz, Bobby Lipsitz, Joel Wooldridge---“AJ102.”

One expert needs AJ9x/765/K432/87 to invite.

George Jacobs---“AJ9x. You could reach a nice 4=4 fit and have a ruffing value to boot. Partner may cooperate by having the 10 of spades.”

Twelve experts need AJ87/765/K432/87 to invite. 4=4 hand with good honors.

John Hurd---“AJ87. And I would bid Stayman.”

Kerry Sanborn---“AJ87. This follows the idea of inviting with eight points and two 4-card suits.”

Mike Passel---“AJxx. As close to the minimum I would raise on. The additional plus of getting to spades pushes me over the top. If we catch partner with four spades it is almost always going to play better there. Change to xxxx/Axx/Kxxx/Jx, I would pass since we might be better off in 1NT even with a 4=4 spade fit and since we might have a weak fit or be facing a bad break”

Richard Freeman---“AJxx. Hope partner passes 2NT if he responds two of a red suit.”

Peter Boyd---“AJxx. Invite with a reasonable 8-count 4=4=3=2 with a 4-card major “

Henry Bethe---“AJ87. Less of a change than AJ102. With the 4=3=4=2 shape I would be happy to invite over a 2spade-response to 2clubs, so I would invite.”

Larry Cohen---“AJ32. I'm not dying to reach 3NT, but willing to take the gamble of reaching a 4=4 spade fit (I'll invite with 3spades) given my prime cards. Willing to play 3NT with 17 opposite this so-so 8 -- and even opposite a good 16 it might be OK. The downside of inviting via Stayman is that it gives away helpful information about partner's hand to the defenders.”

Jeff Meckstroth---“AJ32.”

Bart Bramley---“AJ87. Inviting is aggressive at MPs, although it would be clear at IMPs. I upgrade with all of my honors in my long suits and a major-suit fit to look for.”

Mark Feldman---“AJxx. The combined chances of making a game or scoring 140 in spades would sway me to bid. But I wouldn't argue with a partner who said they needed AJ9x to invite.”

Robin Klar---“AJ76. There is not much to work with here. With a minimum, 2NT could be in jeopardy. Better diamond spots or the spade 10 would make a difference.”

Lynn Deas---“AJ32. I would bid Stayman hoping for a spade fit. My small doubleton club is good for a spade contract. I usually invite with 8 HCPs and two 4-card suits.”

One expert needs only A1097/765/K432/87 to invite.

Matthew Granovettor---“A1097.”

Now we'll look at the heart suit. Sixteen experts need A87/Q765/K432/87 to invite. The married spade honors (AJ) are a plus. The lone heart honor is a minus.

Henry Bethe---“Q765, or even Q432. The spade Jack is worth about as much as the heart queen on this hand.”

David Bird---“Q765. If you had only J765, you would have an exceptionally bad 8-count with no tens or nines. You need an above average 8-count to invite.”

Joel Wooldridge---“Q765. If I had the Jack instead of the Queen, I might try Stayman and pass the response. However, this is risky and pass is more likely my response.”

Barnet Shenkin---“Q765. Major potential game and can start with 2clubs.”

Chip Martel---“Q765. Nine HCPs, major, no jacks = invite.”

Peter Boyd---“Qxxx. Don't invite with "bad" 8-count (Jxxx would be a "bad" 8-count).”

Barry Rigal---“Qxxx. Putting an honor in every suit weakens the hand. With the HJ I'd pass 1NT. Plus finding a 4=4 heart fit is now less likely to be right. Using Stayman also lets the opponents find the right lead or avoid the wrong one -- another factor.”

Richard Freeman---“Qxxx. Jack would make it close.”

Steve Bloom---“Q. Here, I would like to have full values for any invitation -Axx/Jxxx/Kxxx/xx isn't as suit oriented as Ajxx/xxx/Kxxx/xx, and starting with Stayman, and finding a 4=4 heart fit, may not win the board.”

Allan Falk---“Q765. This feels sub minimum to me at matchpoints, but the hope of stumbling on a 4=4 heart fit makes it marginally worthwhile to advance 1NT with a Stayman 2clubs.”

Bobby Lipsitz---“Q765. 4=4 major 9-count worth inviting in suit or notrump.”

Susan Picus---“Q432. This is a 9-count, a clear invite. Would not invite with Jxxx, values too scattered, there is still a premium on getting a plus score!”

George Jacobs---“Q. Afraid I need at least the queen here as I have holes everywhere. Even J1098 seems too soft.”

Jill Meyers---“Qxxx. I don't have “married honors” and I have bad spots, I'm only willing to be in game if partner has a maximum and even then he might not make the contract.”

Zeke Jabbour---“Qxxx or maybe J109x”

Mel Colchamiro---“Q765”

Eight experts need A87/J1095/K432/87 to invite. The jack with spots is worth as much as the lone queen.

John Hurd---“JT9x and I would bid Stayman.”

Dave Berkowitz---“J1087. The chance of a heart fit makes it more attractive to bid.”

Eddie Kanter---“J1092. Nothing wasted on the side; otherwise 8 HCPs is not quite enough.”

Larry Cohen---“J1082. I'd invite with Qxxx, and I think J1082 is about as good, maybe better (picture A9xx opposite).”

Grant Baze---“J1097. I would bid Stayman; J1087 I would pass. In the later case, in addition to our other problems, we may need to find the heart 9 to make game.”

Bart Bramley---“Heart J109 or Queen. If my best heart is only the jack, then I want supporting spots before I invite. Without the spots I need the queen. Contrast this with the spade example. Having two honors in your long suit is much better than having one honor in the long suit (especially a low honor) and another honor on the side. At IMPs I might invite with J1032 or J982, especially vulnerable.”

Mark Feldman---“J10xx would be my minimum. Without the ten, the J would be of little value.”

Steve Garner---“J1097.”

Five experts need only A87/J765/K432/87 to invite.

Robin Klar---“J976. Again another close one if you had the heart 10 it's an easy call with entries in dummy.”

Jeff Meckstroth, Matthew Granovettor and Lynn Deas---“J432.”

Kerry Sanborn---“J765. With an ace and a king, this hand is barely worth inviting with.”

Adding a card to the diamond suit makes it a five-card suit. The experts like holding a five-card suit but the strength of the suit makes a difference. Two experts need a very good 5-card suit to invite.

George Jacobs---“KJ9xx. Here I need both the jack and the 9 as KJxxx needs lots of help and doubleton 10 by partner may not be enough.”

Barnet Shenkin---“KJ1084. Eight points with a source of tricks.”

Eighteen experts need only KJxxx of diamonds.

Mike Passel---“KJxxx would be a certain raise even having to go through Stayman. The fifth card in a good suit makes us worth a raise. I would bid 3NT at IMPs just so I wouldn't help the opponents in the auction.”

Eddie Kanter---“KJ432. A 5-card suit headed by two of the top four honors should be upgraded at least one point.”

David Bird---“KJ432. A 5-card suit is worth an extra point or two. The spade ace increases the chance that you can enjoy the long cards too. Game might be there if you held K5432 but it does not pay to stretch to thin games at matchpoints.”

Barry Rigal---“KJxxx. Irrational I know but with the fifth diamond I might drive KJ432 to game and with K10432 I might pass 1NT. Maybe there is no fifth diamond where I'd invite to 2NT, particularly if I had to use Stayman to do it and give away information in the process! “

Steve Bloom---“J. I love the fifth diamond. KJxxx is a good hand, and worth an invitation. I would bid 3NT with that hand at IMPs.”

Jeff Meckstroth, Mel Colchamiro, Chip Martel, John Hurd, Lynn Deas and Joel Wooldridge---“KJxxx.”

Bobby Lipsitz, Peter Boyd, Zeke Jabbour and Richard Freeman---“KJ432. Good 8-count with 5-card suit worth invite.”

Jill Meyers---“KJxxx. I have a good diamond suit, an Ace on the outside. I like my hand. At IMPs I would bid a game.”

Grant Baze---“With KJ432 I would raise. With K10987 I would pass, expecting the field to pass.”

Allan Falk---“KJ432. A five card suit to two honors makes for a marginal advancing hand. While my experience is that passing will actually prove correct more than 50% of the time, the field will disagree, and therefore there is a great deal of protection in issuing an invitation with this hand. If you pass and are correct you will tie for top, but nearly half the time you will get a zero, so pass is actually swingy. Inviting puts you with the field and will tend to produce an average result, which is where you need to aim on marginal hands, expecting to pile up points on hands involving more informed judgments rather than outright gambles based only on tiny percentage differences.”

Seven experts need A87/765/K10432/87 to invite.

Henry Bethé---“K10932. I think K5432 is not enough. Partner will often need the extra texture with say Ax, or even QJ of diamonds. If I can only add one card I would need the DJ, e.g. KJ432.”

Mark Feldman---“K108xx, but dislike raising to 2NT with undisclosed 5-card suit. There are minimum 1NT openings where 3NT will be a good contract and maximums where 3NT is too high.”

Robin Klar---“K10432. I always add extra for 5-card suits and a for sure entry makes this one easy.”

Kerry Sanborn---“K10932. Certainly a minimum for inviting. With the Q of diamonds, we would bid 3NT. It's possible the card should be the J of diamonds instead and would be without the 10/9.”

Larry Cohen---“K10432. A decent five-card suit and an ace and a king are enough to tempt me. If my invite is 2NT (as opposed to going through Stayman), that would make it more attractive. The only problem with inviting is that reaching 2NT exactly is probably wrong (if diamonds run, we make 3, if not, we make 1) -- so it might actually be better to bid 3NT than inviting (especially if the invite is through the revealing 2clubs).”

Bart Bramley---“K10432. With a good five-card suit this is almost a "pass-or-bid-game" situation. That is, inviting is unnecessary because you will probably not take exactly eight tricks; you will take more or fewer depending on whether the diamonds are worth a lot of tricks. The side ace, a potential late entry, is another big plus. If your 2NT invitation must go through Stayman, then the case for NOT inviting is even stronger. 2clubs might get doubled, and even if not your partner will be forced to reveal his distribution. Note the hidden costs of artificiality even on seemingly "cost-free" auctions. At MPs you should stay (somewhat) with the field and invite, but the margin is thin on either side. With KJ432 I would just bid 3NT at any form of scoring. With K9432 or weaker I would pass at MPs. At IMPs I might well bid 3NT even with the weaker holdings, especially vulnerable.”

Susan Picus---“K10932. Now I have seven with a 5 card suit, with good intermediaries in my long suit.”

Two experts invite without any diamond spots.

Matthew Granovetter and David Berkowitz ---“K5432.”

Now we turn to the ugly suit. 3=3=3=4 hands need the full nine HCPs and two experts even needs ten

Steve Bloom---“K. In contrast, I hate 4=3=3=3 hands, and would happily pass Qxx. The ten count is more problematic. The field will be in 3NT, and I am not sure that I want to swing by bidding only 2NT. Texture, and honor cards would influence my decision (as would the state of our game). I would only invite with, say, AJx Jxx Kxxx Jxx, but would probably overbid to 3NT with, say, Axx xxx Kxxx Kxx. Change the four of diamonds to the ten, and I would certainly bid game.”

Allan Falk---“K87. With 4=3=3=3, you need extra high cards to make game in notrump opposite a balanced hand; now 9 HCP is not enough when a game contract has to be more than 50% to make it worthwhile, and when 2NT down 1 will be a disaster.”

Three experts need the full nine plus a ten to invite.

Barnet Shenkin---“Q107. Hand has the worst distribution for trick taking and would pass some nine point hands at match point scoring.”

Eddie Kanter---“Change the clubs to Q102. A stretch with a nine count and only one ten. One should deduct a point for a 4=3=3=3 hand with no intermediates.”

Henry Bethé---“Change the clubs to Q87. I am not sure that is enough with 4=3=3=3 shape and no spots. I think actually I would want Q107.”

Twenty-two experts need the full nine to invite.

Mike Passell---“Qxx. With this ugly shape and lack of spot cards this is closer to a pass than a raise to three. In my heart I would like to pass 1NT but would hate to dishearten my partner if it were wrong.”

Richard Freeman and Bart Bramley---“Qxx. Would raise only to stay with the field.”

Kerry Sanborn---“Q87. I surely think it is right to have nine HCPs when you are 4=3=3=3. This hand has no source of tricks. If the notrump opener is 4=3=3=3 also, 26 HCPs are frequently not enough for game.”

Larry Cohen---“Q32. An ugly 9-count, but it's too anti-field to miss 3NT with 25 or 26 points. Certainly Jxx (maybe J10x) is not good enough.”

Mark Feldman---“Qxx. Queens not accompanied by a higher honor aren't worth 2 points and 4=3=3=3 pattern is also a drawback unless opener has a 5-card suit.”

Grant Baze---“Qxx. Even with J109 I would pass. 4333, no spots in the other three suits, and scattered honor cards all suggest game will be less than 50%.”

Jill Meyers---“Qxx. Again I don't have “married” honors, I'm 4=3=3=3, I don't like my hand but if partner has the right max we might make game.”

John Hurd, Joel Wooldridge, Mel Colchamiro David Bird, Peter Boyd, George Jacobs, Barry Rigal, David Berkowitz, Lynn Deas, Steve Garner, Zeke Jabbour, Bobby Lipsitz, Susan Picus and Jeff Meckstroth---“Qxx.”

Two experts raise with only eight HCPs. They do need club spots.

Matthew Granovetter---“J92.”

Robin Klar---“J109. I just don't invite with 4=3=3=3 eight-counts. Sometimes I find myself in 1NT making three on lucky hands and favorable leads. My partners know never to open 1NT with 17 HCPs with five-card suits.”

Be aggressive with hands with touching honors, spots, two four-card suits or a five-card suit. Be conservative with 4=3=3=3 hands, hands with lone honors, hands without spots.