

Trident

A Forcing Pass System

Ken Allan

Feb/07

Forcing Pass systems are illegal in North America. But the extra room created by assigning a positive message to a first seat pass is intriguing. Trident is a system I would like to test drive if the ACBL were less conservative. What follows may seem at first glance to be very detailed. In fact it is just a sketch of a complicated system and if it were going to be played in earnest there would be many gaps to fill in.

The basic approach is to have the forcing pass (1st or 2nd seat) show 0-7 HCP or 16+ HCP. That leaves all the bids from 1C on up for defining the 8-15 HCP hands. For every 10 times you are the "opening" bidder, expect to make a forcing pass 4 times (3 of those times you'll be weak); the other 6 times you will have 8-15 HCP. This system is weighted towards defining the 8-15 HCP hands and scrambling with the weak and strong hands.

With the first seat pass taking care of both weak and strong hands, we have one more constructive low level bid than most systems. So what should we do with it? The usual approach is to cater to the strong hands. My choice has been to have the extra bid describe a frequently occurring distribution: 1C shows an 8-15 HCP hand with three suits of 3+ and a singleton (or void) in the 4th suit.

The Trident 1C Bid

The main advantage of identifying singletons is that in trump contracts when I have only small cards opposite your singleton (in a side suit), then the point count required to make our contract is reduced by about 5 points. This means that 20 HCP will usually give us a reasonable chance of making a major suit game. In most systems, splinters are used to invite slam. Some partnerships have ways of finding a singleton in game investigations but when you and your partner have only 20 points between you, finding the wrong singleton may get you too high. The downside is that when you bid 1C rather than naming your 5-card suit, preemptive action by the opponents might talk you out of a 5-card major. While the potential is certainly there, I'm not convinced it would be a serious problem in actual play. And the occasions when your 5-card suit gets lost will be balanced by the occasions when your short suit is identified and partner is then able to compete in contested auctions because he knows you have 3+ support for his 5+card suit.

An opening bid of 1C (in first or second seat) is a trident bid. Trident bids promise 3+ in three suits and a singleton or void in the fourth suit. Typical distributions are 3415, 4414, 4405. [When written this way, suits are not identified. A specific case of 3415, say five spades, one heart, four diamonds and three clubs, would be written 5-1-4-3]. When one of the suits is longer than 5, we would have options (like bidding the 6-card suit naturally) but a trident bid should be considered for the following distributions: 3505, 3316, 3406, 3307 (especially when the long suit is a weak minor).

If partner makes a trident bid and the opponents take over the auction before the short suit can be revealed, the one thing we will know for certain, for defensive purposes, is that partner has no doubleton.

A trident partnership can expect to make three or four trident bids in an average evening of bridge. In response to a 1C trident bid, pass is unlikely but not forbidden. Any suit response other than 1D is natural. After a natural response, if opener is short, he has just two options — bid the next suit or bid NT. Any other call shows a 3+ fit — pass is a flawed minimum; raise is minimum to medium; jump raise or 2nd suit is a maximum (tends to have just 3-card support for partner's suit); and jump shift is a splinter max (void with 12+ HCP or singleton with 14-15 HCP).

An immediate NT response to 1C should only be made when it seems clear to responder that the contract should be played in NT. Opener can overrule by bidding a 5+ suit (to play). If opener has the values to go to game he can jump in a 5-card major on the way.

1D Asking

After 1C, the artificial 1D response shows 10+ HCP and asks which suit is short. Low level interference may help more than it hurts because it provides two more bids — pass and double (or redouble) which become the first two steps.

When responder asks for the short suit, the general rule is to bid the suit below the singleton. This makes it easy (and efficient) for responder to cuebid the singleton (as a distribution ask giving opener a chance to show a 5+ suit). Also, bidding a natural (3+) suit in response to the shortness ask may have some advantages in competitive situations over bidding the actual short suit (not as easy for them to double).

Since the responder to a singleton ask has no need for a natural NT bid, NT is incorporated into the responses. This means there are 5 bids to show four suits which increases efficiency but can produce an occasional hiccup in the responses. NT almost always shows the 4th suit in the

sequence even when NT is not the 4th step.

When there is no interference, exception to the general rules for responses makes it possible to check on a major suit fit and still sign off in 1NT (if opener is short in the wrong major).

No interference

After 1C – 1D,

1H and 1S show short suit (exception to general rule)

1NT = short club (another exception)

2C = short diamond.

The next 4 bids (2D,2H,2S,2NT) show short h,s,c,d and 14-15 HCP (game force).

After 1C – 1D, 1H (short hearts)

Pass = minimum hand with hearts.

1S is artificial, asking for longest suit, after which, 1NT = spades, 2C, 2D natural.

1NT to play

2C,2D,2S to play

2H also to play – 6+ suit (good hand devalued because no fit).

After 1C – 1D, 1S (short spades)

2C artificial asking for longest suit: 2D,2H natural; 2NT = clubs; 2S = void(usually 4405)

After 1C – 1D, 1NT (short clubs)

2C asks for longest suit.

After 1C – 1D, 2C (short diamonds)

2D asks for longest suit; 2H,2S natural; 2NT = clubs

Interference over 1C

1C – (double) –

pass weak (willing to play in clubs)

redouble asks for short suit, 1D = short hearts, up to 1NT = short diamonds

1D, 1H, 1S natural, weak (pulled to next higher if opener's short suit)

1NT to play (flat 10-12 HCP)

1C – (suit bid) –

pass weak or trap

double asks for short suit

NT to play

suit bids constructive, not forcing (but opener bids next suit if short)

1C – (1NT) –

double = penalty

2C asks for short suit; 2D = short hearts, etc, up to 2NT = short diamonds

2D asks for better major (not necessarily a constructive bid)

2H,2S natural, to play – opener should pass if short but can raise with fit.

1C – (2NT unusual) –

pass weak or interest in penalties

double asks for short suit

3C, 3D unusual v. unusual, bid in gap shows fit, bid of H/S = short, NT = short and max

3H, 3S natural and to play even if partner short

1C – (3-level) –

pass weak. Opener can reopen with max (double = short in overcall; suit bid = 5+)
double penalties
suit natural, forcing (might be 4-card suit)

Interference over 1C – 1D

When the opponents interfere with a suit bid directly over the shortness ask a bid of 1NT (or 2NT if interference at 2 level) shows shortness in the fourth suit in the sequence. For example, if they interfere with 1S, pass (showing spade shortness) will be the first suit in the sequence, so the fourth suit will be hearts (therefore 1NT = heart shortness).

1C – 1D – (double) –

pass = short diamonds
redouble = short hearts
1H, 1S = short spades, clubs
1NT, 2C, 2D, 2H = short c,d,h,s and 14-15 HCP

1C – 1D – (1H) –

pass = short hearts
double = short spades
1S = short clubs
1NT = short diamonds
2C, 2D, 2H, 2S = short d,h,s,c and 14-15 HCP

1C – 1D – (1S) –

pass = short spades
double = short clubs
1NT = short hearts (4th suit)
2C = short diamonds
2D, 2H, 2S, 2NT = short h,s,c,d and 14-15 HCP

1C – 1D – (1NT) –

pass = short spades
double = short clubs
2C = short diamonds
2D = short hearts
2H, 2S, 3C, 2NT = short s,c,d,h and 14-15 HCP (*NOTE 2NT=4th suit)

1C – 1D – (2-level or higher) –

pass = not strong enough to compete (if responder just has required 10 HCP)
double = 4+ suit, 10+ HCP (short suit not identified)
suit = short in next higher suit

Some examples

In response to a shortness ask, the short suits are shown in a rotating sequence — c,d,h,s. So if the first suit that can be shown is hearts then the sequence is h,s,d,c. The exception introduced by using NT in the responses is that once the first suit of the sequence is determined, NT refers to the fourth suit even if the NT bid comes out of order.

1C – (1H) – double – (pass) – after the double asking for shortness, responses are:

1S short clubs (so fourth suit in sequence is spades)

1NT short spades

2C short diamonds

2D short hearts

2H short spades —start of a second sequence (with 14-15 HCP) so 4th suit is hearts

2S short clubs

2NT short hearts

3C short diamonds

1C – (pass) – 1D – (1H) – with interference after ask for shortness the first suit response is 1S showing club shortness but there are two calls before that (pass and double) showing heart and spade shortness so 1NT = short diamonds. And 2C also = short diamonds but with 14-15 HCP.

1C – (1NT) – 2C – (2H) – after 2C shortness ask and 2H interference, pass is needed for weak hand and double = 4+ hearts. So 2S = club shortness and fourth suit is spades so 2NT = spade shortness

Bidding after the short suit has been identified

In order to ask which suit is short, responder promises at least 10 HCP. Once the short suit has been identified, a bid of any of opener's three suits is non forcing (shows nothing extra). A jump by responder in one of those three suits is invitational.

With extra values responder can cuebid the short suit asking opener to bid a 5+card suit or cheapest 4-card suit or short suit if void or NT with a stiff King or Ace. Note that with three 4-card suits, the cheapest is bid; but with two 5-card suits the higher ranking is bid (whether it is the cheapest or not). While the first priority is to bid a 5+ suit, especially if it is a major, exceptions may be made to show a void or bid NT rather than 5-card minor.

The only trident distribution without a 5+ suit is 4414. So after a cuebid, a bid of the cheapest suit usually shows a 5+ suit but it could be 4-card suit if 4414; a bid of either of the other suits definitely promises 5+.

After a cuebid and answer, if responder now jumps (below game level), that sets the suit and is forcing and asks for a cue bid of an Ace or King. If, instead, responder bids one of the other suits (without jumping) promised by opener, this is forcing for one round and doesn't set trump. Opener's options are to raise with 4, bid other 4-card suit or rebid 6+card suit (or bid NT with stiff honour and a max). If opener has only 3-card support, he will have either a 6+card suit or be specifically 4315 or 5305. The 4315 is shown by bidding the 3rd suit. The 5305 can be shown by jumping in 3rd suit. That leaves cuebid and all jumps as game forces for showing middle or upper strength trident hands.

An example — the bidding starts:

1C	1D (ask)
1S (short S)	2C (artificial — long suit ask)
2D (4+suit)	2H (forcing but may pass some responses)

Depending on room available, responses would have to vary. In this case, opener's options would be as follows (Note: any bid which implies 3 hearts also implies 5+ diamonds):

2S	spade void (either minimum strength or will take another bid)
2NT	1-3-5-4, minimum with spade honour
3C	1-3-5-4 or 0-3-5-5, minimum
3D	6+ suit (3-card heart support), minimum
3H	4-card heart support, minimum strength
3S	4-card heart support, spade void, extra strength
3NT	1-3-5-4, mid to max strength
4C	0-3-5-5, mid to max strength
4D	7-card suit (0-3-7-3) or 6-card suit (1-3-6-3), middle strength
4H	4-card support, mid strength
4S	0-4-5-4 or 0-4-6-3, max strength
5C	0-3-5-5, max
5D	7-card suit (0-3-7-3), max strength

The Rest of the System

Some General Guidelines

Opening bids of 1C are always artificial. In first and second seat, 1C is limited and therefore not forcing (though seldom passed). In third and fourth seat, 1C is unlimited and therefore forcing.

The 1D response (to 1C bids) is always artificial. As a response to a first or second seat 1C bid, 1D is unlimited and forcing. As a response to a third or fourth seat 1C bid, 1D is limited and not forcing.

To recapitulate: 1st and 2nd seat 1C bids are artificial but not forcing; 1D responses are artificial and forcing. 3rd and 4th seat 1C bids are artificial and forcing; 1D responses are artificial but not forcing.

Opening or responding bids of 1NT are always natural. But after a trident 1C and a shortness ask, the NT answer to the ask is never natural.

Opening bids of 2NT are always limited and unusual.

Stayman and Four Suit Transfers are on whenever NT bid is the first natural bid (except for 1NT response to a trident 1C bid). Though 1D can be short it is treated as a natural bid so 1NT response is not considered to be the first natural bid.

All opening bids of 2D, 2H, 2S are limited and natural and usually 6+. While such 2-bids are sometimes made on a five card suit, responder should assume a 6+ suit if there is no room to investigate.

First and Second Seat Bids

Pass	0-7 (or 8-9 balanced, no 4-card major) or 16+ HCP
1C	trident
1D	convenient 1D – 3+ (usually 4+). Can be as weak as 8 HCP but is usually 10+.
1H	4+ hearts. 8-15 HCP. With 4 card M and longer m you have a choice. With weak hand tend to bid M. Quality of suit may also be a factor.
1S	4+ spades. 8-15 HCP.
1NT	10-12 balanced
2C	5+ clubs. 8-15 HCP. With 3-3-2-5 and 8-9 HCP, pass is an option with bad suit
2D	11-15, 6 diamonds
2H	11-15, 6 hearts
2S	11-15, 6 spades
2NT	8-12, minors (might be 5-4)
3C	11-15, 6+ clubs
3D-3S	normal preempts

Bids of 2C, 2D, 2H, 2S show a hand where that suit is main feature of the hand – if there is a second suit, 1-level opening bids are preferred. Though 2-level opener okay if the second suit is Qxxx or worse.

For opening bids in a major followed by a minor rebid, the minor may be longer. But for maximum hands, open the longer minor and reverse into the major.

Inviting Game Opposite an 8-15 HCP Opener

With hands where game is a possibility opposite an opening bid showing 8-15 HCP, use the three-level method of inviting. When opener has a range of 8 to 15, it is not enough to just invite game with a max. Opener's hand can be defined as weak, medium or strong (ie. 8-10, 11-13 or 14-15 HCP) with some adjustment depending on length of agreed suit and whether short suit is singleton or void. The general approach is that if responder signs off, opener is expected to take another bid with 14-15; so when responder invites game, a medium hand is sufficient to accept.

This is similar to standard bidding where opener makes a 1-level bid with 13-21 HCP. Most game invitations ask if opener has anything extra, ie. 15 points. So the three level method of inviting is already a standard treatment and is only mentioned here because the ranges are different.

Bidding after a 1st/2nd seat limited opening bid

1D — pass	this is an option with up to 9 HCP
1M	forcing, 8+ HCP; 1NT rebid by opener = 13-15
2/1	one round force promising a rebid
jump shift	game force
1NT	10-12
2NT	13-14
3NT	15-18

This is a 4-card major system. After opening bid of 1M, an immediate raise promises 6-12 support points. Raise freely with 3-card support. Jump raise promises 4-card support.

All NT responses to 1M are natural (up to 3NT), though 1NT may not be balanced. 2NT invites.

Jump shift = game force. 2/1 promises 12+ points but 2/1 followed by rebid of same suit may be weaker. 2/1 followed by support is invitational (usually 3-card support); 2/1 followed by jump support is forcing to game.

A 2C opening bid can be as weak as 8 HCP but is usually 10-15 HCP. New suit forcing. 2NT invitational (13-14 HCP)

After opening 2D,2H,2S: 2NT invites, raise invites, new suit forces.

Bidding after a forcing pass (25% chance of 16+, 75% chance 0-7)

When playing the forcing pass, there is never a third or fourth seat opening bid, in the usual sense, even when the third seat bid is the first non-pass (though for discussion purposes, these third and fourth seat bids are still called opening bids). The third/fourth seat bidder will always be responding to partner's bid or forcing pass. The assumption (after a forcing pass) until you learn differently is that partner is 0-7 rather than 16+.

3rd and 4th seat bids (except for 1C) are much like 1st/2nd seat bids. The main difference is that the range for the limited bids is expanded by 2 HCP (8-17). This expanded range tends not to be a problem because partner is already known to NOT have a midrange hand. After a limited 3rd seat bid, if FP (forcing passer) is strong we are forced to game. If FP is weak we have little interest in game. A 1C bid in 3rd/4th seat is a two way bid, similar to the forcing pass in 1st seat.

Pass – 1C	0-7 HCP or 8-9 balanced (no 4-card major) or 18+ HCP
1D	3+ diamonds. 8-17 HCP
1H	4+ hearts. 8-17 HCP
1S	4+ spades. 8-17 HCP
1NT	16-17 balanced (stayman and transfers)
2C	8-17, 5+ clubs (if 8-11, use this bid only when it is only option)
2D	12-17, 5+ diamonds
2H	12-17, 5+ hearts
2S	12-17, 5+ spades
2NT	10-17, minors (major suit responses natural and create a game force)
3-level	std preempt, 6+card suit

When FP (forcing passer) is weak, his only response to 1C is 1D. However, when partner makes some other (more descriptive mid-range) bid he has a few options – he can support any suit shown by partner or even bid game. But he has to be careful not to show the big hand – a new suit at the 2-level, or any NT bid higher than 1NT shows the 16+ hand.

Pass – 1C, 1D 0-9 HCP

When FP responds 1D to your 3rd or 4th seat 1C, he is broke and if you are too, this would be a good time to quit. Actually, the possibility that you would reach this point is pretty remote – your opponents have the balance of the HCP and it is unlikely they would have contained themselves this far into the auction. One can imagine weak hands where you would like to take another bid but the system forbids it — all bids at this point show 18+. Though 1H and 1S are the only 100% forcing continuations. 1S asks for point count with 1NT = 0-2 and all higher bids 1 point steps.

Pass – 1C
 1D – pass 0-9
 1H relay to 1S. Now 1NT = 20-21, 2-bids natural 20+ HCP, 2NT = 24, 3NT = 27-28
 1S artificial, semi-game force, 1NT(artificial) by FP shows 0-2 HCP and can be passed; higher bids are one point step bids (up to 3D); next bid by big hand is natural and forcing.
 1NT 18-19 balanced (stayman and transfers)
 2C,D 18+, natural, not forcing, might be 4-card suit
 2H,S 18+, natural, not forcing but very suggestive.

When FP has 16+ and partner bids 1C

Any rebid other than 1D is 16+ and the auction should proceed the same as in K-Club after a negative. There are two exceptions: (1) The 1H and 1S rebids by FP are treated as in K-Club but are 100% forcing – 1NT response shows 0-5 instead of 2-5. The strong hand will go this route with 19-21 balanced hands so very rarely the bid of 1H/S will be 3-card suit (but responder should bid as though it is 4-card suit)

Some examples:

Pass – 1C
 1H — 2H Responder has 3+ hearts and 0-5 support points

 Pass – 1C
 1H — 3H Responder has 4+ hearts and 6-7 support points

 Pass – 1C
 1H — 2D FP has 16+, responder has 3-card heart support and 6+ support points. If FP signs off, responder will take another bid (forcing) with 8+ HCP

 Pass – 1C
 1H — 2S natural – FP has 16+, partner has 18+.

 Pass – 1C
 1H — 1NT
 2NT 21-22 HCP balanced (good 20). Note: with 19-20, FP passes 1NT

Summary of how to handle balanced hands

First or second seat

8-9, no 4-card major	pass
8-9, 4-card major	1M
10-12	1NT
13-15	1D – 1M, 1NT
16-18	pass – 1C, 1NT
19-20	pass – 1C, 1M (might be 3-card) – 1NT, pass
21-22	pass – 1C, 1M – 1NT, 2NT
23-24	pass – 1C, 2NT
25-26	3NT
27-28	pass – 1C, 3NT

If partner should bid something other than the weakest possibility, make a forcing bid.

Third or fourth seat after a forcing pass

0-9	pass – 1C, 1D – pass
8-9 with M	pass – 1M
10-15	pass – 1D or 1M
16-17	pass – 1NT
18-19	pass – 1C, 1D – 1NT
20-21	pass – 1C, 1D – 1H, 1S – 1NT
22-23	pass – 1C, 1D – 1S (asks for HCP): after 1NT (0-2), pass with 22-23
24	pass – 1C, 1D – 1H, 1S – 2NT
25-26	pass – 3NT
27-28	pass – 1C, 1D – 1H, 1S – 3NT

Interference

After a forcing pass

Until advised otherwise, 3rd/4th seat should assume the original pass is of the weak variety. After an opening bid (directly over a forcing pass), overcalls in 3rd/4th seat are natural. FP can raise or bid 1NT with weak hand. New suit at 2-level, cue bid, jump in NT show strong hand. If 3rd/4th seat passes the opponents opening bid, any action by FP shows strong hand.

If RHO bids over natural bid by partner, any action by FP other than support shows the strong hand. New suit may be 4-card. If partner has bid anything other than 1C, double is penalty.

After 1D to 2S opening bid in 1st/2nd seat

If they interfere, double is negative, redouble shows values, all bids natural (standard bidding logic applies).

Defending against the Trident Forcing Pass System

It may be tempting to bid on air to mess up the forcing passers. The difficulty with this approach is that after a forcing pass, more than half of the hands will belong to the defenders and if they can't trust each other's bids, they will be the ones that get messed up.

After a forcing pass

75% of the forcing passes will be weak and you should assume that to be the case until you learn differently. Therefore, all of your bids should be your normal opening bids.

If you were going to play an extended match against this system it might be worthwhile doing something special like returning a bit of their own medicine by making a semi-forcing pass with all good opening bids as well as very weak hands and bidding with 8 to 13 point hands (2C would still be strong and forcing so partner is not completely forced by your pass).

After artificial 1C trident opening bid

All suit bids are sound natural overcalls. Double shows opening values, tending to be balanced.

After all other bids

Use your standard defense against natural bidding (even though many of the bids can be as weak as 8 HCP)

Two example hands where identifying singleton gets you to low point game

Knowing about singletons or voids can get you to remarkable contracts. Consider this combined holding of 17 HCP where spades are trump – even after a trump lead, lose a diamond, trump return, you are odds on to make game. Add the diamond King to bring the count up to 20 and you'd be wondering why you didn't bid slam.

A654

--

A7654

A654

KQ732

6543

32

32

Here are a few auctions which would get you there:

1.

1C — 1S signoff unless partner short in spades
3H — 4S splinter; okay

2.

1C — 1H signoff unless partner short in hearts
1S — 2S
3S — 4S

3.

1C – (1H) – pass if partner short in spades we want out of this auction
* — 2S partner short in hearts – hand suddenly improves
4S

On the flip side, there is this ugly 20 point spade fit – you need the club finesse and 3-2 splits in both spades and diamonds, and even then you may need some cooperation from the defense. But this is as bad as it gets. Most 20 pointers (with nothing opposite partner's singleton) play better.

A65
2
K7654
QJ65

QJ743
654
QJ3
A4

Auction might go:

1C — 1D ask for short suit
1H — 3S short heart; almost enough to bid game but restrained because of quacks
4S