

# "Coming alive" with 6-5 openers (Part 1)

The players at my local club are fond of quoting the "6-5, come alive" maxim popularized by Grant Baze in his 1986 "Rules of Bridge" article. The basic idea is that 6-5 distribution is so powerful that it justifies aggressive bidding, even when you have minimum high-card strength.

Even armed with that good advice, we all seem to have problems when we're the opening bidder with a "5-6" hand like:

♠4 ♥KQJ86 ♦AJ10765 ♣4

If you had 6 hearts and 5 diamonds, there would be no problem -- you could open 1H and keep rebidding diamonds until partner got the picture. With 6 cards in the lower-ranking suit, though, you have a dilemma.

The simplest approach is to open 1H. This usually results in "underbidding" your playing strength, as the best you can do is show 5-5 distribution by rebidding diamonds twice. The purists prefer 1D, which allows you to show your true pattern by rebidding 2H and 3H, but that creates a reverse auction that promises much more high-card strength. When partner bids a hopeless slam based on your presumed 17+ points, you find yourself saying, "Sorry, partner. I thought I had to come alive."

## Opener's jump-reverse rebid

An effective solution is to open your longer suit and use a jump rebid in a *higher-ranking* suit as natural, limited and non-forcing. With the hand above, open 1D. Over partner's response of 1S or 1NT, you jump to 3H to show a minimum opener with 6 diamonds and 5 hearts.

The requirements for using this jump-reverse rebid are:

- 1 - You're the opening bidder and have 6-5 distribution (or perhaps 7-5), with 6 cards in the lower-ranking suit.
- 2 - You have minimum high-card values (10-15 pts.) -- a hand that's worth an opening bid, isn't strong enough for a standard reverse (16-17+ pts.).
- 3 - You have the playing strength to play at the 3-level opposite a minimum response.
- 4 - Partner makes a 1-level response that bypasses your 5-card suit. You can also make a jump-reverse if an opponent's overcall forces you past the 1-level, whether or not partner has responded:  
1C - (Pass) - 1D - (1S) - **3H**    **or**    1D - (Pass) - Pass - (1S) - **3H**

## The exceptions

Note that you do not jump if you have room to bid your second suit at the 1-level. After 1D by you - 1H by partner, your jump to 2S should be a strong jump shift (18+ pts.). With a hand like ♠AQ874 ♥Void ♦QJ10863 ♣K4, you can show your pattern and minimum values by simply rebidding 1S and then 2S.

Another exception comes after partner makes a negative double. After 1C by you - (1S overcall) - Double by partner, your jump to 3H is a simple value bid, promising 4-card support and invitational strength.

Most pairs choose not to use this convention if partner makes a 2-level response, especially in a 2-over-1 forcing-to-game system. After 1D by you - 2C by partner, rebid just 2H with ♠A ♥K10976 ♦A98764 ♣4. This saves space and allows you to use 3H as a splinter (good club support, singleton heart, extra values).

## Weighing the benefits

This simple convention is especially effective in finding short-point games and slams, and can even have preemptive value. Unless you already use this jump as a "mini-splinter", adding the jump-reverse also makes good use of an otherwise idle bid, since you don't need the jump to show strength. If you have a 6-5 hand with extra values, you can make a forcing 2-level reverse and then rebid your second suit.

The main drawback is that although the jump rebid gives a near-perfect description of your hand, it takes the auction very high, very fast. If partner has a weak hand with shortness in your second suit, he'll have to go to the 4-level to take a preference to your first suit. To make best use of this bid, opener and responder must exercise good judgment.

## Evaluating your hand

The best hand for a jump-reverse has all (or almost all) of its honor cards in the long suits. This is especially critical if you're opening with only 10-11 high-card points. For example, a jump-reverse is not recommended with a hand like ♠Void ♥A5 ♦J6542 ♣KQJ973. With such a weak second suit, the best strategy is to open 1C and rebid 2C.

Another way to evaluate your hand's suitability for a jump-reverse is to count quick tricks and losers. A "classic" jump-reverse hand will have 2 to 3 quick tricks and 4 to 5 losers. Figure one loser for each missing ace, king and queen in your long suits. In short suits, count only missing aces (for singletons) or aces and kings (for a doubleton). If your long suit is headed by just the queen (no jack), count this as 2.5 losers.

You'll also be faced with borderline hands that seem too strong for a non-forcing jump, but not quite strong enough for a classic reverse. Consider these two hands:

- (1) ♠AQJ92 ♥QJ10863 ♦4 ♣A
- (2) ♠AK1076 ♥AK10863 ♦Void ♣43

Both hands are 14 points and 4 losers, but the second hand is much stronger because it has more honors in its long suits, more quick tricks (four, vs. only 2.5 in Hand #1) and "slower" losers (missing queens instead of aces and kings). If partner responds 1NT to my 1H opening, I would use the jump-reverse to 3S with Hand #1. With Hand #2, I would rebid 2S, evaluating it as strong enough for a "true" reverse.

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## "Coming alive" with 6-5 openers (Part 2)

In the July issue, we looked at opening-bid strategies for those awkward "5-6" hands where you hold 6 cards in your lower-ranking suit, but don't have enough points for a standard reverse.

A handy solution is the non-forcing jump-reverse, which allows you to accurately describe your strength and pattern. With this agreement, you open your longer (lower-ranking) suit and use a jump-rebid in your second suit to show a minimum (10-14 pts.) 6-5 hand. With ♠4 ♥2 ♦KJ1043 ♣AK7654, you would open 1C. Over partner's response of 1H, 1S or 1NT, your jump to 3D shows a minimum with 6 clubs and 5 diamonds.

Adding the jump-reverse to your system is simple enough, but you'll need good hand-evaluation skills to take full advantage of it. The most difficult part of these auctions is responder's decision after the jump reverse. These guidelines will help you choose your rebid:

## Your picture of opener's hand

Opener's jump-reverse gives a fairly complete description of his hand, so in most cases, it's up to responder to place the contract. Remember that although opener has shown great playing strength, the jump is not forcing. You can pass or take a preference to his first suit if you have no interest in game.

To assess your chances for game or slam, forget about high-card points. Use your picture of opener's hand and concentrate on your holdings in his suits. You can start with these "ballpark" assumptions:

- On average, opener will have 11-12 points and 2 (possibly 2.5) quick tricks.
- Virtually all his high-card points will be in his long suits.
- He will most often be 1-1 in the outside suits.
- His hand will have 4 (possibly 5) losers. A loser is each missing ace, king or queen in a long suit; a missing ace or king in a doubleton; and a missing ace in a singleton.

In general, you should stretch to bid game if you have fitting cards in partner's suits. You can expect to make 4H or 4S if you have a fit and cards to cover one to two losers. For a minor-suit game, you need honors and/or ruffing values to cover at least two (possibly three) losers.

## Responder's rebids

After the auction:    **Opener**    **Responder**

1C	1S
3H	?

the meanings of responder's rebids are:

- **Pass** = a "trick-poor", possibly non-fitting hand that prefers opener's second suit -- ♠KQ102 ♥752 ♦KJ94 ♣43. Since partner is likely to be 1-1 in the outside suits, you can't count on kings to cover any losers.
- Preference to opener's first suit (**4C**) = a weak hand that prefers the 6-card suit. Opener will always pass.
- Game bid in either of opener's suits (**4H** or **5C**) = to play.
- Rebid of your suit (**3S** or **4S**) = to play. Your suit should be long and strong enough to play opposite a singleton.
- **3NT** = to play.
- Below-game raise of opener's second suit (1C-1S-3D-**4D**) = invitational to game, showing a fit and cards that will cover one to two losers.
- **4NT** = Key-card Blackwood for opener's second suit. An alternative is "double" Key-card, which asks about six key cards (four aces and two kings in opener's suits).
- Fourth suit (**4D**) = a slam-try in opener's first suit. Opener accepts by cuebidding an ace or void or using Key-card Blackwood. Another approach is to use this as immediate Key-card for opener's first suit, which allows you to check on aces without going past 5 of the minor.

## Test your judgment

Matchpoints, vulnerable vs. not:

Opener	You
1D	1S
3H	?

♠A9854 ♥1043 ♦K5 ♣943

**4H.** Your diamond king covers one sure loser, and the spade ace will be another trick on most deals (when opener is 1-1 in the black suits). Your trumps may even cover a third loser if partner needs to ruff a diamond.

♠Q87432 ♥2 ♦10953 ♣KQ

**5D.** This dummy could be a virtual Yarborough if partner is 1-1 (or 2-0 with a club void). Then again, game could be almost laydown if he holds ♠Void ♥A9863 ♦AK8762 ♣32. Note that the auction gives you a clue that your KQ are working cards. The opponents' silence suggests they don't hold 10 or 11 clubs, making it likely that partner is 0-5-6-2.

♠KQ7532 ♥Q7 ♦43 ♣KQ3

**Pass.** Plenty of high-card points, but with no fit and only one cover card for partner, chances for game are slim. At IMPs, I'd probably bid 3NT and pray. Opposite most of partner's hands, though, transportation problems and the shaky club stoppers will defeat 3NT.

♠AQJ854 ♥3 ♦J ♣AKQ103

**3NT.** You had high hopes when the auction began, but you've quickly discovered the misfit. When in doubt, be a pessimist about partner's potential fit for your suits. He'll rarely have the cards you need, and even if he did, there's no safe way to investigate.

If you still have the nagging feeling that you should be making another move with this hand, keep in mind that your jump-reverse may have already given you an edge over the field. Pairs who don't play this convention will be having long, tortured auctions to show their "dueling 6-5's", and they may be propelled past 3NT. They'll also be giving their opponents more information than you've given yours, so they may not get the club lead you're expecting. Use what you know and rely on the odds to settle for a reasonable contract, not necessarily a perfect one, and let other pairs do the high-level guessing.

From Karen Walker's tips