

1NT Semi-Forcing – FEFMO
Forcing Except Flat Minimum
Openings

By Henry Jackson

Larry Cohen

- In his September 2015 article in the Bridge Bulletin entitled “1NT Forcing or Semi-Forcing” Larry Cohen makes a compelling argument for allowing an opener with 5-3-3-2 distribution and minimal values to pass!
- In his 30 years of playing this treatment, the downsides of passing Partner’s 1NT have not been much of an issue.

1NT Forcing is the Price Paid for Playing 2/1 Forcing to Game

- 2/1 is the most popular system in tournament play.
- Since bidding 2 of a new suit is forcing to game, 1NT becomes the “catchall” for all 6-12 point hands that cannot respond in a suit at the one level.

1NT Response Must Handle a Variety of Hands After a 1 Spade Opening

- ♠K 2 ♥K J 7 6 5 ♦Q 10 6 5 ♣Q 2
- ♠3 ♥A 8 7 5 ♦K J 4 3 ♣K 10 3 2
- ♠5 4 ♥K 10 3 2 ♦7 6 ♣K J 8 7 6
- ♠— ♥A 9 8 7 6 ♦5 4 2 ♣A J 6 5 2
- ♠7 5 ♥Q J 2 ♦Q J 5 4 ♣K Q J 2
- ♠2 ♥K J 8 6 4 3 ♦K J 5 4 ♣5 3

Why Call It FEFMO?

- Semi-Forcing is an oxymoron! Something should either be forcing or not forcing.
- Semi-Forcing is on the convention card so we must check that box.
- We really mean mostly forcing or forcing except... Therefore
- Forcing Except Flat Minimum Openings

How Does FEFMO Work?

- After Partner responds 1NT to your 1M, pass if you have a flat minimum!
- Rebid your major with 6+.
- Bid a new suit with a 2nd lower-ranking suit.
- Pass with minimum with 4-5 in majors (**trust Partner not to have spades!**)
- Raise NT or even reverse into spades with 15+

What are the Downsides to FEFM?

- Partner may have a 3-card limit raise such as ♠2 ♥K 4 2 ♦J 10 7 6 4 ♣A Q 7 6 after your 1♥ opening. He is hoping to jump raise if given a 2nd bid.
- Larry Cohen suggests lying with a limit raise promising 4-card support if playing FEFMO. Note there is a better way to be seen later.
- He also says that playing 1NT may be better than 3M going down when Opener has a flat minimum!

Downsides Continued

- Partner playing “Constructive Raises” may have 3-card support but only 6-bad 7 points and respond 1NT.
- If Partner’s hand is that bad and you pass with a flat minimum, your 1NT making or going down 1 may be better than 2M on a bad 7-card fit while the opponents have half the deck. They may have a fit for a partial.

Downsides Continued

- Partner may have a good 6-card major like ♠2 ♥K J 8 6 4 3 ♦K J 5 4 ♣5 3 and if you have 3-card support you can take 8-9 tricks in his suit.
- You can't win them all! But even with this, sometimes NT pays better even with a long major.

Advantages

- You no longer have to bid 3-card suits!
- If you bid again you have a 6+ suit or a 2nd suit or a 15+ point hand
- 1NT may be the best place to play at match points.
- Note that players using Weak No Trump do not need FEFM because they would have opened 1NT in the first place with a flat minimum hand including one having a 5-card major!

Better Method for 3-Card Limit Raises

- Playing normal Reverse Bergen with 4+-card support bid 3M (4-6), 3♦ (7-9) & 3♣ (10-12)
- But playing a modified Reverse Bergen change 3♦ to mean 3-card support with 10-12 and use 3♣ to show 4+-card support with 7-12.
- Then 3♦ after a 3♣ response asks partner to bid 3M with 7-9 and 4M with 10-12.

Summary

- Playing 1NT Semi-Forcing (FEFMO) allows an easy, more natural auction without awkward bids of 3-card suits.
- Often 1NT is the best contract.
- Consider using a modified Reverse Bergen treatment or improving your facial expressions when forced to lie with a limit raise and only 3 trumps.