

“Coming alive” with 6-5 openers

Part 1

By Karen Walker

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 such as ♠4 ♥KQJ86 ♦AJ10765 ♣4.

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

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

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. Let’s call this the *jump-reverse rebid*. With the hand above, open 1♦. Over partner’s response of 1♠ or 1NT, you jump to 3♥ to show a minimum opener with six diamonds and five hearts.

The requirements for using this jump-reverse rebid are:

1. You’re the opening bidder and have 6-5 distribution, with six cards in the *lower*-ranking suit.
2. You have minimum high-card values (10-15 high-card points), *i.e.*, a hand that’s worth an opening bid, but isn’t strong enough for

a standard reverse (a good 16-plus HCP).

3. You have the playing strength to play at the three level opposite a minimum response.

4. Partner makes a one-level response that bypasses your five-card suit. You may also make a jump-reverse if an opponent’s overall forces you past the one level, whether or not partner has responded. For example,

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	1♦	1♠
3♥			

The exceptions

Note that you do *not* jump if you have room to bid your second suit at the one level. After opening 1♦ and getting a 1♥ response from partner, your jump to 2♠ should be a strong jump shift (18-plus HCP). With a hand like ♠AQ874 ♥— ♦QJ10863 ♣K4, you can show your pattern and minimum values by simply rebidding 1♠ and then 2♠.

Another exception comes after partner makes a negative double. After you open 1♣, say LHO overcalls 1♠ and partner makes a negative double. Your jump to 3♥ is a simple value bid, promising four-card support and invitational strength.

Most pairs choose *not* to use this convention if partner makes a two-level response, especially in a 2/1 forcing-to-game system. After opening 1♦ and getting a 2♣ response from partner, rebid just 2♥ with

♠A ♥K10976 ♦A98764 ♣4.

This saves space and allows you to use 3♥ 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 two-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 four 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 or 11 HCP. For example, a jump-reverse is not recommended with a hand like ♠— ♥A5 ♦J6542 ♣KQJ973.

With such a weak second suit, the best strategy is to open 1♣ and rebid 2♣.

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 two to three quick tricks and four to five 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 ♦— ♣43

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