

NoTrump Opening Bids and Responses

The HCP necessary for an opening 1NT bid varies widely, partially on the bidding system used and partially on individual style; a former common style is the weak NT (10-12 HCP). Most common are 1NT openings with a medium hand (15-17, some extend the upper limit to 18). It is because of the potential differences that ACBL¹ requires the partner of the 1NT opener to announce their 'agreed upon' point range. We will stick with the common 'standard' therefore when your partner opens with 1NT you announce ALOUD "15 to 17".

In addition to the specific point range ACBL generally requires a NoTrump opener to have a balanced hand. Balanced here means a balanced distribution of the 4 suits. One way to define it is: a balanced hand has no singletons or voids and no more than one doubleton. This verbal description can be illustrated with the 3 distributions that meet the criteria:

4333; 4432; 5332 note that the sequence of numbers, written as xxxx, doesn't correspond with the suits held, where as when we write 4-3-3-3 we **are** designating 4 Spades, 3 Hearts etc.

With the following examples you should open 1NT:

♠AQ4 ♥KT98 ♦KT9 ♣KJ8 (3-4-3-3) the dashes in between the numbers indicates they correspond to our suit order
♠AQT4 ♥K654 ♦AQ8 ♣83 (4-4-3-2)
♠AKQ ♥AQ ♦J642 ♣J876 (3-2-4-4)
♠64 ♥AQ9 ♦KQ9 ♣AJ843 (2-3-3-5)

There is much debate about having stoppers in suits when opening NT. Some say its OK if one suit isn't stopped; others say if two suits aren't stopped find another bid. Its a matter of judgment.

It is even OK to open 1NT if you have a 5-card suit, which means you must have no more than 1 doubleton. This is also an area where great debates rage. We'll talk more about that later; much later.

How Do You Respond when Partner Opens 1NT?

The simple way first (Partner's balanced hand suggests no interest in a suit contract) :

< 8 HCP → **Pass** (note: there is not enough total HCP to reach a (25HCP) NT game even if partner has the max of 17)

8-9 HCP → bid **2NT** (now if Partner has 17 there's enough for game – and **he'll know** it and should bid it) *

10+ HCP → bid **3NT** (here **you know** that there's enough HCP for game, even if P has the min 15 HCP) *

These are relatively safe contracts; **But** what if you could, without doing any damage, find a magic-8 fit? By the way-- *We have just given you a rule – he who knows, goes – meaning don't rely on your partner to guess, if you know there is sufficient HCPs for Game bid it, on your own.

The suggested responses are based solely on HCP count. If you happened to have 9 HCP and 5♥'s and ended in a 2NT contract, making, the score would be 120. With that same hand a 2♥ contract as a viable alternative and with the Magic-8 is likely to produce 9 tricks (still for the 2♥ contract) and a score of 140; a better score. A Responder with a 4-card Major still can hope to find a Magic-8 fit; one of the possible opening distributions has 2 4-card suits and the others have either a 4- or a 5-card suit. If we can devise a method to explore for 8-card fits and at the same time not jeopardize our ability to get to proper safe NT contract it might be worth the effort.

There is another danger. With < 8 HCP our safe bid is Pass. How much help would a 2 or 3 HCP hand provide our partner if our Pass sticks him with a 1NT contract? Not Much!! So if we have a 5-card Major suit the safer thing to do is to suggest playing in that suit. The partnership may not have the magic-8 but a 7 card trump suit is likely a better contract than 1NT.

1 ACBL is the American Contract Bridge League, it is the organizing authority that defines the 'Laws of Bridge', among other things.

Potential Responses to NoTrump Openings

When your partner opens 1NT you actually have 6 potential responses:

Pass with < 8 HCP and no 5-Card Major or no 6-Card Minor

Bid 2NT with 8-9 HCP which might include a 5-card Minor

Bid 3NT with 10-14 HCP

Use Jacoby Transfer Convention with a 5-Card Major or 6-Card Minor.... later

Use the Stayman Convention with 8+ HCP and a 4-Card Major.... a little later

Explore for Slam – You'll have to wait for this one!!