

## 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. Some, less common now, use a weak NT (10-12 HCP) opener, most common are 1NT openings with a medium hand (15-17, some extend the upper limit to 18). It is because of these differences that ACBL<sup>1</sup> requires the partner of the 1NT opener to announce the point range. We will stick with the common 'standard' therefore **when partner opens with 1NT you announce ALOUD "15 to 17"**.

In addition to the specific point range ACBL requires a NoTrump opening to be done with 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*<sup>2</sup>. This verbal description can be illustrated with the 3 distributions that meet this 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) Note that this is the 5332 arranged in suit order

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. But in general there is no requirement that any or all suits be stopped. What is meant by 'stopped' is a holding of Ax(x) or Kx(x) or Qxx, i.e. there are no more than 2 fast losing tricks in a suit.

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?

< 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 3NT) \*

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

\*We have just given you another *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 yourself. These are relatively safe contracts; **But** (that's a big but) what if you could, without doing any damage, find a magic-8 fit? Remember we have a preference for playing in a suit contract vs a NT contract when, there is a fit. We'll see!

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 (our ultimate goal). Also a Responder holding a 4-card Major still can hope to find a Magic-8 fit; one of the possible opening distributions for No Trump has 2 4-card suits and the others have either a 4- or a 5-card suit. If we could 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! More later!

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

2 Recently ACBL relaxed the NT open laws and now allows one to open NT holding a singleton A or K. We will just make note of that, for now, using the balanced NT opening is the safer approach.

There is another danger. With < 8 HCP our only safe bid is Pass. BUT, 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 suit contract having 7-card trump suit fit is likely a better 2-level contract than 1NT.

## Potential Responses to NoTrump Openings

When your partner opens 1NT we 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+ HCP
- Use Jacoby Transfer Convention with a 5-Card Major or 6-Card Minor.... later – in a minute
- Use the Stayman Convention with 8+ HCP and a 4-Card Major.... a little later
- Explore Slam – you'll have to wait a while for this one!

## A Refresher

Before going further remember (i.e. memorize) our categorization of hand sizes:

Open (HCP)		Response (HCP, could be Playing Points)
12-14	<b>Minimum</b>	6-9
15-17	<b>Medium</b>	10-12 note: A 1NT Opening bid shows a Medium hand
18-19	<b>Big</b>	13+ We break the Big hand into two because we have a
20-21	<b>Big</b>	special bid to show a balanced 20-21 hand, 2NT
22+	Huge	

A Partnership needs at least 1 Minimum hand **AND** 1 Medium hand to consider going to Game.

If this requirement is not met you should not go beyond the 2-level i.e. 2NT.

This is the basis of the Rule of 23: “Never bid 2NT or make a bid that forces Partner to Bid 2NT unless you are very, very sure that your partnership has at least 23 Points”. This is a very important concept going forward from here. Effectively this says you should not be at the 3-level unless you know you have the points to be there. We will use our first two bids to tell our partner which category (I call them Buckets) your hand is in. To wit after two bids by each partner you should know the answer to the two questions our bidding system is designed to answer, (1) What Strain and (2) How High.