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BBW Lesson #3: Bidding 1NT Contracts

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When you and your Partner do not together hold a long suit, but hold HCPs, a **NT** part score or game score contract may be your best outcome. However, the death of No Trump contracts is Opponents holding a long suit, especially if they hold some "control" cards in side suits, because they can relentlessly attack their long suit. In such a situation, your odds are particularly dire if Opponents have both bid the same suit, because then Opponents will **know** exactly what suit to attack relentlessly, and repeatedly. The good news is that you still will make even a **3NT** contract with a shortage in one suit, since even at **3NT** you can lose 4 Tricks, and still make your **3NT** contract!

Scenarios When You Open NT, and Partner Responses Thereto

Opening 1NT

In any seat, holding a "square," "flat," "balanced" hand, with HCPs, a **NT** opening bid becomes reasonable. You must hold (1) no voids, (2) no singletons, and (3) no more than 1 doubleton. However, even if you hold 15-18 HCPs, you may open **1NT** holding a 5-card Major! Most players have a strong preference to first show Partner your holding of 15-18n HCPs, and later show their Major, since this means you hold between 37.5% (15/40 x 100) and 45.0% of all the HCPs in the Board!

1. If you hold 15-18 HCPs,¹ and a "balanced" hand, open **1NT**.
2. If you hold 20-22 HCPs, and a "balanced" hand, open **2NT**.
3. If you hold 24-25 HCPs, and a "balanced" hand, open **3NT**.

Remember whenever you open with a **NT** bid that you have then "limited" your hand, because you have been very specific in telling your Partner about both (1) your HCPs, and (2) your card distributions. Therefore, you **must not bid again** unless Responder/Captain by bidding asks you a question!

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¹ Some Partners prefer to play **1NT** as showing 15-17 HCPs. This is a matter of "Partnership agreement," and in any case you or Partner should "announce" your point count when you open **1NT**.

NT Responses to Partner's 1NT Opening

1. Responder bids 2NT. Responder is saying, "Opener, I do not hold a 4-card or a 5-card Major, but I hold 7-8 HCPs. If you are at the "top" of your 1NT opening bid, please bid 3NT, because I think we will then make 3NT, and that is our best game contract."
2. Responder bids 3NT. Responder is saying, "Opener, I think we should play a NT contract, and we can't play a more desirable suit contract in a Major, since we apparently do not have a long Major. We will make 3NT, but no more. Please Pass."
3. Responder bids 5NT. This is called a "**Quantitative Raise**". Responder is saying, "Opener, I know that you hold 15-18 HCPs, and hold a 'flat' hand. I know that with 'flat' hands and ~33+ HCPs together we can make a 6NT contract. I think we *may* make 6NT. If you are at the 'top' of your 1NT opening bid (17 or maybe 16 HCPs), please bid 6NT."

Responses Other than a 2NT or 3NT Bid to Partner's 1NT Opening

< 7 HCPs, and No 5+ Card Major, and No 6+ Card Minor (Pass). If you as Responder do not hold a 5+ Major, or a 6+ card Minor, and you hold fewer than 7 HCPs, **Pass**. You have now put your Partner in the position of having to play what many regard as "the most difficult contract to make in duplicate bridge." The good news is that in duplicate bridge every other Pair sitting in your direction on this Board will be *similarly situated* and will confront exactly the same challenges. The challenge of playing a 1NT contract is that, holding relatively few HCPs, you may have fewer opportunities to *at will* take "control" of play, and thus fewer opportunities to "promote" you low cards in your longest suit into winners, even though the cards 6 and lower in your long suit might be "promoted" into Trick winners!

Virtually No HCPs, No 5-Card Major, but Holding 6+ in a Minor ("Minor Suit Transfer"). Even if you hold virtually no HCPs, no 5-card Major, but you hold 6+ cards in a Minor with 2 of the top 3 honors, or 3 of the top 5 honors, bid 2S. You are denying the possibility of making a 2NT or a 3NT contract, due to holding too few HCPs. Because your Partnership is playing NT such that Opener must hold at least 2 of your long Minor, your Partnership holds 8+ cards. According to the "Law of Total Tricks," holding 8+ cards in trumps, you should make a 3-level part score contract in a Minor even if you hold fewer than an ideal number of HCPs! A 2S response to Opener's 1NT bid demands that, unless Opponents interfere, Opener must bid 3C. If Responder actually holds 6+ Diamonds, Responder then corrects to 3D.

0-9 HCPs, Holding 5+ in a Major ("Jacoby Transfer"). Even if you hold virtually no HCPs, but you hold a 5+ card Major, bid the suit lower than the Major you hold (i.e., bid 2D if you hold 5+ Hearts, bid 2H if you hold 5+ Spades). A 2D bid "demands" that Opener **must** bid Hearts at least at the 2 level. A 2H bid "demands" that Opener **must** bid Spades

at least at the 2 level. If the Responder indeed holds HCPs, in addition to 5+ cards in the Major, Responder can then *later* show points by subsequently bidding at either the 3 or the 4 level. The Opener may also respond by bidding 3**H** or 3**S** rather than 2**H** or 2**S** to say, "I have 3 or 4 rather than only the 2 of this Major required for me to open 1**NT**. If you hold good honors in trump, and/or more than 5 of this Major, and/or 9-10 HCPs, bid game." If Opener holds 4+ cards in the Major, according to the teachings of the "Law of Total Tricks," Opener should respond to the Jacoby transfer by bidding at least game. A 4-level contract should be makeable holding 10+ trump cards! Responding to a Jacoby transfer bid by bidding at the 3 or 4 level is called "super accepting," for obvious reasons!²

9-10 HCPs, Holding 4+ Cards in One or Both Majors ("Stayman"). Holding 9-10 HCPs,³ and at least 1 4-card Major, Responder/Captain knows that a game contract may be reasonable, (1) in a Major, if Opener holds 4+ cards in Responder's Major with 4 cards, or (2) in 3**NT**, because the Partnership holds at least 15+9 = 24 HCPs, and may hold 18+10 = 28 HCPs. Bidding 2**C** in response to Opener's 1**NT** bid says to Opener, "I hold (1) 9-10 HCPs, and (2) at least 1 4-card Major, and (3) not a "flat" distribution (4-3-3-3 or 3-4-3-3) such that the trump cards I hold will be hard to use to ruff. Do you hold a 4-card Major?" If Opener then bids 2**D**, Opener is saying to Responder. "I do not hold a 4-card Major. Tell me your Major if you hold 5 cards in the Major. Otherwise bid 2**NT** or 3**NT**." If Opener instead bids 2**NT** in response to Responder bidding 2**C** Stayman, Opener is saying, "I do not hold a 4-card Major. I am at the 'bottom' of my original bid. If you nevertheless think we can make a 3**NT** bid, bid 3**NT**, especially if we are Not Vulnerable, and even if we go down we will get hurt less than if we went down Vulnerable."

>6 HCPs, Holding 5-4 or 4-5 Cards in the 2 Majors ("Stayman"). When you are 5-4 or 4-5 in the Majors, do not bid a Jacoby transfer to your 5-card Major! In the words of Marty Bergen, in his *wonderful, magnificent, wonderful* little "pocket book," so called because this small book will fit in a back or shirt pocket, Pocket Posh Tips for Bridge Players,

² Some players play the "Texas Transfer" convention, in which a 4**D** or 4**H** response to a 1**NT** opening bid "demands" that Opener bid a game contract in the appropriate Major, and no more. This Texas Transfer bid says, "I have 6+ cards in the Major, such that we have at least 10 trump cards, and so according to the 'Law of Total Tricks' should make at least 4. And we hold something like a 6-2 trump split, which is better than a 4-4 split, because our Partnership will be spending fewer than 2 trump in later Tricks when drawing trump. And I have roughly 8-9 HCPs."

³ Some Partnerships bid Stayman with 8 to 10 HCPs, rather than 9-10. Yoda says this is dangerous, because if you end up playing a **NT** contract, you might have too few points to make the **NT** contract. Remember: "Points are for No Trump [but not so much for suit contracts]!"

If your [P]artner opens 1**NT**, and you have 5-4 in the [M]ajors and a game-going hand (9-plus HCP), do not transfer. The better approach is to respond 2**C**. This is true for hands with both four spades and five hearts, or five spades and four hearts. (p. 43) [underlining added]

If you hold length in both Majors, your odds of finding a "fit" in a Major are *massively* increased. For example, if you hold 4-4 in the Majors, your odds of finding the Magic 8-Card fit are **60%**, while if you are 5-4 or 4-5 in the Majors your odds of finding an 8-Card fit in a Major are **74%**. Therefore, you may wish to bid Stayman even with as few as 6 HCPs, as long as both your Major suits include *several* Honors, meaning cards Ten or higher.

When you are 5-4 or 4-5 in the Majors, even holding only 6 HCPs, your Partnerships holds roughly 16 (~16) HCPs + 6 HCPs = 22 HCPs, and at least either 7 or 8 Trump cards. When you bid Stayman as Responder, you are "The Captain". Your job is to set the final contract at 2**H** or 2**S**, by PASSing Opener's response tno Stayman, or to later make a 3-level bid "inviting" Opener to game if Opener holds more than 2 cards in the Trump Suit, or to set the contract at either 4**H** or 4**S**.

Bidding 3NT to Give Partner a Game Contract Choice

Normally a 3**NT** bid is a "drop dead" bid that says to Partner, "I think we can make 3**NT**, but probably should stop here." For example, opening 3**NT** is usually "drop dead." The sequence with Opponents Passing at every turn is also "drop dead": Opener: 1**NT**, Responder: 2**C**, Opener: 2**D**, Responder: 3**NT**.

However, bidding sequences in which Partners have *shown each other a "fit" in a Major*, and only then 1 Partner bids 3NT, is not a "drop dead" bid, and instead says to Partner: "Partner, I think we can make 3**NT**, but we also can make 4 in our Major. Usually playing 4 in a Major yields a higher score than 3**NT**, unless you (rarely) make exactly 4 in a 3**NT** contract when you would also make exactly 4 in the Major. You chose!" For example, the sequence "Opener: 1**S**, Responder: 2**S**, Opener: 3**NT**, says, "Partner, you chose!"

Bidding 3NT Following Partners Bidding 3 or All 4 Suits

In some cases, Partners bid as many as 3 different suits, and still do not find a suit "fit." In such cases, the last bidder in the Partnership should bid **NT** if the player (1) holds sufficient HCPs, and (2) can stop the unbid suit. An example sequence might be: Opener: 1**S**, Responder: 1**H**, Opener: 2**C**. If Responder can stop Diamonds, with sufficient HCPs a 3**NT** bid by Responder would be reasonable. In another sequence, with *only non-Pass bids shown here*, the decision may rest with the Opener: Opener: 1**D**, Opponent: 1**H**, Responder: 1**S**, Opener: 2**C**.

If the Responder can stop Opponents' Hearts, a **NT** bid by Responder may be reasonable.

Overcalling Opponents' Suit Bid with a 1NT Contract Bid

An overcall NT bid of Opponents may be reasonable, but requires that the Overcaller **must** hold "stops" in **all** the suits bid by the Opponents. All conventions (i.e., transfers, Stayman) are "on" whenever Partner makes a **NT** Overcall bid. For example, in the sequence: Opponent NORTH: **1H**, Partner EAST: **1NT**, SOUTH: Pass, Responder WEST: **2D**, WEST is "demanding" that EAST transfer to Hearts.

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"Asking for Aces" in a NT Context

If Partner opens 1NT, Partner has "limited" Partner's hand. Responder knows that Opener holds (1) 15-18 HCPs, and (2) distributions involving (a) no voids, (b) no singletons, and (c) not more than 1 doubleton (but may hold a 5-card Major). If Responder holds ~16-17 HCPs, Responder now knows that the Partnership holds roughly 32-33 HCPs, and so a 6NT "small" slam bid may be makeable.

But in addition to HCPs, "control" cards are absolutely critical in high-level NT contracts. For example, an Opponent "on lead" holding 2 Aces, or an A,K, will immediately lead to set the 6NT contract "off the top." The Responder by "asking for Aces" by bidding the **Gerber Convention** can determine whether such a scenario is likely to occur.

To "ask for Aces" when Partner opens 1NT, you **must** hold both (1) 15-18 HCPs, and (2) first-round (Aces) or "protected" second-round control cards (K,x or K,x,x) across **all 4 suits**.⁴ In a NT context you can "ask for Aces" by bidding 4C **whenever a NT bid was either the first or the last bid within the Partnership**. The 4C "asking" bid is "artificial," because this bid says exactly nothing about holding Clubs. Partner responding to the 4C Gerber "ask" responds (1) 4D to show 0 or 4 Aces, (2) 4H to show 1 Ace, (3) 4S to show 2 Aces, and (4) 4NT to show 3 Aces.

Double of Opponent's 1NT Opening as a 1NT Bid

Many Partners play a Double of an Opponent's 1NT bid, assuming no intervening bids, if any, other than Pass, says, "Partner, I hold exactly the HCPs and card distributions required to make an original 1NT bid!"⁵ **ALL** conventions (Stayman and Jacoby transfers) are "on" within the Partnership after this Double! Two example sequences would be: NORTH: 1NT, EAST: Double, SOUTH: Pass, WEST: 2D, with 2D being a Jacoby transfer to Hearts, or NORTH: 1NT, EAST: Pass, SOUTH: Pass, WEST: 2H, with the last bid being a Jacoby transfer to Spades. Because the 2NT hands together (1 in 1 Partnership, 1 in the other Partnership) hold more than 75% of the HCPs on this Board, a Jacoby transfer bid by the Responder to the Double is *much more likely* than a Stayman bid.

⁴ Players holding voids also usually do not "ask for Aces," because when you hold a void, and Partner tells you a count of Aces, you won't know whether or not the Partner holds an Ace in your void suit, or elsewhere. However, when the bidding occurs in a NT context, voids in either hand are unlikely.

⁵ Some Partners instead play a special convention called "DON'T" in which a Double of a 1NT bid has an entirely different meaning.

But this "Not-for-Penalty" Double of the original 1**NT** opening does not require the Responder to the Doubler to bid. In fact, quite often, especially when the original 1**NT** bidder is Vulnerable, the most prudent decision yielding the most optimal result will be to leave the Double in place, and proceed to set Opponent's 1**NT** contract!

Opening 7**NT**

If you hold (1) all 4 Aces, and (2) the top 10 cards in any 1 of the 4 suits, open 7**NT**. If Opponents Double, you must Re-Double. Your contract is a "lay down" that you cannot screw up during play. 7**NT** will be made even though a Grand Slam bid normally requires **35-37** HCPs within your Partnership, and you in your hand sadly only hold $4 \times 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 20$ HCPs! Although generally "Points are for No Trump!", in bridge there are always exceptions. This is exactly what makes bridge so frustrating, and so interesting!

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Board 03.1 (Jacoby Transfer)

Dealer: **NORTH**

NORTH (17)

S: A 5
H: K Q 9
D: A J 9 8 5
C: K 4 3

WEST (10)

S: K Q 8 6 3
H: A T
D: T 2
C: J 9 6 2

EAST (10)

S: J T 9 7 4
H: J 7
D: Q 7 3
C: A Q 5

SOUTH (3)

S: 2
H: 8 6 5 4 3 2
D: K 6 4
C: T 8 7

Board 03.2 (Stayman with 8)

Dealer: **EAST**

NORTH (7)

S: Q T 3
H: 9 8 4
D: K 8 2
C: Q 8 5 2

WEST (8)

S: 9 8 4 2
H: Q 5 3 2
D: J 5 3
C: A J

EAST (15)

S: K J 6
H: K J 7
D: A 9 7 4
C: K 7 3

SOUTH (10)

S: A 7 5
H: A T 6
D: Q T 6
C: T 9 6 4

Board 03.3 (Super Accept)

Dealer: **WEST**

NORTH (7)

S: J 9 4 3

H: Q 7

D: 9 6 2

C: A 4 3 2

WEST (17)

S: A 8

H: K J 4 2

D: A K 5

C: Q 8 7 5

EAST (6)

S: Q T 6

H: A 9 8 5 3

D: T 8 7

C: T 9

SOUTH (10)

S: K 7 5 2

H: T 6

D: Q J 4 3

C: K J 6