

Esther Discusses "3 Methods as Responder for Transferring Partner's 1NT Opening into a 3-Level Contract in a Minor, with a Brief Discussion of the "Rule of 8" to Decide Whether to Overcall Opponents' 1NT Opening"

Bruce Thompson

Bruce: Today, we are honored to have with us Esther Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master (20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints), who will discuss **"3 Methods for Transferring Partner's 1NT Opening into a 3-Level Contract in a Minor"**. Well, Esther, thank you for talking to us today.

Esther: D**n it, Bruce! How many times do I have to tell you to **NEVER, ever** call me Esther! Always, **ALWAYS, ALWAYS** instead call me, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen!

Bruce: Errr, very sorry about that, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen. Well, to make this discussion concrete, why don't we discuss the following Board?

Board #1

Knoxville 499er 9/18/23

Vul: **NONE**

Dealer: **NORTH**

	NORTH (15)	
	S: A T 2	
	H: A J 4 2	
	D: A Q 7	
	C: 5 4 3	
WEST (8)		EAST (10)
S: 7 6 4		S: K Q J 3
H: K Q 7		H: 8 5 3
D: K T 8 6 5 2		D: J 9 4
C: T		C: Q J 8
	SOUTH (7)	
	S: 9 8 5	
	H: T 9 6	
	D: 3	
	C: A K 9 7 6 2	

Esther: Well, of course, my *Malodorous Misanthrope*. NORTH as Dealer (1) held 15 HCPs, and a "flat" Hand with (2) no void, (3) no singleton, and (4) not more than 1 doubleton and, in fact, no doubleton. It don't get much "flatter" or more "rectangular" than that. So, NORTH quite correctly opened by bidding **1NT**!

Bruce: OK. Well, EAST held 10 HCPs. Should EAST have overcalled with a Suit bid?

Esther: Well, EAST did not have a biddable Suit, and not that many points. EAST wisely decided not to make a 2-level Suit bid. One way to decide whether to overcall a **1NT** opening bid with a Suit bid is to apply Mel Colchamiro's "**Rule of 8**"¹:

1. Add together the number of cards in your longest 2 Suits.
2. Subtract from that Total your number of losers in your Hand.
3. If the result is **2** or more, bid a Suit. Otherwise PASS.

Here is an example from the 2000 Bermuda Bowl. Brazil's Roberto Mello opened **1NT** (15-17). Paul Soloway held:

S: A K J 7 3 **H:** Q 8 2 **D:** Q 7 **C:** K 6 5

1. Paul held $5 + 3 = 8$ cards in his longest 2 Suits.
2. Paul counted as likely losers 1 Club, 2 Diamonds, 2 Hearts, and 2 Spades = **7** losers.
3. Because $8 - 7 = 1$, and 1 is less than **2**, a PASS is in order, according to the "Rule of 8".

Here is a second example:

S: K 8 6 3 2 **H:** K 8 6 5 3 **D:** 5 2 **C:** 9

1. Obi-Wan held $5 + 5 = 10$ cards in his longest 2 Suits.
2. Obi-Wan counted as likely losers 1 Club, 2 Diamonds, 2 Hearts, and 2 Spades = **7** losers.

¹ See Mel Colchamiro's 2007 book, How You Can Play Like an Expert (Without Having to Be One): Mel's 21st Century Rules and Other Guidelines for Winning at Your Level and Above).

3. Because $10 - 7 = 3$, and 3 is more than 2, so an overall of either 2H or 2S is appropriate. Obi-Wan holds only 6 HCPs, but while "Points are for NT"², in Suit contracts it's all about the "Law of Total Tricks", and distributions, and "Points Schmoints!"³

Bruce: Well, Esther, Colchamiro's "Rule of 8" is so complicated that it makes me *vomit* all over myself!

Esther: Well, Bruce, in that case, then certainly do not use the "Rule of 8"!!! Instead, simply think *analytically* about (1) how many cards you hold in a Suit in which you may Overcall, and (2) how many Honors you hold in that suit. And, in any case, also remember the bigger point that ALL the 40 or so "Rules of Bridge", or at least ALL the Bidding "Rules", are ALL intended to be used with *thoughtfulness* and only as *general* guidelines, and are not meant to be used too mechanically or rigidly!

Bruce: Well, OK. So, moving on, on **Board #1**, EAST's longest 2 Suits hold 7 cards. In a Spade contract, EAST will lose in EAST's Hand 1 Spade, 3 Hearts, 3 Diamonds, and 2 Clubs = 9 losers. So, it's not a close call, and EAST should (and did) PASS. Now, what should SOUTH bid?

Esther: Well, my *Bodacious Bupkus*, SOUTH does not want to leave the Partnership in a **NT** contract, because SOUTH's Hand is certainly not "flat", and SOUTH only has a singleton Diamond. NORTH may only hold 2 Diamonds, and E/W may hold between them 10 Diamonds! Do you really, really want to play a **NT** contract at *any* level when Opponents may hold 10 Diamonds? The most likely split would be 5-5, and EAST on lead will almost certainly lead a Diamond, and E/W will find their Diamond fit, and things will get very nasty

² This is a widely quoted saying of a Savannah Bridge Club player with more than 10,000 ACBL MasterPoints, whom some players call "Yoda"!

³ This is the title of Marty Bergin's 1995 book, which won the 1996 American Bridge Teachers' Association's "Bridge Book of the Year Award". Bergin is also the inventor of numerous important conventions and Rules, such as the "Rule of 20", "Bergen Limit Raises", and "DONT".

quite quickly. Therefore, SOUTH *desperately* wants to transfer to a Club contract, where SOUTH holds 6 Clubs to the A,K! Afterall, SOUTH's Club Ron Klinger "**Suit Quality Test**" ("**SQT**") **Score**⁴ is $6 + 2 = 8$, which says a 2-level contract is pretty safe, since $8 - 6 = 2$, and with SOUTH knowing that NORTH holds both (1) ~16 HCPs, and (2) at least 2 Clubs, will be perfectly fine.

Bruce: Well, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, how does one go about executing a transfer from **1NT** to a Minor?

Esther: Well, Bruce, there are *many* ways to do this transfer, and this is a matter of Partnership Agreement. I will discuss some of the options, and then I will say the method that I prefer. First, some Partners play Responder's bid of **2NT**⁵ as (1) showing 6+ Clubs and (2) requesting a transfer to Clubs, while bidding **3C**⁶ shows (a) 6+ Diamonds and (2) requesting a transfer to Diamonds. I personally (and remember that I am a Quintuple Gold Emerald Life Master [20 Million+ ACBL MasterPoints]) do not like using a **2NT** response as a transfer request! I much prefer using a **2NT** bid by Responder instead as saying, "Partner, my hand is 'flat', and a transfer bid is not reasonable, but a **NT** contract will indeed play well. If you are at the 'Top' of your **1NT** opening bid, please bid **3NT**, because I hold almost enough HCPs to respond **3NT**, but not quite. Otherwise, please PASS."⁷

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, is there another transfer-to-a-Minor option?

⁴ The Ron Klinger "**SQT**" **Score** equals (1) the number of cards in your longest Suit plus (2) the number of Honors you hold in the Suit, including the Ten. Generally, you can bid to the level that equals the "**SQT**" **Score** - 6.

⁵ **ALL** the transfer-to-a-Minor bids are "artificial," and therefore must be alerted to Opponents by Partner saying "Transfer", and explain the transfer if requested to do so.

⁶ In this transfer-to-a-Minor system a **2C** bid by Responder is still retained as Stayman.

⁷ When Partners playing **2NT** as requesting transfer to a Minor, Responder can still make the **2NT** bid asking Opener to bid **3NT** if he is at the "Top" of his opening **1NT** bid by first bidding **2C** Stayman, followed by Responder second only then bidding **2NT** *no matter what* Opener bids in response to the **2C** bid.

Esther: Well, Bruce, here is a second Transfer-to-a-Minor system:

1. Opener: 1**NT**. Responder, bidding 2**S**, says, "Partner, I hold 6+ Clubs with a reasonable '**SQT**' **Score**. Please bid 3**C**."
2. Opener: 1**NT**. Responder, bidding 3**C**, says, "Partner, I hold 6+ Diamonds with a reasonable '**SQT**' **Score**. Please bid 3**D**."

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what are your thoughts about this second Transfer system?

Esther: Well, Bruce, I very much *dislike* this second Transfer-to-a-Minor system. It is **critically important** to remember that you should only Transfer to a Minor when you hold a *weak* Hand with **7 or fewer HCPs**. This is because when you hold 8+ HCPs and a long Suit, a 3**NT** Game contract becomes potentially makeable when Partner has opened 1**NT**. So, I **insist** on a Transfer-to-a-Minor system that informs Partner either, "Partner, I hold a weak Hand, and so (1) 3**NT** is probably not makeable, but I hold a long Minor Suit, and (2) together our Hands will support (only) a 3**C** or a 3**D** bid", or alternatively, "Partner, I hold 8+ HCPs, and a long Minor Suit, so 3**NT** is probably makeable, particularly if you know that, together with your Hand's holdings in my Suit, my long Suit can be used to run the long Suit, and you have 'stoppers' at a reasonable level in all the other Suits." Therefore, I reserve the 1**NT**-3**C** or 1**NT**-3**D** bidding sequences to **only** when I hold both (1) a long Minor, and (2) 8+ HCPs, such that 3**NT** becomes potentially makeable, and *otherwise* Responder executes a Transfer.

Bruce: OK, Ms. Klinktoast-Houstonhousen, what third Transfer-to-a-Minor system do you then personally prefer?

Esther: Well, third, I personally prefer to play a 2**S** response to Opener's 1**NT** bid as requesting a transfer to Clubs, then, if Responder really wants the Partnership to play a Diamonds contract, Responder then "corrects" Opener's 3**C** bid by bidding 3**D**. Of course, one *downside* to this Transfer system is that when you want the Partnership to play a 3**D** contract, you will "*wrong side*" the contract by making the

Responder who holds the weaker Hand the Declarer. However, I find this downside *tolerable* because this third Transfer-to-a-Minor system still lets me distinguish for Opener whether or not I hold (1) a long Minor when 3NT is probably not makeable, as against (2) a long Minor when 3NT is probably is makeable!

**"To Transfer a 1NT Opening to a Minor, or
Not to Transfer 1NT to a Minor,
 that is the Questions!"**

Yes!

SOUTH (6)
S: 9 8 5
H: T 9 6
D: 3
C: K Q 9 7 6 2

1. The Club "**SQT**" **Score** = 6 + 2 = 8. 8 - 6 = 2, so a 3-level bid is potentially safe with Partner/Opener holding ~16 HCPs, and together the Partnership holding at least 6 + 2 = 8 Clubs.
2. A singleton Diamond in a **NT** contract may prove disastrous, but in a Club Suit contract, the short Diamonds holding provide second-Round control in Diamonds, and a ruffing opportunity in SOUTH as Dummy holding 6 Trump cards.
3. If Opener NORTH has sufficient "stoppers" in the other 3 Suits, and 3+ Clubs rather than 2, with an Honor, NORTH may *instead* set a makeable 3NT contract, which will be more favorable than making a 3-level Part Score in a Minor!

No!

SOUTH (7)
S: 9 8 5
H: T 9 6
D: 3 2
C: A K 9 7 6

1. The Club "**SQT**" **Score** = 5 + 2 = 7. 7 - 6 = 1, so a 3-level bid is potentially not safe even with

- Partner/Opener holding ~16 HCPs, and together the Partnership holding possibly only $5 + 2 = 7$ Clubs.
2. SOUTH holding a Diamond doubleton limits ruffing opportunities in Dummy.
 3. Because (1) a transfer to Clubs is probably unwise, and (2) and $\sim 16 + 7 = 23$ HCPs, **3NT** does not seem makeable, and so SOUTH should PASS NORTH's **1NT** opening.

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