

Who's in charge?

What a silly question – I am, of course. But what I mean is at the table; it is North (or East if E-W are a stationary pair). The board should be placed on the table (in the correct orientation) by North and remain there throughout the duration of bidding and play.

Pierre please note. Please leave the empty board in the middle of the table during play – this leads to less mis-scoring, mis-boarding and possible unethical questions about vulnerability etc during play. Now this is not just something that I made up, it is Law 7a:

‘When a board is to be played it is placed in the centre of the table until play is completed.’

Opening 1NT with a 5 card major?

One of our more flamboyant players suggested to Malgosia that she should have opened 1NT on a hand that contained a 5 card major; I was asked to comment. First of all, there is no ‘should’ about it. Expert opinion is divided. It is up to the individual/partnership style and understanding. Opening 1NT with a 5 card major is by no means that popular; the ACBL system cards, so kindly provided by Chuck, have a box that you need to tick for ‘5-card major common’.

There is obviously no problem in opening 1NT with a balanced hand and a 5 card minor. However, a 5 card major is more controversial. Opinion is divided on this subject; some never open 1NT with a 5 card major, some will allow a weak suit such as Q10543, while others will allow virtually any 5 card major suit. Which philosophy do I adopt? All three probably have equal merit, but I prefer the last (providing the hand *is balanced* in terms of both distribution (only 5332 acceptable) and location of high cards, i.e. the doubleton is Ax, Kx or Qx and the major is not top-heavy) for a number of reasons:

- 1- If you open 1♥/♠, then you will usually never be able to play in possibly the best contract of 1NT if you play 2/1 and a Forcing NT (my preferred system).
- 2- It is usually best to limit your hand as soon as possible, especially if relatively flat.
- 3- Once you open 1NT you never have a rebid problem. The hand is off your chest.
- 4- If you play 3♣ Puppet Stayman (a convention that locates both 4 and 5 card majors), you will never get into the wrong *game* contract.
- 5- 1NT (and most other contracts) will be played from the strong hand.
- 6- The defenders do not have it so easy defending against a 1NT contract as they do not know if declarer has a 5 card major or not.
- 7- There is also the negative inference, that a major suit opening within our 1NT range is usually a good suit and/or unbalanced.

Examples (of my preference) when playing a strong NT:

♠ AJ9	♥ AQ984	♦ K7	♣ Q93	Open 1NT
♠ AJ9	♥ Q10974	♦ AK7	♣ Q3	Open 1NT
♠ Q97	♥ AKQ104	♦ A7	♣ J93	Open 1♥, the ♥'s are top-heavy
♠ AK9	♥ AQ984	♦ J7	♣ Q93	Open 1♥, the doubleton is not good enough (and the points are concentrated in two suits). The hand is not balanced (point-wise)

As I said, the experts disagree and many will open 1NT even if top-heavy, and there are certainly many who would open the last hand 1NT. You do not guarantee a stopper for in every suit for a 1NT opening, but the major suit contract may well be better if 5 card with a very weak doubleton. Let's have an example of what I consider to be an unsuitable 1NT opening. But who am I to disagree with Zia Mahmood (South)? The hand is from the 1998 Macallan International Bridge pairs. You have to be a top class player to even be invited to this tournament, and these players were 4 of the World's best.

Dealer:	♠ 1072	West	North	East	South
South	♥ K2	-	-	-	1NT
Both vul	♦ 875	-	-	-	1NT
	♣ 97654	dbl	pass	pass	pass

♠ 6	N	♠ J983	West cashed the first 6 ♦ tricks, followed by the ♣A and then 6 ♥ tricks took the remainder. 7 down in a 1 level contract! Perhaps rather a graphic example, but the South hand really is unsuitable for 1NT. I guess you have to be a top international to make zero tricks in a doubled contract and come away smiling?
♥ 108	W E	♥ AQJ973	
♦ AKQ1096	S	♦ 2	
♣ AJ103		♣ 82	
	♠ AKQ54		
	♥ 654		
	♦ J43		
	♣ KQ		

The NT Rebid

Now over the last few weeks I have been pounding away at introducing a new suit at the two level with insufficient values, but apparently a few people have not realised what I am getting at.

You are playing a strong NT and so you open 1♦, planning to rebid 1NT over partner's 1♥/♠. Unfortunately, partner responds 2♣ and so your rebid is now 2NT. This does not show any extras, it is still a non-jump and is 12-14 points. Now if partner had (unwisely in my view) chosen to bid 2♣ on a flat 10 count then the final contract of 2NT may be too high. This scenario is only a problem if you play a strong NT, as in the analogous case of the weak NT the 2NT rebid here would show 15-16 points and there is never a problem. There is also a problem (when playing a strong NT) of bidding a new suit on a decent 11 points. If your partner (the opener) is flat with 12-14 points then he will bid 2NT. You (the 11 point hand) are then left with the decision whether to go on to 3NT or not. You have no idea! The decision should be made by the hand with the 3 point high card spread. With this hand, for example, do not bid 2♣ over a 1♦/♥ opening as you have no idea what to do when partner rebids 2NT (12-14). Best is to bid 2NT yourself (showing 11 / bad 12 points) and allowing partner to pass with a min and bid 3NT with a max (14+). Now some people are loathe to respond 2NT as it takes up so much space. This is true over a major suit opening, but over a 1♦ opening it really is very descriptive. 11 points and no 4 card major.

Opening 1NT with a 6 card minor?

♠ 96 This may seem a silly question, but somebody actually did open 1NT with
♥ A3 this hand on Friday. Perhaps the person in question (Chuck) should re-
♦ A72 consider his request to me about typing up something on alerts (he says that
♣ AKJ975 a 1♣ opening with a possible 2 card ♣ suit should be alerted). I would be loathe to have to
alert a 1NT bid as possibly a good six card suit with a
useless doubleton and no tenace to protect! This hand is far too good for a strong NT – open 1♣ and rebid
3♣ over partner's 1♦/♥/♠. If 3NT is to be the final contract, you want partner to be declarer. This hand
has no tenace (such as Kx) to protect, and partner may well have. Aces belong on table. Wouldn't it be
sad if partner had ♣Q, a red king and ♠K and the opponents took the first 5 ♠ tricks in 3NT? What
actually happened? Partner had a 7 count and passed 1NT, it made 12 tricks! Everybody else was in 3NT.

♠ KJ Now this is more like it! I would certainly have no problems with
♥ K3 somebody opening a strong NT with this hand. The ♣ suit is not so
♦ Q92 robust and a rebid of 3♣ having opened 1♣ would be an overbid.
♣ AQ9875 These tenaces cry out for a 1NT opener.