

Strong or Weak NT

The two most popular opening ranges of 1NT are 15-17 (strong) and 12-14 (weak). There are others but these two are the most practical and common. 16-18 has some followers, but really is unsatisfactory and out of date. The two main problems are that it comes up infrequently and also the 1NT rebid is then 12-15 which is really too large a range.

But how does your adopted NT strength affect the rest of your bidding? As indicated above, the NT rebid is affected (it is 12-14 using a strong NT and 15-16 with the weak NT), but that is not all. It affects the allowable strength for a new suit at the two level after partner has opened with a 1 level suit bid; and this holds whether or not the opponents have intervened.

♠ KQ10 This is last week's quiz. You are playing 5 card majors and a 15-17 NT.

♥ 85 Partner deals and opens 1♥. What do you bid? Playing a weak NT, 2♦

♦ AJ654 would be most people's choice (it only promises 8 or 9+ points). Playing a

♣ 832 strong NT, things are different (some might say not so good! – this really is an advantage of the weak NT). You cannot now bid 2♦ as this bid

promises 11+ pts. Opposite a 1♥ opener, this hand is not worth anywhere near 11 points and so the best response is 1NT.

So now we come onto a major difference between the Strong and Weak NT systems. Playing a weak NT allows much more freedom for a two level response. Why? The answer is that you must consider opener's rebid. Let's assume he opens 1♥ with a relatively flat hand and the point range to rebid NT. If you play a weak NT, this rebid is 15-16 points and if your initial response is at the two level then partner must bid 2NT. The point is that if you 'force' partner to rebid NT at the two level, you need to be sure that it is a relatively safe contract; 8 + 15 should be OK. But with a Strong NT the rebid only promises 12-14 points, hence you need 11 pts for a new suit at the two level.

Two over One (2/1)

Playing a weak NT system such as Acol allows two level responses on 8+ points. Strong NT systems such as Standard American require 11+ points. A very popular system in the States is 2/1. With this system, the requirement for a two level response is increased from 11 to 12. This thus makes the bid game forcing and makes finding the correct game/slam much easier as nobody has to waste space making unnecessary jumps or forcing bids.

Negative (Sputnik) Doubles

♠ 75 Your partner opens 1♦. No problem, you simply bid 1♥ (you would not,
♥ AJ96 of course, not even dream of bidding 1NT and suppressing the 4 card ♥
♦ Q4 suit). Unfortunately, RHO intervenes with 1♠. So what do you bid now?
♣ 98732 Under traditional methods there is no sensible bid. You have to employ a
 negative double. There are various different ways of playing them, but I
think the easiest (and best) is that they simply promise unbid majors(s) and sufficient points to compete (but they are unlimited – just the same as a new suit if RHO had not intervened). So with this hand, a double of the 1♠ overcall promises a ♥ suit and enough points to compete to 2♥. And how should opener respond? - Just the same as he would have if his LHO had passed and partner had bid 1♥. So 2♥ by opener is non-forcing. Easy eh?

But some people may say ‘I like to have my nice juicy penalty double – especially if playing against Jeff or Martin’. The answer is that you *can* have your cake and eat it too. And very often you get a much bigger cake! All will be explained in next week’s exciting instalment.

Now don’t forget those new year resolutions guys (nice shirts, be polite, no arguments and be punctual). Happy new year to you all.