



Chris Jagger

The husband is a 'sticker'...

AS a nervous youngster coming up against a top class pair, my confidence took a bolstering when we collected 2300. Having gone eight off doubled in 2♥, declarer observed ruefully that with a favourable wind he may have gone fewer off in 1NT doubled. Quick as lightning dummy retorted that it would have been a bottom anyway. But actually that wasn't true: there were a number of pairs going off doubled in 1NT, most going seven off, a few going six off. True, going off in 1NT was not going to be a good score, but there were definitely match-points to be had, and with our defence even more would be available when declarer scraped together a trick or two. If it had been teams, it would have been even more significant: 7 or 12 IMPs saved.

A few years on, I was persuaded by my partner of the merits of 'running before you are doubled'. I held the East hand:

♠ 7 6 2		♠ 9 4 3
♥ 8 5 3		♥ 7 4 2
♦ K 8		♦ 7 6 4 3
♣ A K Q J 6		♣ 5 4 2

Partner opened 1NT. On the theory that we were bound to be doubled, I tried 2♣. Partner bid 2♦, which was doubled. I was now in some trouble: if I passed, then we would have gone seven off. So I tried 2♥. This was doubled for seven off. At other tables 1NT was being passed out (the points split 14-13), and going one off on a diamond lead. 'It's only a bottom,' you say. Not a bit – it was 17 IMPs away.

Proponents of the 'pulling' school will tell you that the opponents haven't doubled

When 1NT is doubled don't wriggle out of it!

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you yet at the two level, and anyway, you might have a fit. But does this stand up to scrutiny?

Sometimes it is easier to catch you at the two level. You are one level higher, and if the opponents have marginal values they will be doubtful about standing 1NT, but much more confident to double a two-level contract if they have a trump holding. On a really bad day, when you run to a suit you might find a weak hand sitting over you with the same suit – intending to pull to that suit themselves!

What about the assertion that you might have a fit? Well, true: you might, but you might not! And even if you do have a fit, can you actually find it? Optimists always envisage finding a fit – history has taught me to be a pessimist!

Now let us consider the downsides of pulling:

1. You are one level higher, so further to go off.
2. When you don't have a fit, the play can be horrible at the two level, while often in 1NT you will scramble some tricks.
3. If you do have a fit, you may still not find it. Consider the earlier layout: clubs was clearly the best fit, but could you actually find it? Even those who play a rescue mechanism may not find their fit. E.g. if responder has 4-4 in the majors, he may be able to bid 2♥ showing the majors, but there could still be a 5-3 minor fit available and no major-suit fit.
4. Passing can give opponents a problem. On marginal hands the fourth hand may well decide to pull; when this happens, you may go from getting a very bad score to a very good score, as it is now the opponents who are struggling to find their best fit. We've made them take the last guess.

Every argument can find a deal that best suits its case – but here we shall not consider a perfect deal, but use a realistic everyday sort of deal that illustrates the last point:

Game All. Dealer South.			
		♠ Q 9 5	
		♥ J 7 6 3	
		♦ 8 5 2	
		♣ 9 6 4	
♠ K J 8 2		♠ 6 4 3	
♥ A K Q		♥ 8 2	
♦ 3		♦ K J 10 6 4	
♣ K Q J 7 5		♣ 10 3 2	
		♠ A 10 7	
		♥ 10 9 5 4	
		♦ A Q 9 7	
		♣ A 8	

At Game All it starts 1NT – Double. Should the North hand pull? It is a weak hand, and clearly 1NT doubled is going a 'long way' off – in actual fact only two off. 2♥, as you can see, is only one off, but even if you find the 2♥ contract (I can see some pairs escaping to 2♣, then redoubling, and ending up in 2♦), it is likely to be doubled and still be a bad score (even though better than being left in 1NT doubled). However, consider what happens if you pass.

Most Easts would take out to 2♦. This will either be left in, and drift off, for a good North-South score, or may be converted by West to 2NT or 3♣, both considerably worse than what was to be gained by defending.

So here we see that even when North has a fit, even when he finds it (which he might not do), and even when he is better off there than in 1NT, he would still have got a better result by passing 1NT!

I rest my case. □

When 1NT is doubled do wriggle out of it!

Or vote by post (Editor, English Bridge, 23 Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LR).
Comments for publication (not more than 200 words, please) are welcome.

... but the wife is a 'wiggler'!

YOUR partner opens 1NT, the next hand doubles, and the clouds darken above as you survey your weak, fairly balanced hand. The next hand will pass, and they've got you. With your hand useless to help, the undertricks will mount up, and a telephone number conceded. Who argued in an earlier debate that a weak no-trump is better than a strong one? (*None other than Chris Jagger, of course!* — Ed.)

At this point you could do with a bit of magic, and fortunately it is right at hand. That chap Houdini, the master of great escapes, decided you need to wriggle, and there are several variations on a theme that allow you to get out of 1NT with a long suit, but also to show more balanced hands and find your best fit. Not only is this sleight of hand desperately needed in these dangerous times, but it is even a bit of fun to play, and turns the tables on your opponents who then squirm to know what to do!

Exactly which method to use is up to you to mull over on a long summer's evening, but essentially you can bid a suit directly, you can redouble to ask partner to pull, and if you like you can also use pass to ask for partner to redouble, thus showing even more hand types.

The first upside to pulling 1NT doubled on most hands is that you often get to a better spot – even though it is one trick higher. A 4-4 fit (or better!) will provide several more tricks than 1NT on scanty values, and escapes that show two places to play will always find at least a 4-3 fit. Even when the fit isn't so great, it will often play better than 1NT doubled if opponents were going to cash a long suit. Now at least you can ruff it!

The second upside is that they haven't doubled you yet!

Once 1NT has been doubled, the advantages of wriggling are:

- If you land in a decent fit, neither opponent may have a good enough holding in the suit to be able to take a penalty.
- When you start to wriggle, the next player may be under pressure to take action. With a hand unsuitable for a double, he may feel obliged to bid a suit to show either a five-card suit, or some values – and thereby let you off the hook. To counter this, many pairs play a forcing pass by the fourth hand. In the situation described above, it is safe to pass and let the 1NT doubler have the chance to double instead. However, this is usually only played over pulls to two-of-a-minor, so the same problem is faced after a pull to two-of-a-major.
- And against new partnerships there is always the possibility that the opponents will not have an agreement as to whether doubling an escape is for penalty or take-out.

There are many other ways in which an escape mechanism may confuse opponents. For example, if you are playing a pass as forcing to redouble, followed by bidding the lower of two four-card suits, fourth hand has a chance to bid a suit over the pass, or to pass and bid a suit over your suit bid (which will generally be a minor), or to make a forcing pass and then bid a suit over partner's action. It takes a detailed level of partnership agreement to know the differences between all these actions, and I've seen many a wheel come off with opponents arguing: 'But if you'd had some values you'd have bid on the previous round!' 'But bidding on the previous round would have shown a very weak hand!' As a result, games are missed, or bid in vain – in an auction where at one stage it was your partnership that was in the danger zone.

And the longer the wriggling goes on,



Catherine Jagger

THE DEBATE

the more mesmerised the opponents can become – by the time you bid your fourth escape suit they are wondering which suits you really have. Sometimes they will get weary as the double cards run out and just blast out 3NT, at others they will double you on principle – so if you have finally managed to find your fit you could now be destined for a +670 gain.

Personally I usually play a fairly simple wriggle, with two-level bids showing the lower of two suits, redouble forcing 2♣ and showing a five-card suit, and pass to play. But there are plenty of more exotic flavours which, as they are rarer, can pose more challenges to defend against. Two-way bids such as 2♣ showing clubs or two higher suits (the 1NT opener always passes, and if the opponents double, the wriggler can bid again to show specific two-suited combinations) are especially effective when non-vulnerable, and can confront opponents with the choice of leaving you in a non-fit but only going off in 50s, or letting you have a second go with a better chance of finding a decent fit.

There is one downside, however, to the partner of the 1NT opener always wriggling that I really feel I should mention: it stops openers wriggling themselves when they have a five-card suit! Why should partner have all the fun? □

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