

Evaluate your hand when responding to a 1NT opening

SOME years ago I was conducting a seminar with the late Jeremy Flint on Canberra, P&O's famous passenger liner, when we posed this question. Your partner opens 1NT (12-14); what would you respond with this hand?

♠ Q J 5
♥ J 6 2
♦ K Q 7 4
♣ Q 8 3

The almost unanimous answer was 2NT. Perhaps this is not so surprising when one considers that most learners are reared on tables which indicate that opener's 1NT should be raised (invitationally) to 2NT on 11-12 points. Understandably, in the early stages of teaching it is not practical to dot all the 'i's' and cross all the 't's', and somehow, later on, the subject of adjustment, or fine-tuning, tends to get neglected.


Now if you think we had an easy ride telling everyone that the right response was 'Pass', you would be sadly mistaken! The point count, which unquestionably does a yeoman service in pointing us in the winning direction on balanced hands, soon becomes ingrained on the budding player and is often treated as little short of a religion. However, it is not infallible and there is certainly room for fine-tuning.

4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2 and 5-3-3-2 are all balanced hands but the first one is the least attractive when it comes to generating

tricks. So, if a 4-3-3-3 hand is lacking in intermediate cards – and being aceless doesn't help – there is a strong case for deducting a point (fine-tuning). That is why 'Pass' is recommended on the above hand.

Let's suppose the opener has a maximum, in which case it's possible, if responder passes, that a game will be missed – assuming everything clicks. As against that, a minus score will frequently be the outcome when responder raises. Then there are all those cases where opener passes the invitational raise and it transpires that seven tricks is the maximum partner can muster. One last thought: if defending was going to be more advantageous than declaring, that chance would be less likely to materialise if responder shows his hand by raising to 2NT.

Although one deal proves nothing – it's the overall picture that really matters – here is the original setting of the featured hand held by North:

♠ 7 3 ♥ A 9 3 ♦ 10 8 5 2 ♣ K J 7 4	♠ Q J 5 ♥ J 6 2 ♦ K Q 7 4 ♣ Q 8 3 	♠ K 10 8 2 ♥ 8 7 4 ♦ 9 3 ♣ A 10 6 2 ♠ A 9 6 4 ♥ K Q 10 5 ♦ A J 6 ♣ 9 5
---	---	---

Against South's no-trump contract, West leads the four of clubs; East wins with the ten and there are still three more clubs and the ace of hearts to come. Now try moving East's two black tens to North in exchange for the five of spades and three of clubs, and suddenly it's a whole new scenario. The ace of clubs wins the first trick and the defence are held to four tricks, three clubs and the ace of hearts. Even if it looks as though West started with five clubs, and therefore too dangerous to play on hearts, declarer has another string to his bow: the



Freddie North

FINE-TUNING


spade finesse. Four spades, four diamonds and one club would see him home.

The other side of the coin is when a spot of fine-tuning is required in the opposite direction: upwards.

This is your hand as North at game all, teams; partner opens 1NT (12-14) and West passes. What should you respond?

♠ 3
♥ Q 7 5
♦ A K J 10 7 4
♣ 7 6 5

The full deal is:

♠ Q 8 7 6 ♥ K 10 2 ♦ 9 ♣ J 10 9 8 3	♠ 3 ♥ Q 7 5 ♦ A K J 10 7 4 ♣ 7 6 5 	♠ K J 10 5 4 2 ♥ A J 4 ♦ 8 6 2 ♣ Q ♠ A 9 ♥ 9 8 6 3 ♦ Q 5 3 ♣ A K 4 2
--	--	---

For two reasons North should respond 3NT. The first is that game could be cold and there seems little point in asking partner his opinion when he is unlikely to know what is needed. The second reason is the opposition: they could easily have a profitable contract of their own.

3NT duly sailed home in Room 1, but in Room 2 the East-West pair were allowed into the auction at a low level. North-South still bid on to 3NT but then East-West decided to 'save' in 4♠. The save turned out rather better than expected when East guessed the position of the queen of hearts, losing just one spade, one diamond and one club. □

**JUST STARTED AT THE
77 BRIDGE CLUB
(H. SCHOGGER'S)**

Every Tuesday at 8.00 pm

£100 FIRST PRIZE DUPLICATE

For County Masters and above only

£10 ENTRY – £20 A PAIR

Enquiries: Mel ☎ 07967 039096

Drinks & light snacks available