

August 1999 Overcalls in no trumps

When students start learning it is hard enough to cope with an uninterrupted auction, let alone one where everybody joins in. But long before the teacher is ready to introduce the topic, the students are entering the auction without fear – probably because they have never heard the word Double! This is never more true than when they bid 1NT over an opening bid. The other evening Len held

- ♠ A Q 7 A perfect hand for a weak no trump opening bid, but the player to Len's right got there first and opened 1♥. Len hates to pass, so he bid 1NT just the same. The hand was passed out and the contract went three down, losing 150 points Not a bad result as such but the opponents were only going to bid to 2♥ and make +110, so it was not a winning action.
- ♥ Q 7 4
♦ 7 4 3 2
♣ A J 2

Well if 1NT is not the recommended bid, what should Len have done? The answer is that neglected call – pass! Think about it. The hand on the right has around 13 to 19 points, Len has 13 which leaves at the very most 14 points between the remaining two hands. Len was lucky that his partner had some points, she might have had none. If you are going to have to play opposite a very weak dummy, you need a bit of stuffing in your own hand, which is why a 1NT overcall is normally played as 16-18 with two stops in the opponents suit. Something like:

- ♠ A Q 7 This hand has 17 points. It is likely that the ♥ K Q will generate two tricks and when this hand is on lead it can play on diamonds to set up two winners. Even if partner has absolutely no points, it is quite likely to win two hearts, two diamonds, one or two spades and a club. Nothing is certain but making or one down seems a likely result
- ♥ K Q 4
♦ Q J 10 9
♣ Q J 2

- ♠ 10 6 5 If 1NT shows 16-18 points how does this affect responder's actions? It is simplest to bid exactly as though 1NT had been opened but with four fewer points needed for invitational sequences. With ten points Barbara raised straight to game, since 16 plus 10 is 26
- ♥ 3 2
♦ K 7 3 2
♣ A K 6 4

- ♠ J 10 6 Joan wanted to pass this hand when she heard partner's 1NT overcall, it looked such a poor hand. But if partner is a maximum there should be the values for game, since 8 plus 18 is 26 points. The right bid is 2NT.
- ♥ 3 2
♦ K 7 3 2
♣ A 10 6 4

- ♠ J 10 6 5 When this hand came up, nobody remembered about using Stayman with a 4-card major. With the hand shown, it is right to bid 2♣. If partner responds in spades, raise to 3♠. If partner bids 2♦ or 2♥, make a game try with 2NT. If you had a couple of points more, say the ♠K instead of the ♠J you would bid 4♠ over 2♠ and 3NT over 2♦.
- ♥ 3
♦ K 7 3 2
♣ A 6 4 3

- ♠ J 9 6 5 4 3 Marion wouldn't bid with this horrible hand, but put it opposite the 1NT overcall shown and you will see that you should. Your hand is worth more tricks played in spades than no trumps.
- ♥ –
♦ 8 7 3
♣ 10 6 5 3
- Make a weakness takeout to 2♠, which tells partner to pass, even if holding only two little spades. Partner may be a bit miffed at having to put a lovely hand down as dummy but the result will prove you right.

- ♠ K Q 7 Having mastered all that, Len was sitting in the fourth seat on the very next hand. Now the bidding went 1♥ pass pass. Len wanted to bid but he had just heard me say 'A 1NT overcall shows 16-18 points'. What could he bid? He looked pretty fed up when I said the answer is 1NT. When third hand passes, it won't have more than 5 points. So partner must have some values and now it should be safe to bid 1NT with just 12-14 points.
- ♥ Q J 8 3
♦ Q J 10 9
♣ K 2
- Oh isn't bridge a complicated game – logical, but complicated!

Summary

<p>In second seat, or in fourth seat when there is an opening and a response, a 1NT overcall shows 16-18. Responder bids as to a 1NT opening but remembers that partner is four points stronger.</p> <p>In fourth seat after an opening bid followed by two passes, 1NT is 12-14.</p> <p>The same responses are used to a no trump overcall as a no trump opening.</p>
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