

Slam tries after partner opens 1NT

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Once in a while, when partner opens 1NT, your hand is strong. The sort of hand that really makes you sit up and check that it is sorted correctly – where you need several goes at counting your points. For example:

♠ A Q 3
♥ K Q 2
♦ K Q J 10
♣ A 7 2

Partner opens 1NT and you have this super hand. After counting your points at least twice, you know you have 21. Since partner must have 12-14 points to open 1NT, your side must have at least 33 points in the two hands combined and possibly as many as 35. Barring bad breaks, you can be sure your side can make a slam, all you have to do is bid it.

Pick your 6NT card out of the bidding box and put it on the table.

Don't worry that the defence will be able to cash two aces. Two aces are eight points and you know that even if partner is a complete minimum, you are only missing seven points. Don't worry where the tricks will come from, partner should have no problem finding at least twelve tricks. Screw up your courage and just bid 6NT.

There are only 40 points in the pack. With a combined 33 or more, your side cannot be missing two aces!

♠ A Q 3
♥ K Q 2
♦ A K Q J
♣ A 10 2

And if you ever pick up 26 points, you know that your side has at least a combined 38 points. Just bid 7NT. At the very most your side is missing a queen or a couple of jacks, so even a nervous partner should be able to make thirteen tricks. With a combined 38 points, your side cannot be missing an ace or a king.

♠ A Q J
♥ K Q 2
♦ K Q J 10
♣ Q J 4

This hand is not quite as good as the two above, but it does have 20 points. What you would like to do is ask partner whether their 1NT opening is a good one or a poor one. You can do this by bidding 4NT. This is asking opener a question – are you a maximum? Opener should only pass with 12 or a poor 13 points. With 14 or a good 13, opener should bid 6NT. It's just the same question as when you raise 1NT to 2NT and it's just the same hand that would happily bid 3NT that should also happily bid 6NT.

4NT over 1NT is not asking for aces but about the value of the whole hand.
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With a balanced hand, however strong, responder will expect to play in no trumps. But with a strong suit, responder may want to look for slam in a suit.

♠ A Q J
♥ K Q J
♦ K Q J 10 8 2
♣ 10

It's easy to picture hands where 6♦ could be making, but we don't want to bid a slam and find that two aces are missing. If 4NT is asking about opener's points, how can we ask about opener's aces? Over 1NT responder bids 3♦ with this hand. This is a strong bid suggesting an alternative to playing in no trumps and looking for a slam. Hands only interested in game usually play in no trumps not diamonds.

Whatever opener responds to 3♦, 4NT is now asking for aces. If opener responds 5♣ (no ace) or 5♦ (one ace) to 4NT, you will play in 5♦. If opener shows two aces with 5♥, you will bid 6♦. If partner shows three aces by bidding 5♠, don't expect a grand slam to

make. With 12 points in three aces, partner won't have ♠K as well. 7♦ would need the spade finesse to win and that is only a 50% chance. Be happy to reach 6♦.

If you play 3♥ or 3♠ as showing a five-card suit and looking for the best game, you can still bid 3♥ or 3♠ with a strong hand too. You just bid on over partner's response. If you are a more advanced learner and play transfers all jumps to the three level bids show a good six-card or longer suit and are looking for a slam.

Less experienced players are always nervous of bidding slams, but here are some hands from the bidding practice.

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

Polly Les

1NT 4NT
6NT

Polly looked very worried and tried to pass 4NT quickly. But after realising that she couldn't have a better hand for a 1NT opening, she was persuaded to bid 6NT. Four spades, three hearts, three diamonds and two clubs after driving out ♣A came to 12 tricks and she was very pleased with the result.

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

Elsa Barbara

1NT 3♥
3NT 4NT
5♦ 6♥

Barbara is always an adventurous bidder and happily bid a strong 3♥ over 1NT. Elsa bid 3NT with only two hearts, but Barbara continued with a Blackwood 4NT. She found Elsa with an ace and bid 6♥. Four spades, six hearts, four diamonds comes to thirteen tricks if a club is not led. As it was Barbara ruffed the second club, drew trumps and claimed twelve tricks.

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

I am not going to shame the pairs who produced a poor auction on the following deal, but there were at least two more I heard about who bid:

West East

1NT 3♦
4♦ 5♦

A club was led and South won ♣K and played a spade to ♠A. A diamond had to be lost and 5♦ went one down. Of course East should just bid 3NT. Partner will see the lovely diamond suit when dummy goes down – no need to tell everybody in advance.

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

Mike Chris

1NT 6NT

With 23 points, Chris had no problem bidding 6NT. 14 tricks were actually available and the pair wondered if the grand slam was biddable. There is one rather obscure piece of system that makes it easy – a bid of 5NT over 1NT says 'Bid 6NT with a minimum and 7NT with a maximum' but I have to confess that I have never held a hand good enough for a 5NT bid and probably never will.

♠ J 5	♠ K Q 9 8 6 2	Margaret	Peter
♥ K 4 2	♥ A Q J 8 7 6	1NT	3♠
♦ A J 9 8 4	♦ –	3NT	6♥
♣ K 7 2	♣ A		

Sometimes responder just has to improvise in the bidding. There is no good way to show this strong two suiter with only two losers, except by bidding both suits. Peter found a good solution since he knew Margaret would have at least three cards in one of the majors, but he didn't know which. Margaret gave preference to hearts by passing 6♥ and produced two good cards, the ♠J and the ♥K, allowing the contract to make.