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This Week in Bridge

(189) Bidding vs. Weak 1NT Opening

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Level: 4, 6

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General

When the opponents open the bidding with a strong NT, showing 15-17 points, we usually try enter the auction over this 1NT bid either to be competitive or destructive – bidding with shapely hands (most common) or bidding with hands that have good values (less common). But if the opponents are playing a “Weak 1NT” opening bid (for example, 12-14 points) then, somewhat counterintuitively, we need to bid only when we have a decent valued hand. In this case, we tend to bid with hands that would normally have overcalled at the 2-level – hands with about opening values. This is because when the opponents open a “Weak 1NT” it is still possible for our side to have a game. If we bid destructively (with only shape and without much strength) then if partner has values they may push the auction too high. It is common to use a special bidding system against the opponents’ Weak 1NT opening bids that is different from the one you use against a strong 1NT opening.

Defining Weak NT

Level: 4

Before we go into a system for competing over a weak 1NT opening bid, we need to know which NT ranges are considered weak and which are considered strong. A common and effective solution to this is to play a 1NT bid as strong if it contains 16 points in the range and to play it as weak if it is not that strong.

Examples of 1NT Ranges and Classifications

15-17 points	Strong
14-17 points	Strong
14-16 points	Strong
13-16 points	Strong
13-15 points	Weak
12-14 points	Weak
11-14 points	Weak



Modified Cappelletti vs. Weak Notrump

Level: 4

Now that we know what a Weak 1NT bid is let's discuss a system for bidding over it. Unlike vs. Strong 1NT bids, in this situation we need a bid to show a strong balanced hand (remember that vs. Strong 1NT opening bids that with that hand we simply pass and defend – expecting this to be our best result). We use *double* of their Weak 1NT opening to show this balanced hand that is at the top or stronger than the opponent's 1NT bid.

Example

If the opponents play a Weak 1NT showing 12-14 points, then

1NT X This double shows a balanced hand with at least 14 points.

This double is not unilaterally for penalty. It asks for input from partner. Advancer can leave this double in for penalty if they have about 6+ points and no long suit. (When Advancer has 6+ points then they know we have at least half the points, giving us a good chance of beating the 1NT contract).

Note: In this situation, when partner has made a penalty double, some partnerships play “systems on” (SO), bidding as if their partner had opened the bidding 1NT. But this is not the best approach and not recommended. Advancer needs to be able to run to a natural 2♣ or 2♦ contract with a poor hand.

It should also be noted that double can be used for other types of powerful hands, like “double and bid” hands with lots of HCP and a long strong suit.

The other primary bids in the system are

- 2♥ and 2♠, both natural, usually showing a 6+card suit.
- 2♦* is used to show a hand with both Major suits.
- This leaves 2♣* as a special bid to use a relay to 2♦. This bid is used to show a hand with a long ♦ suit, a two-suited hand with a Major + minor, or occasionally a good hand with long ♣.

Let's see how this 2♣ bid works.

1NT 2♣* P 2♦*

P ___?

- Pass Showing a long ♦ suit.
- 2♥ ♥ and a minor (at least 5+card ♥ and 4+card minor).
- 2♠ ♠ and a minor (at least 5+card ♠ and 4+card minor).
- 3♣ ♣, but a stronger hand than jumping to 3♣ directly.



Complete Modified Cappelletti System

Level: 4

1NT ___?

- X Penalty oriented, usually a balanced hand at top of opponent's range (14+ points)
- 2♣* Relay to 2♦ to show ♦, M+m, or strong with ♣
- 2♦* Both Majors (usually at least 5/4 shape)
- 2♥ Natural
- 2♠ Natural
- 2NT Weak with both minors (usually at least 5/5 shape)
- 3L Natural and preemptive

All of the bids from 2♣ to 2♠ show at least opening bid values in shape and strength and are more constructive than bids that we make over a strong 1NT-opening bid.

Note: The difference between Cappelletti and Modified Cappelletti is that in Modified Cappelletti the 2M bids are natural, where in the original version of Cappelletti, they showed a M+m 2-suiter. The general consensus amongst expert players is that it is important to be able to show hands with 1-Major immediately. Meckwell is a similar change from DONT, showing the 1-Major hands immediately.

Modified Woolsey vs. Weak Notrump

Level: 6

Some partnerships that play Woolsey vs. Strong 1NT opening bids like to use most of the same system vs. Weak 1NT openings with a modification to strength (bidding more constructively and less destructively). Also, they change double to be more penalty-oriented, showing a balanced hand at the top of the opponent's range (usually 14+ points) instead of a 4+card Major and a longer minor. This allows the partnership to change little about their system when facing a "weak notrump" opponent.

Conclusion

When the opponents play a Weak 1NT range, we need a different approach to bidding (more constructive and less destructive) and a different set of bidding tools to show the hands with which we want to compete in the bidding. We still want to enter the auction with 1-suited and 2-suited hands that have good values, but we also want to compete (or possibly penalize the opponents) with good balanced hands (usually 14+ points). If you face a weak notrump opening, be prepared to adjust your bidding system and philosophy to help you better compete in the auction and overcome playing against a system with which you are not that familiar!