



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(24) Responding to 1NT with Unbalanced Hands

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Level: 1

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General

When partner opens 1NT our primary focus is to look for Major suit fits. When we do not find these fits we will usually bid the appropriate number of Notrump (2NT, 3NT, 4NT, 5NT, 6NT, or 7NT) based on the strength of our hand. However, occasionally we will have a highly unbalanced hand and want to do something other than bid Notrump.

Note: In many unbalanced hand situations we will still bid Notrump once we have finished searching for a for Major suit fits – in these cases we will be willing to let partner play 3NT and not be interested in looking to play 5-minor.

In the cases where we have a highly unbalanced hand, we want to be able to communicate to our partner more about our shape. This information will hopefully allow partner to better judge which game to play or whether to play more than game.

Highly Unbalanced Hands by Strength

The way that we bid our highly unbalanced hands differs based on their strength. Let's examine the 2-suited hands.

0-7 point Hands

With a poor hand we escape 1NT with a gadget like Jacoby transfers or Drop Dead Stayman.

8-9 point Hands

With invitational hands with one 4-card Major and a long minor we have problems. We usually cannot show our shape without creating a game-forcing auction, so we must suppress our overall shape and just show our strength by inviting game.

Example 1

With a 5c-Major and 4+c-minor we will still transfer to our Major and bid 2NT – we can't show our long minor.



Example 2

With a 4c-Major and a long minor (5+ card) we bid Stayman to look for the Major suit fit and then bid 2NT – we can't show our long minor.

10+ point Hands

When we have enough points to game force (10+ points) we can show our entire shape to our partner. We will generally look for a Major suit fit and then bid 3NT. But with an extremely distributional hand we look for our Major suit fit first by showing our Major, and then show the rest of our shape.

Note: With single-suited highly unbalanced hands, we have lots of gadgets to allow us to show our hand and explore the appropriate level and contract – Transfers, Quantitative Bids, Splinters, etc...

Strong Hands in Detail

The most interesting of these hands are the 10+ point hands. Let's take the time to look at each of these auctions in greater detail.

1NT 2♦*
2♥ 3♣ 5c+ ♥, 4c+ ♣, GF

1NT 2♦*
2♥ 3♦ 5c+ ♥, 4c+ ♦, GF

1NT 2♥*
2♠ 3♣ 5c+ ♠, 4c+ ♣, GF

1NT 2♥*
2♠ 3♦ 5c+ ♠, 4c+ ♦, GF

5+♥/♠ (usually only 5-card) and 4+♣/♦. If we are only 5-4, then we are strong and interested in slam. With 5-4 and 10+ points we usually just transfer and bid 3NT, giving little info to the opponents.

With 5-5, we can transfer and bid our second suit with a 10+ point hand. We have interest in determining if 3NT, 4-Major, or 5-minor is the correct contract.

With 6M-4m (or more), we will usually make a Texas Transfer, not giving the opponents any additional information. If we have a very strong hand with slam interest, we will usually splinter to show shortness instead of showing the 4-card side suit.



1NT 2♥*

2♠ 3♥

This auction shows 5-5 Majors and is game-forcing. We are interested in finding a Major suit fit, so this does not promise extra values. It may or may not be interested in more than game. This auction is not 5-4 or 6-4 in the Majors because those hands start with Stayman, looking for the 4-4 Major suit fit.

Conclusion

Hopefully this gives us a feel for what our options are as Responder when we have highly distributional hands opposite partner's 1NT opening, and why we might choose to show some of our distribution instead of just bidding Notrump.