



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(46) 14-16 1NT Opening

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Level: 5

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General

The best auction in all of bridge is 1NT – 3NT, and the best opening bid in all of bridge is 1NT. 1NT is a great opening bid for both *constructive* and *destructive* reasons. A 1NT opening bid is an excellent start to a constructive auction because we get to make use of our best bidding tools: Stayman, Transfers, etc. A 1NT opening bid is also a powerful destructive bidding weapon because it simultaneously preempts the bidding and conceals information from the opponents.

Bridge players love to open 1NT. If we love to open 1NT and it is an effective opening, then we should strive to do so as often as possible. By defining our 1NT opening bid to show 14-16 points with a balanced hand, we maintain the general strength of the opening bid while allowing ourselves to open the bidding with it more often.

Modern Style of Bidding

Another reason to adjust our opening 1NT bid to 14-16 points is that in the *modern style* of bidding we want to bid game with a combined 24 points, so we generally open the bidding with 12 points and force to game with 12 points. Traditionally when we play a 15-17 point 1NT opening bid, Responder drives to game with 10 plus points, but that requires a minimum of 25 combined points. To be in line with the modern bidding style of having 24 combined points for game, if we have 14-16 points for our 1NT opening bid, we can still force to game with 10 points as Responder. This turns out to be a very effective way of bidding.

Let's look in more detail at how we respond to a 14-16 1NT Opening Bid:

- We still use Stayman and Transfers to look for Major suit fits.
- We invite game with 9 points.
- We force to game with 10-16 points.
- We invite slam with 17-18 points.
- We bid slam with 19+ points.



Opening 1-Suit Inferences

Now that we are opening 1NT with our 14-16 point balanced hands, we need to consider how this changes our 1-suit opening bids. In general, this does not affect our bidding with unbalanced hands. We still open our primary suit with those hands, no matter the strength or bucket of the hand. However, if we have a balanced hand our bidding will change.

Let's look at how we now bid our balanced hands:

- 1X 1Y 1NT 11 to 13 points (or 12 to 13 points)
- 1NT 14 to 16 points
- 1X 1Y 2NT 17 to 19- points
- 2NT 19+ to 21 points

Aggressive Options

To open a 14-16 point 1NT, you do not need to agree to open all balanced 11 HCP hands. You can agree to still open only your balanced 12 HCP hands, thus defining:

- 1X 1Y 1NT 12 to 13 points

But one of the advantages of playing a 14-16 1NT is that you get to open bidding more aggressively if you choose to. This is up to your partnership and your style, but is something that is becoming more and more popular each year.

Opposite a Positive Freebid

When partner invites game by showing 10+ points and a 5-card suit, which is what a new suit in competition shows, we should decide if we are going to accept the invitation or not. When we play a traditional 15-17 point 1NT opening, then the minimum balanced hand shows 12-14 points for opening 1X and rebidding 1NT. In this case, we accept a game at the top of range and decline at the bottom:

- Accept the invite with a good 13 or 14 points,
- Decline the invite with 12 or most 13.

When we play a 14-16 point 1NT then we will have opened 1NT with almost all of the balanced hands that would accept an invitation. Since we won't be bidding game with most of our balanced hands unless partner has a game forcing hand it is much easier to judge what to do in many competitive auctions.



2NT Openings

Traditionally, a 2NT opening bid has shown 20 to 21 points. But in the *modern game*, players have learned to upgrade more and more of their 19-point hands to be 2NT opening bids. If you look at most advanced/expert tournament players' convention cards (even those playing a 15-17 1NT openings) you will see that their 2NT opening range is 19+ to 21. This works nicely with the fact that when we play a 1NT opening as 14-16 points, then we play a 2NT opening as 19-21 points.

2NT Rebids (1X-1Y-2NT)

Another benefit of improving our 1NT and 2NT opening bids is the 1.5 NT opening bid (1X-1Y-2NT auctions.)

When we have a traditional 1X-1Y-2NT hand, we are showing 18-19 points opposite 6+ points. In this case the Responder almost always bids game. We should have a combined 24+ points, so we only pass 2NT when we really didn't have a response the first time. In this case 2NT is *virtually forcing*! When we play a 14-16 1NT opening, then the 2NT rebid shows 17 to a bad 19. That means that we have a combined 23+ points when partner has responded. This makes a lot more sense for our combined values to be "inviting" with 2NT. It will still be extremely rare to pass 2NT, but it makes more sense that we will use 2NT to strive to get to 3NT and not have it be *virtually forcing*.

Conclusion

You can see that this small change to our 1NT opening range has ripple effects through our entire balanced hand bidding system. And this is what makes the 14-16 point 1NT so valuable – it's a simple change resulting in improvements across many parts of our constructive and competitive bidding system. Give the 14-16 point 1NT opening bid a try; you will be happy with what you find!