



# Adventures in Bridge

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## ***This Week in Bridge***

### **(161) 1NT Overcalls**

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Level: 1

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#### **General**

A 1NT overcall in the direct seat, after RHO has opened the bidding, is similar to a 1NT opening bid in that it shows a balanced strong hand. But once RHO has promised a good hand by opening the bidding, we make this 1NT overcall a bit stronger than a 1NT opening bid – promising about 15-18 points. That is total points, high-card points plus length points and other re-evaluations.

#### **Stopper in the Opponent's Suit?**

In addition to promising a decent 15-18 points, a 1NT overcall also usually has a stopper in the opponent's suit. This is particularly true when the opponent has opened 1-Major, showing a 5-card or longer suit. When the opponent opens 1♦, that's usually at least a 4-card suit, so it is still important to have a stopper for overcalling 1NT (though not as important as when the opponent opens a Major suit.) But when RHO opens the bidding with 1♣, this may be done on a little as a 3-card suit (for some partnerships even a 2-card suit when 4-4-3-2), so it is reasonable to overcall 1NT without a club stopper (or with only half a stopper) if that is the best description of our hand.

#### **Borderline Cases**

When we have a close decision about whether to overcall 1NT or not it is usually because we have a balanced hand with about 15 total points.

Things to consider when making a borderline 1NT overcall decision, remembering that LHO has a penalty double available:

- Vulnerability – When vulnerable, be conservative and overcall with 15+ to 18 points.
- # of Stoppers – The more stoppers we have, the more aggressive we can be in overcalling.
- Positional Values – Some cards may be upgraded for your position behind the opener.
- Other Options – Rather than 1NT, maybe make a takeout double or overcall a 5-card suit.



*Example*

♠ AQ93

♥ AQ93

♦ Q83

♣ J3

1♣     \_\_?

With this hand, when vulnerable, if RHO opens the bidding 1♣ it is best to make a takeout double, not overcall 1NT.

### **A Good Hand with a 5-card Suit**

With a hand that is balanced with 15-18 points and a 5-card minor suit, generally it is better to play in Notrump than in the minor suit. With a stopper in the opponent's suit it is normal to simply overcall 1NT – no other bid is worth considering.

*Example*

♠ Q93

♥ A4

♦ AQ943

♣ KJ8

1♣     \_\_?

With this hand we have 17 total points (16 high-card points and one length point) and a stopper in the opponent's club suit. The best bid is simply a 1NT overcall.

But when our 5-card suit is a Major, then we decide whether is best to overcall 1NT or to overcall our Major suit. Surprisingly often, this is not a clear-cut decision. There is a balance between the convenience of describing our entire hand in both shape and strength with a 1NT overcall and the urgency to search for a Major suit fit.

Some guidelines to help with the decision:

- 1NT is usually the best bid with a powerful hand, 17-18 total points.
- A Major suit overcall is usually best if it can be made at the 1-level and our stopper in the opponent's suit is weak.

### **Advancing Partner's 1NT Overcall**

We use the same tools to advance partner's 1NT overcall as when responding to partner's 1NT opening bid – Stayman, transfers, etc. This is called playing "Systems On". The main difference in the 1NT overcall auction is that partner's range is a bit stronger, ½ to 1 more point on average. So as Responder, we bid slightly more aggressively, inviting with some good 7 point hands, and bidding game with some good 9 point hands, as our invitational range changes from 8-9 points down to 7+ to 9- points.



## Conclusion

Overcalling 1NT is a good way to describe our entire hand, both in shape (balanced) and strength (a small range of 15-18 points). It also shows a stopper in the opponent's suit and does all of this at a low level – an excellent bid.