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This Week in Bridge

(194) Sandwich 1NT Overcall

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Level: 3

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

When we are a passed hand, bids that we might make that would show strong hands are now illogical. For example, a 2-level simple overcall usually shows an opening hand and a good suit, but as a passed hand we cannot have that hand. Instead, a 2-level overcall as a passed hand shows something different in this situation (usually a good suit). This idea of “illogical bids” having different meanings is also true for a 1NT overcall by a passed hand. Since it is impossible for us to have a balanced hand with 15-17 points, then this passed hand 1NT overcall can not be natural. Thus, we can use a 1NT overcall as a passed hand as something different – a special conventional bid. Let’s look at our options for using this “illogical” 1NT bid.

1NT Overcall by a Passed Hand

One example of an illogical 1NT bid is a direct 1NT overcall by a passed hand.

Example

P P P 1♠

1NT

This 1NT overcall cannot show a natural 15-18 points, so instead it is played as an Unusual NT (just “less” Unusual than 2NT). This shows 5-10 points and usually at least 5/4 in the minors (either suit could be longer).

Another example of an illogical 1NT bid is a balancing 1NT by a passed hand.

Example

P 1♠ P P

1NT

This balancing 1NT bid normally shows a balanced hand with about 11-14 points and a ♠ stopper by an unpassed hand. We could still play this as natural by a passed hand – just reducing our agreement to 11 points. But this 1-point range is not particularly useful. Instead, it is best to play this as a “less” Unusual Notrump showing 5-10 points and usually 5/4 in the minors (either suit could be longer). Occasionally this could be even 4-4 minors with 8-11 points.



Sandwich 1NT Overcall

The “sandwich” seat is the one in the middle of two opponents that are bidding. A 1NT overcall in this seat usually shows a stopper in at least one of the opponent’s suits and a balanced hand with 15-18 points. But again, this is illogical if we are a passed hand.

Examples

P 1♣ P 1♠
1NT

This “Sandwich 1NT” bid is used like a light takeout double – showing 9-cards in the other two suits (usually a 5-card ♦ suit and a 4-card ♥ suit) and about 7-11 HCP.

P 1♣ P 1♥
1NT

Sandwich Notrump - Usually 5+card ♦, 4+c ♠, about 7-11 HCP

P 1♦ P 1♥
1NT

Sandwich Notrump - Usually 5+card ♣, 4+c ♠, about 7-11 HCP

P 1♦ P 1♠
1NT

Sandwich Notrump - Usually 5+card ♣, 4+c ♥, about 7-11 HCP

P 1♥ P 1♠
1NT

Sandwich Notrump - Usually at least 5/4 in the minors (either suit could be longer), about 7-11 HCP

Note: Some players play the Sandwich 1NT convention even as an unpassed hand. But as opening bids have become more aggressive and Responders have been bidding with fewer values, it has become more important to have a natural and strong 1NT overcall in this position. This is why the modern approach has returned to playing a Sandwich 1NT overcall as natural by an unpassed hand.



Example Auction in Detail

Let's take a look at our 2-suited bidding options in the following auction.

Example

1♦ P 1♠ ___?

- Double At least 4-4 in ♣ + ♥, about opening strength – 11+ HCP.
- 2♦ Not natural, other 2-suits (♣ + ♥), usually 5-5 (sometimes 5/4), 5-11 HCP.
- 2NT Unusual NT, at least 5-5 in ♣ + ♥, 5-11 HCP – more preemptive than 2♦.

A note about this 2♦ bid: If LHO had opened 1♥ then a cuebid of LHO's 5-card suit would clearly not be natural, since the suit is behind us – with length and possibly strength. But if LHO bids a minor (like ♦ here), then most players treat this as an artificial bid as well (like a Michaels cuebid, showing the other 2-suits). Although since a 1♣ opening bid shows as little as a 3-card suit, it is good to discuss with partner if a 2♣ bid in this auction shows ♣ or the other 2 suits (for simplicity I like to keep them all as the other 2 suits).

Note: Some players like to play this cuebid in the sandwich seat like Michaels that could be min-max, meaning that it could also contain a strong hand with 16+ HCP.

Also, both 2♠ and 1NT are natural bids in this auction. But as a passed hand, 1NT can be used as a "Sandwich NT" – a light takeout for the other 2 suits. A direct 2♠ bid is always natural and shows at least an opening hand and at least a good 5-card ♠ suit.

Conclusion

Just as the 2NT bid in competition is used as a conventional bid (often the other suits or the lowest unbid suits), 1NT can be used as a conventional bid when we are a passed hand, since a natural bid makes no sense. This gives us more options for describing our hand to partner with 2-suited hands (5-5, 5/4, 4-4) and allows us to more precisely describe our hand to partner – giving them better information for making for competitive bidding decisions.