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This Week in Bridge

(515) Modern 2NT Opening Bids: 19+ to 21 Points

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Level: 3 of 10

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General

Notrump opening bids are the best openings in all of bridge because these bids describe Opener's hand effectively, both in strength and shape, and Responder has a precise set of tools for describing their hand. In auctions that start with a NT opening bid the opponents are often left with little information about declarer's hand, and the strong hand usually becomes the declarer. For all these reasons we strive to open NT as often as possible.

1NT Opening Bids

A 1NT opening bid shows 15-17 points. This is total points: high-card points plus length points for a decent 5-card suit. Thus, some 14 HCP hands with decent 5-card suits are opened 1NT. The modern style is to open 1NT with all the balanced hands that contain 15-17 points – even with a 5-card Major. There are some semi-balanced hands and even some 1-4-5/3 shapes (with singleton honors) that are not strong enough to reverse and thus we decide to open them 1NT to avoid a rebid problem. 1NT should be one of our favorite opening bids!

2NT Opening Bids

A 2NT opening bid traditionally shows 20-21 points. This is total points: high-card points plus length points for a decent 5-card suit. Thus, some 19 HCP hands with decent 5-card suits are opened 2NT. We may choose to open some semi-balanced hands 2NT, but this is less common, as any hand with this many HCP has enough values to reverse and thus does not have a rebid problem.



1.5 NT Opening Bids -- Balanced 18-19 Point Hands

When we have a balanced hand with 18-19 points we often play the hand from the wrong side after we open our primary suit and partner responds with a Major suit. We may play from the wrong side if we have a 4-4 or 5-3 Major suit fit.

Example 1

1♣ 1♠
4♠

Playing 4♠ from the weak side with a 4-4 ♠ fit.

Example 2

1♣ 1♠
2NT 3♦*
3♠ 4♠

3♦* is New Minor Forcing. Now we play 4♠ from the weak side with a 5-3 ♠ fit.

We may even play a NT contract from the wrong side when we have this 18-19 point balanced hand.

Example 3

1♣ 1NT
2NT 3NT

Modern Range for 2NT Opening -- 19+ to 21 points

To avoid wrong siding these Major suit contracts, many modern partnerships open more and more 19-point hands with 2NT.

- 2NT is opened with almost all 19 HCP hands that have a 5-card suit.
- 2NT is opened with most 19 HCP hands that have two decent 4-card suits, 4432.
- 2NT is opened with most 19 HCP hands that have lots of Ts and 9s.
- We do not stretch to open 2NT with 4333 hands.
- 2NT is opened (we even stretch some to do so) with lots of tenaces to protect; we do not stretch with nothing to protect.

Conclusion

When Opener has 19 points, we are highly likely to bid at least a game. If we start the bidding by stretching to open 2NT then we may occasionally get too high, playing in 2NT when partner has nothing or playing in 6NT when partner has a great hand. But much more often stretching to open 2NT helps us play the final contract from the strong hand and gives the opponents less information about the future declarer's hand. Give this aggressive 2NT opening bid a try - it is practical and allows you to have the auctions that start with a 1-minor opening followed by a 2NT rebid a little less often!