



## Ask Jerry

Well-known teacher and player **Jerry Helms** answers your bridge questions. Send your questions to [askjerry@jerryhelms.com](mailto:askjerry@jerryhelms.com).

**Dear Jerry:** Is the “sandwich notrump” the same as the unusual notrump convention?

—C. L., Carmel, IN

**Dear C. L.:** The “sandwich” notrump overcall is a little different from the unusual notrump convention, although it has similarities.

A sandwich bid occurs when the bidding has been opened on your left and responder has bid a suit on your right:



You are “sandwiched” between the two opponents. There is some danger in coming into the auction in this situation, since the opening bidder could have a strong hand and responder’s strength is unlimited.

♠ 8 6  
♥ K Q 10 3  
♦ 9 4 3  
♣ A K J 2

With a hand like this, with good support for both unbid suits, you can make a takeout double, hoping to find a safe landing spot in one of the suits.

♠ A Q  
♥ Q 7 3  
♦ K Q 8 3  
♣ K 10 4 2

The standard meaning of an overcall of 1NT in this position is to show a hand like this.

A balanced hand of about 15–18 points with stoppers in both the suits bid by the opponents.

In the past, it was uncommon to hold the values for a strong notrump overcall when the bidding was opened on your left and responder had enough to bid. So some players decided the 1NT overcall in this position could be put to better use. It could be used to show a weak hand with support for both unbid suits, but too weak to make a takeout double.

♠ 8  
♥ Q 10 8 7 3  
♦ 6 3  
♣ K Q 9 7 2

Consider this hand. With only 7 high-card points, you aren’t strong enough to make a takeout double. Partner will expect an opening bid or better. However, you would like to compete for the contract.

One possibility is to jump to 2NT. That would be the traditional “unusual notrump.” That risks getting too high, however, if partner has a weak hand and no good fit for either of your suits.

So the thinking was, “Why not use 1NT to show this type of hand—a weak takeout for the other two suits.” Thus, the conventional “sandwich” notrump overcall was born. It is not standard, so it has to be alerted if the partnership agrees to use it.

Notice that if you were already a passed hand, then a 1NT overcall in this situation would be unusual, showing this type of hand. That would be “standard.” It is only when you are an unpassed hand that this convention comes into play.

Do you need at least five cards in both unbid suits to bid a sandwich 1NT? Ideally. The partnership style, however, might allow you to bid 1NT with, say 5–4 in the two suits, or, if you are very aggressive 4–4.

Do I recommend this convention? At one time, I might have. In today’s game, however, opening bids have become much lighter and players respond sometimes with almost nothing. So it is much more common to hold a balanced 15–18 points in this situation. If you have agreed to use the sandwich notrump, you have no easy way to get into the auction with such hands.

So, use it if you and your partner like the idea. Most expert partnerships, however, have dropped the idea.

**Dear Jerry:** Why is a new suit by responder at the two level forcing after an opponent overcalls, but not after a takeout double?

—K. B., Highland Village, TX

**Dear K. B.:** Although there are some players who prefer that a new suit by responder at both the one and two level is forcing after an opponent’s takeout double, the popularly accepted standard is that only a new suit at the one level is forcing.

The main reason that a new suit is not forcing after a takeout double is that the responder has the redouble available to show hands of 10 or more points that would have responded in a suit at the two level without the double. That allows things such as a preemptive jump raise to the three level.

It also allows you to show a hand like this by responding 2♣ after your partner’s opening bid in another suit has been doubled. Without the double, you would have to respond 1NT. Not very descriptive!

The reason that responder’s new suit at the two level is forcing after an opponent’s overcall is that the redouble is not available to show a hand with 10 or more points. The ‘new’ calls available are the negative double and a cuebid of the opponent’s suit, but responder may have a hand that is unsuitable for either of these calls. So, a new suit at the two level has to be available as forcing. —JH ♠

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