



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

I would appreciate your advice about what to open a 15- to 17-point hand with a five-card major. Does point count or the major suit have priority? Is there a hard and fast rule I should be using?

Mary R.

Dear Mary,

With all due respect to experts who either avoid opening notrump with a five-card major, or who put specific requirements regarding their holding in the unbid major, I suggest you use WIRDI (Whatever Is Right, Do It). To best accomplish this, remember this Jerry-ism:

Always plan a second bid before you make your first.

Any time you hold a five-card major, one doubleton, and two three-card suits, along with 15-17 points, I suggest opening 1NT to avoid a rebid problem. In my opinion, each of the following should be opened 1NT:

♠K6 ♥KJ843 ♦AQ9 ♣QJ6

♠Q92 ♥AKJ73 ♦Q5 ♣A54

♠Q9843 ♥J7 ♦KJ6 ♣AKJ

♠87642 ♥AQJ ♦K6 ♣KQJ

If, however, your distribution is a

five-card major, a four-card suit, and two doubletons, open the major suit, even with 15-17 points. Your four-card side suit gives you a rebid option not available when your pattern is 5-3-3-2. When holding:

♠K5 ♥KJ832 ♦AQ ♣QJ53,

open 1♥, planning to introduce your club suit at your next turn.

On occasion, concealing a five-card major via a 1NT opening bid may not yield the best possible result. Get over it! Keep in mind that a bid or play with a 75% probability of being correct is wrong 250 times out of 1000. Just do what is right most of the time, and live with the consequences of being wrong some of the time.

Dear Jerry,

My partner opened 1NT (15-17) and my RHO overcalled 2♦, natural. Our agreement at this level is "systems off," with a cuebid (3♦) being Stayman.

My hand:

♠K874 ♥J653 ♦103 ♣QJ6.

I doubled, meaning it for takeout, but my partner took it for penalty. My thinking was, I was letting partner know I had "something" and she could leave it if she had quick tricks and a trump stack.

Sib

Hi Sib,

Once again, I can hide behind partnership agreement as the ultimate answer to this as well as many other questions I receive. I applaud your forethought in having discussed to a point how to handle interference over your 1NT opening bids. I am on

record as being a non-fan of "stolen bids" other than after double or 2♣ interference. Unfortunately, to avoid mishaps such as the one you encountered, even further discussion is necessary. It is reasonable to define double of a two-level overcall of 1NT as any of the following:

1. Pure penalty.
2. Negative/takeout.
3. Values for a 2NT raise (not necessarily showing a diamond stopper).

Based on this, your intent seems pure and your partnership misunderstanding could happen to anyone. My preference is to incorporate the lebensohl convention, using double of 2♦ as negative or takeout, while reserving doubles of 2♥ or 2♠ as pure penalty.

What's most important, however, is what the two of you are comfortable with. A Jerry-ism:

Any agreement remembered is better than no agreement at all.