



## Ask Jerry

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Hello Jerry,

My partner and I differ in the meaning of bidding sequences involving a response of 1NT. When my partner opens one of a suit and there's a one-level overcall, should a 1NT response show a stopper, or simply show point count? My partner strongly believes in the point-count aspect, while I strongly believe in the necessity of having a stopper. What is your take on this issue?

J.C.G.

Hi, J.C.G.,

One of the underlying issues here is the vast difference between auctions in competition as opposed to those where the opponents are silent. When an opening bid is followed by a pass, a 1NT response is often the best alternative even when it looks a little odd. For instance, say you hold:

♠ J 9 6 ♥ J 5 4 ♦ A ♣ J 8 7 5 4 2.

West	North	East	South
1 ♦	Pass	?	

With 7 high-card points, pass should not be considered an option for a variety of reasons. First of all, partner could have a strong hand with five diamonds and five clubs, and I suspect a club contract would be far superior to 1 ♦. Second, partner could hold any number of very strong hands where a game is possible, but languishing in 1 ♦ could work out terribly. A 2 ♣ response would be an overstatement of values, and while some imaginative players might respond in a three-card major, 1NT seems the “least bad” alternative: showing 6–10 HCP, no four-card major and not enough support to raise diamonds.

If the opponents had intervened with either 1 ♥ or 1 ♠, pass would be clear-cut.

This time you hold:

♠ 9 7 6 ♥ A 5 4 ♦ J 7 ♣ K 8 7 4 3.

The auction starts:

West	North	East	South
1 ♦	1 ♠	?	

Despite holding 8 HCP, pass is the “least bad” alternative. Why reject 1NT? In any competitive auction where the opponents have bid a suit, the one who suggests notrump as a potential contract should be the one who has a stopper. To bid 1NT here and find partner holding a balanced 19-count with two low spades would be a bit embarrassing when you lose the first five or six spade tricks in a final contract of 3NT. If the overcall had been 1 ♥ instead of 1 ♠, 1NT would be a perfect response.

One of the mantras that I try to emphasize when I teach competitive bidding seminars is the following:

**In a competitive auction, pass means one of two things. Either you have nothing to say, or there's nothing you can say that says what you have!**

The 8-point pass after the overcall is a perfect example of “there is nothing you can say that says what you have.” If your partner holds extra values or extra shape, he may back into the auction and you might be able to bid later. That's a much better plan than tricking partner by bidding 1NT with no spade stopper.

Although I am a strong proponent of finding reasons to bid rather than excuses to pass, sometimes pass is the right thing to do. ■