



Ask Jerry

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Hi Jerry,

In the April Bridge Bulletin, in the review of Adam Parrish's book, "When To Bid Notrump (And How to Play It)," he states that bidding 1NT is better than opening a five-card major when you are in notrump range. As a Bronze Life Master, I have played with partners of each belief. One Gold Life Master of over 40 years opens a five-card major whenever she has one because she has lost too many games where 3NT was beaten by a major-suit game when there was a 5-3 fit. Can you discuss your pros and cons on the subject?

D.A.D.

Hi D.A.D.

I have yet to read the book, but I'm sure I will, because I tend to agree with what I saw in the review. There is a big difference between when you *could* open 1NT, as opposed to when you *should* open 1NT. I don't know whether my theories align perfectly with those of Adam Parrish, but I will take a shot at giving you my views on less-than-classic 1NT opening bids. Perhaps my guiding principle is this advice offered by Alvin Roth: "Always plan a second bid before you choose a first."

♠ Q J ♥ K Q J 4 3 ♦ K 6 4 ♣ A 7 3

I would always open 1NT. A good rule of thumb is often to assume responder will reply in your shortest suit. What would your plan be after opening 1♥, and receiving a 1♠ reply? A rebid of

1NT ... showing 12-14 on your 16? Or 2NT ... showing 18-19 on your 16? A redundant 2♥ bid ... showing six hearts and minimum values? Just open 1NT and get over it!

♠ Q J ♥ K Q J 4 3 ♦ K 4 ♣ A 7 6 3

Exactly 16 HCP as before, but why distort what you hold by opening 1NT? Open 1♥, planning to bid your club suit over virtually anything partner says. If responder bids 1♠, and you bid 2♣, this does not show 16 HCP, but most importantly, it does not deny those values. 2♣ here is not forcing, but shows values somewhere between a bad 12 up to 18 HCP.

If you hold a five-card major with specifically one doubleton and two three-card suits, along with 15 or 16 HCP, open 1NT. With 17 HCP, use some judgment. If you think it's a good 17, treat it like 18, planning to open at the one level and jump in notrump. In general, if you hold a five-card major and another four-card suit, do not open 1NT. However, with:

♠ J 5 ♥ A Q 8 5 ♦ K Q J 4 3 ♣ K 4,

I would open 1NT in anticipation of a probable 1♠ reply from partner over a 1♦ opening. This hand does not quite qualify as a reverse. It is also time to debunk a myth that a 1NT opening bid does not have two doubletons! But with:

♠ A Q 8 5 ♥ J 5 ♦ K Q J 4 3 ♣ K 4,

you could open 1NT, but why? If you open 1♦ and hear a 1♥ response, you have an easy rebid of 1♠.

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notrump opening bids with a singleton, provided it is either an ace, king or queen. Many experienced players have been doing this long before explicit permission had been provided.

Holding:

♠ K ♥ K Q 3 ♦ K Q 6 3 ♣ Q J 8 7 2,

you could open 1♣, or even 1♦, but my choice would be 1NT showing my "balanced" 15-17. Surely the singleton ♠ K rates to be as useful for play in a spade contract, if that happens, as two low spades would have been.

However, holding:

♠ K Q 3 2 ♥ K ♦ K Q 6 3 ♣ Q J 8 7,

you could open 1NT, but again, why? Open 1♦ and prepare to rebid 1♠ over the anticipated heart response.

♠ Q 6 ♥ A Q ♦ J 8 6 5 4 2 ♣ A K 5

You might open 1♦, but what rebid would you plan to reveal your medium-strength hand? 2♦, an underbid ... 3♦, unthinkable. Just open 1NT. However, holding:

♠ Q 6 ♥ J 6 ♦ A Q 8 5 4 2 ♣ A K 5,

you could open 1NT, but it is perfectly reasonable to open 1♦ planning to rebid 3♦.

To address your partner's fears, compare opening 1NT with a five-card major to probabilities in card play. There are card combinations that in a vacuum yield 75% results. Unfortunately, this translates into being wrong 250 times out of 1000. You might miss an occasional better fit with an alternative action, but just go with the odds for the long term. ■