

Ask Jerry



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Hi Jerry,
I held:

♠K106 ♥AK102 ♦Q64 ♣AQ2.

My RHO opened 1♠. I overcalled 1NT, and partner passed, holding:

♠73 ♥763 ♦AK987 ♣954.

When the smoke cleared, I had collected 12 tricks for an above average result. Partner was adamant that I should double and then bid notrump to show my 18 points and we would reach game. Would you assess the blame for missing this game?

Mr. Aggressive

Hi M.A.,
Your question brings up several good theoretical points about defensive bidding. Although I advocate opening 1NT on 14+ to 17, I equally advocate that an overcall should be defined as 15+ to 18. Perhaps the biggest reason for this is that if you open 1NT, and most of the outstanding values are scattered between the opponents, you could be in real trouble, but neither of them can diagnose it. Contrast that to when your RHO opens one of any suit, and you overcall 1NT, and your LHO is looking at 10 or more points. It doesn't take much math skills for him to realize you are in deep trouble! Assuming his partner has 12 or more points, he has 10 points, and you have at least 15, leaving dummy nearly pointless. In this auction:

1x	1NT	Dbl
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the double by responder is 100% penalty. It is not negative; it does not define any particular shape, but simply announces the hand belongs to our side. Some of the most lucrative penalized contracts occur on this type auction. Just for clarification, if the auction started:

1♦	1NT	2♥
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a typical holding for a 2♥ bid in this auction might be:

♠7 ♥QJ10854 ♦52 ♣J743.

The point is, the only strong action responder can make after an overcall is double. New suits are absolutely non-forcing and a desire to play that contract at that level.

Bulking up your notrump overcalls to 15+ to 18 helps slightly decrease the probabilities of a penalty double.

With your holding, I would clearly have overcalled 1NT. To double first, and then bid 2NT over any two-level advance by your partner, which by the way, could be on 0 HCP, does not remotely appeal to me.

Another bit of bridge theory: I think advancer should always be more aggressive towards game after a notrump overcall than responder should be after a 1NT opening bid.

When you open 1NT, and you reach 3NT on an uncontested auction, the opponents often have 14–15 points, the location of which you have no clue. Contrast that to an overcall of 1NT and you reach game with your 25 HCP. Methinks declarer should be able to play the hand much better since he knows the location of most of the missing high-card strength. In addition, depending on the suit he overcalled, he often has valuable information about the shape of his RHO's hand. Consider this holding:

<i>Declarer</i>	<i>Dummy</i>
A J 9 5	K 10 3

With no information from the bidding, the location of the missing queen is a toss-up. After an opening bid, depending on total values, your holding and LHO's opening lead, you probably have a much better guess on how to play this suit. How about this holding?

<i>Declarer</i>	<i>Dummy</i>
K 3 2	7 6 5

No information? You may have three losers. But when you overcall 1NT, you may be almost certain that RHO holds this ace and that you can safely lead up to your king for a trick.

Holding:

♠K62 ♥Q53 ♦KJ1075 ♣83,

if partner opened 1NT, I would invite game in notrump. If partner overcalled 1NT, I would bid 3NT!

Finally, back to your partner's hand. At matchpoints, I would pass 1NT. At IMPs, I would invite a notrump game. As your result somewhat proves, you did not have to reach game to get a reasonable match-point score, but in a team game, they pay a real bonus for bidding your games. By the way, if you took 12 tricks, you played it extremely well and found the ♣K onside, the ♥QJ onside, the ♠A onside, and diamonds behaving normally. But then again, you probably suspected most of those cards would be on your right after the opening bid! ♠