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# Ask Jerry

## Balancing – part 2

**Dear Jerry,**  
**Since my partner found out it was OK to open notrump with a singleton as long as it was an ace, a king, or a queen, I think he's gone crazy and never misses an opportunity. Surely not all or even most 15–17 point hands with an appropriate singleton should be opened 1NT. Some guidance please?**

**Archie**

Hi Archie,

For starters, just because you are permitted to do something does not mean you should do it randomly. Authorization by the ACBL simply brought to light and sanctioned something experienced players have been doing for years.

Any time you are considering your opening bid choices, I suggest you revisit the Roth-Stone-ism I wish that I had created: “Always plan a second bid before you choose a first.” A Jerry-ism, which I did create and is equally applicable: “The best available bid is often simply the least bad alternative.”

The reason to open 1NT with a singleton is if your other choice of opening bid creates a rebid problem.

Before making any opening bid, consider the nature of your hand. Are your values minimum, medium or maximum? Balanced or unbalanced? In most scenarios, the opening bidder will have no more than two opportunities to accurately describe his values and shape. Let's look at several hands and plan ahead.

① ♠K ♥AQJ ♦QJ43 ♣K8632

With 16 HCP, you clearly have

an intermediate-value hand. As a general rule, anticipating a response in your shortest suit is often a reasonable thing to do. Consider your options:

West	North	East	You
Pass	1♠	Pass	?

Rebid 2♣, showing minimum values, typically with a six-card or longer suit?

Rebid 1NT, showing 12–14 HCP suggesting two or more spades?

Rebid 2♦, a strength-showing reverse, generally reserved for intermediate, unbalanced hands with two strong suits? This hardly seems a good option.

Perhaps you think you could open 1♦, then rebid 2♣. Barf! Wrong on values, wrong on suit lengths ... not a good choice.

The solution? Open 1NT! If your partner thinks you hold 15–17 HCP with two or more cards in all the suits, you almost have that. If your partner transfers to spades and any number of spades becomes the final contract, I suspect the singleton king would be as welcome as a small doubleton which you may have held. It's all about planning a rebid. Both of the following hands I would choose to open 1NT, not because of my singleton, but in spite of it:

② ♠KQ5 ♥Q ♦AKJ4 ♣J6542

③ ♠A ♥AQJ8 ♦K762 ♣K863

Opening 1NT on any of these three may not be a perfect choice, but in my opinion, it clearly beats the alternatives.

Somewhat similar, but two entirely different hands that I would not open 1NT:

④ ♠Q952 ♥K ♦AK62 ♣A765

⑤ ♠K83 ♥Q ♦AJ852 ♣AQ43

Why distort your three-suited hand with a space-consuming 1NT opener when it is completely unnecessary? Using the guideline above of anticipating a response in your shortest suit, simply open 1♦ on both of these, planning to rebid 1♠ over the heart response on example 4 and 2♣ on example 5. While this third-suit rebid does not guarantee medium values, neither does it deny them. This action pegs opener as holding somewhere between the worst hand he has ever opened, up to not quite enough values to make a game-forcing jumpshift. Just to be clear, a third suit nonreverse rebid by opener is *not forcing!* Despite being nonforcing, it does not mean responder should pass. It just means they could pass if spades, or clubs, present a reasonable trump suit and they are dead minimum. Responder should be aware that opener could have 17 or 18 points and should find some bid if he holds as many as a good 8 or 9.

As a side note, the rules requiring the singleton to be an ace, king or queen apply only to 1NT opening bids. By law, you may open 2NT with a singleton of any size! Once again, just because you can do that, does not mean you should do that! 🤖