

OPENING 1-NT

One of the questions bridge teachers get over and over again is should you open 1NT with 15-17 balanced points and a 5-card major. Some say yes, always; some say no, never. Some say it all depends.

Truth be told, there is no right answer. I am in the camp that feels that there are a few times when it makes sense to open 1NT; but only when I have a reason.

If you're a bridge novice, the easiest advice I can give you is always to open 1NT with a balanced hand and 15-17 points. It gets your strength out in the open and gives you an easy rebid.

If you are an intermediate it's probably best to open those 5-card major suit hands 1NT. It keeps things simple and your partner will have no problem responding. Yes, you might miss some 8-card fits but the 5-3 fits play just as well in notrump as in a major suit. Most times it scores better in notrump, as well.

But if you are more experience and would like to have an adventure or two, you can use the following rationale to make the decision.

With a 5-card major and 15-17 balanced points, open 1NT **most of the time**. But there will exceptions and make room for those. For example, you pick up:

♠ 32 ♥ AKQJ10 ♦ AJ10 ♣ 432

This is a hand that cries out to play in hearts. Your stoppers are bad in two suits won't play well in no trump.

Contrast that hand with this hand.

♠ AJ2 ♥ KQ842 ♦ KQ ♣ 1052

I would open this hand 1NT. One factor is the lack of a rebid if partner bids 1NT over your 1♥ opening. If you rebid two of a minor, you imply 4+ cards in the minor. If you

rebid 2♥ you promise 6 hearts. Better to start with 1NT and if partner transfers you into spades, you will be happy. Of course the big payoff comes when your LHO leads his 4th best against your notrump contract - directly into your undisclosed 5-card major.

To sum up my philosophy on the question, I usually always open 1NT with 15-17 balanced points and only consider opening the major with two suits unstopped.

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