

NO TRUMPS PARTNER?

Chapter 17

Now for a couple of NO TRUMP hands from actual play. If you're going to play against a Weak No Trump opening, you should try and make the most of it. When the chance comes to punish it, learn to be able to take that chance. And by the same token, if you are going to open a weak 1NT, hope the opponents won't know how to punish YOU.

BOARD 13 DEALER North BOTH VUL

North

♠ 10 5

♥ Q 8 5 4 2

♦ 7 5 3 2

♣ J 9

West

♠ J 8 6 2

♥ 10 7

♦ A K 6 4

♣ A 10 3

East

♠ A 4

♥ K 9 6 3

♦ J 9 8

♣ K Q 8 5

South

♠ K Q 9 7 3

♥ A J

♦ Q 10

♣ 7 6 4 2

W	N	E	S
	NB	1NT	?

First question: should South bid or not? Coming in at the Two Level, vulnerable and opposite a passed partner is fraught with danger, but at match points South might risk it.

Second question: If South bids 2S what should West do? There should be no doubt about that. This is the reason you PLAY a Weak No Trump. When you have lured in an opponent, close the trap. If West DOUBLES South's 2S bid, that should not be confused with any takeout double. Extracting a penalty in such circumstances is far better than either bidding a game that looks marginal at best, or even worse, inviting game with a bid of 2NT. If you expect to be able to make 2NT, how can you expect South to be able to make 2S? EW in fact can take NINE tricks on defence with GOOD defence, and that means +1100. Eight tricks on defence is much easier and worth 800. Once you have a fish on the hook, why let it go? But I wonder how many people did exactly that.

In checking the travelling score cards, I find that East played in 3NT nine times, making six times and failing three times. Ten Easts played in 2NT, and two of these failed. According to "Deep Finesse" EW can make 3NT, but it's not so easy. It does prove the theory that a 1NT opening opposite a 1NT opening makes 3NT. But how many Souths in fact did bid 2S after East opened 1NT? I would hazard a guess to say MANY. Yet there was not ONE South in 2S doubled. If the reader 'was there', maybe I could have some feedback.

If you're not going to take advantage of the fact that you play a Weak 1NT opening then why play it? In other words, why take the risk and not any benefits that may accrue from it?

And talking of risks....

BOARD 19 DEALER SOUTH EW VUL

North

♠ Q J

♥ 7 6 4 2

♦ A 8 6 5

♣ K Q J

West

♠ 7 4 3

♥ J 10 9 8

♦ K J 2

♣ 7 6 2

East

♠ A K 10 9 8

♥ K Q

♦ 10 9 3

♣ A 9 5

South

♠ 6 5 2

♥ A 5 3

♦ Q 7 4

♣ 10 8 4 3

W

N

E

S

NB

NB

?

This looks like a pretty innocuous 1NT opening. NS aren't even vulnerable and North does have a 13 count. But this time, the boot is on the other foot.

First question: Should North open 1NT? Answer: WHAT ELSE?

Second question: If North opens 1NT, what should East do? Many people I know would simply bid 2S. After all East does have a good enough hand to compete at the Two Level, even vulnerable. But should that be East's first concern? When your opponents play a weak 1NT opening, you should be prepared to make the most of that fact. If you have a BETTER hand than the opener, you should also be entitled to hope that you will be able to DEFEAT them in 1NT, given that opener's partner and yours have undisclosed hands. That is why the recommendation is that, with 15+ HCP, the first thing you do is DOUBLE a weak 1NT opening. What happens next is not the primary concern. Well, what happens next is that SOUTH has nowhere to go and passes. WEST knows one thing: Partner has a MINIMUM 15 count. Anything more, and EW have a majority of points. At worst, EW have NO FEWER points than NS, and at best, they have quite a few more. That should tell West that DEFENDING is a better option than playing the contract, and in any case, WEST has nowhere to go either, with no five card suit. So, North opens 1NT and East doubles. Everyone passes. Because DUMMY turns up with a six count, 1NT fails by only three tricks, +500 to EW. IF EW let a trick slip away, only two down for +300. But, because NS do have 19 HCP, that is enough for EW not to have game on, so the penalty is more than adequate. Had EW been able to make game, they would have extracted 800 to compensate for the possible 600 or 620. Knowing WHEN to defend and HOW to defend is a very important part of the game, and one that most players still have much to learn about. Start learning now!

Once more, the fish was well and truly let off the hook, at least judging by the travelling score cards. 13 Easts played in 2S, and that suggests that North did open 1NT and East bid 2S. TWO Easts played in 1S, which means that North opened either 1D or 1H. Those Norths of course escaped the net, but why did also those who opened 1NT? Clearly, either because East did not double, or East doubled and West bid 2H and East then bid 2S. Twice, North was left in 1NT untouched. Down FIVE once (THAT is hard to see, with four seemingly sure tricks for declarer). That was a top score without a need to double. The other declarer, however, was only down TWO, and at the given vulnerability, this was a very good score for NS, -100 as against the normal -140. All in all, mixed results with no EW pair settling for the sure fire DOUBLE of 1NT left in.

Doubling a 1NT opening and extracting a penalty from it should be a normal part of YOUR play if you want to get better results. Even if you double one out of four 1NT contracts that make, you are well ahead on the three that don't. Simple maths. Simple odds. Of course, once you improve your defence to near perfect, it will be one in ten that makes and nine that don't! Even better odds, but you have to start before you can go further.

Whether you are playing Teams bridge, or Match Points, sooner or later you will realize that you MUST have a system, over the opponents weak 1NT opening, that at LEAST allows you to show BOTH majors, rather than just one suit. Many people seem to think that this is either unnecessary, or too difficult. If you are one of them, fine, just continue to guess and hope you guess right. But if you DO want to get the best out of your bidding, then keep reading and then do something about it!

BOARD 7 DEALER SOUTH BOTH VUL

North

♠ 9 8 6

♥ 10 8 5 3

♦ A K J

♣ A 4 3

West

♠ A 10 3

♥ J

♦ 9 7 4 3 2

♣ J 10 8 2

East

♠ Q J 7 5 4

♥ A K Q 7

♦ 10

♣ Q 6 5

South

♠ K 2

♥ 9 6 4 2

♦ Q 8 6 5

♣ K 9 7

W	N	E	S
			NB

NB	1NT	?
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North has a perfect point count and shape for a 1NT opening. What should East do? The obvious answer is: bid 2S. That works out great on this hand, because West has three spades and, as it happens, everything works perfectly and East makes FOUR. But what if West's majors were the other way round? Now East would play in 2S with a singleton trump in dummy. Worse still when West actually has FOUR hearts and only one spade. And what if East had FIVE of each major? Would East just guess WHICH one to bid? The answer is that there are too many deals where such guesswork would be involved, and to do away with most of the guesswork, you invent a bid over the opposing 1NT that SHOWS BOTH majors. You can do away with being able to overcall with a natural 2C bid and substitute it for a 2C bid that shows both majors. That was the original "Landy" and is still reasonably popular.

You might also have noticed that if EW were to DOUBLE North's 1NT, EW could take NINE tricks on defence and score +800. That is even better than bidding and making 4S, and certainly much better than playing a part score in spades, which is what most pairs in fact did. Those who are interested in finding out about a system that WOULD end up in EW doubling 1NT will be able to find out more later, but right now, we are talking about some way of showing two suits, especially the majors. Whatever you decide to do, make sure that you have a way of doing that. The next hands will show you how important it is.

BOARD 12 DEALER WEST N-S VUL

North

♠ A 6 5 4 3

♥

♦ K 10 8 4 2

♣ Q 10 2

West

♠ K 10 2

♥ K 8 7 6

♦ A Q 7 6

♣ 9 8

East

♠ Q 8 7

♥ A J 9 4 2

♦ J 3

♣ J 6 4

South

♠ J 9

♥ Q 10 5 3

♦ 9 5

♣ A K 7 5 3

West opens 1NT and this time, North has a different sort of hand. Only a nine count, and 5053 distribution. Should North bid? With only nine HCP but that shape, it is normally much better to play the hand than defend 1NT.

Without any system, North would bid 2S and hope. At least if doubled, North could then try 3D. Or, North might try 2D first. But then, the spade suit may be lost. Again, there is no answer but to guess and hope you get it right. If, on the other hand, you have a system which can show two suits, either two specific suits or one anchor and 'another', you won't need to worry about missing out on the best fit.

As it happens, if North does bid 2S, and I certainly would if playing natural overcalls, North can make 3S even with perfect defence. “Deep Finesse” tells us that SOUTH, however, can make only TWO spades. That makes for a very interesting DOUBLE DUMMY problem. I’m still having trouble working out WHY this is the case! Can anyone tell me please? But, once more, the problem is not what you can make, it is how you can bid to 2S IF that is the best place to play, or 3C if THAT is better. If NS had a way to show spades and a minor, or spades and another suit, South would be able to make a better decision when South had a singleton spade. This time, NS are lucky because South does have J9 of spades, even though they turn out no better than two small anyway.

BOARD 13 DEALER North BOTH VUL

North

♠ 6 2

♥ 9 4

♦ A Q J 10 8

♣ 7 5 4 2

West

♠ K Q 10 3

♥ Q 8 2

♦ 9 6

♣ A 9 8 3

East

♠ A J 5

♥ K 10 7 6 5 3

♦ 7 3 2

♣ J

South

♠ 9 8 7 4

♥ A J

♦ K 5 4

♣ K Q 10 6

Now a different problem. South opens 1NT after two passes. Should West bid? Clearly the answer is NO. Unless EW have a way of showing clubs and spades AND bidding 2C first. To show spades and a minor by bidding 2S would take the bidding too high unless East could pass 2S. West’s shape is nothing to get excited about. Next, should North PASS 1NT or remove to 2D? 2D certainly looks much safer, but as it happens, EW can, if they see all the hands, defeat 2D by TWO tricks. But only if they can do so double dummy. But since the diamonds MAY be useful in 1NT, let’s say North PASSES. Should East bid NOW?

With a nine count and six hearts, the answer should be YES, because the bidding so far should tell East that partner must have some values. If East can bid a natural 2H, that is what East should do. And, once more, we can see that there is the opportunity to double 1NT with marginal values. Despite five diamond tricks for declarer, the defence can defeat 1NT by one trick. At the given vulnerability, if doubled, this is +200 to EW and a clear top unless EW manage to bid to the improbable 4H which makes thanks to the very lucky layout of all the cards.

BOARD 15 DEALER SOUTH NS VUL

North

♠ A K 5 4

♥ 10 5 4

♦ 9 5

♣ A 10 9 5

West

♠ J 10 9 8 6

♥ 6

♦ A J 10 7 6

♣ 4 2

East

♠ 7

♥ A J 9 8 7

♦ Q 8 3 2

♣ J 8 3

South

♠ Q 3 2

♥ K Q 3 2

♦ K 4

♣ K Q 7 6

Now we have another hand with five spades and another five card suit. But this time, West has only a six count when South opens 1NT. Should West nevertheless enter the bidding? The considerations are: EW are NOT vulnerable. Though NS ARE vulnerable, because West has only a six count, chances are that NS will make at least 1NT and possibly much more. Therefore West should come in IF West can show two suits. If West can show spades and another, or spades and a minor, West should do so despite the very poor point count. Note that many Souths will not open that hand 1NT because they are a point too strong, but for purposes of this exercise, let's say they are playing a 12-15 1NT opening, as many in fact do.

Say West comes in with a bid of 2S, to show spades and a minor. North should DOUBLE, expecting to defeat 2S. However East can ask West to bid their minor, and the end result will be that the diamond fit is found. That is fortuitous, but despite the fact that EW have only a combined 14 count, 3D will, as far as I can tell, make. Yes, the 'Deep Finesse' analysis doesn't even rate a diamond contract by EW, but that is because the version that we have doesn't take into account any side with a combined 14 count playing the hand! Competing against the weak 1NT can be perilous but can also be a lot of fun. The latter only IF you devise some methods that will allow you to show TWO suits rather than just one.

BOARD 25 DEALER NORTH EW VUL

North

♠ 9 8 3

♥ K Q 7

♦ A K 10 5

♣ 10 6 5

West

♠ J 10 7 5 2

♥ A 10 6

♦ 2

♣ K 9 4 2

East

♠ A K Q 4

♥ 8 5 4 3 2

♦ Q 9 4

♣ 3

South

♠ 6

♥ J 9

♦ J 8 7 6 3

♣ A Q J 8 7

Finally, another standard 1NT opening. But this one results in more competition. North opens 1NT and East bids... well, what? If East bids 2H, which is the sensible thing to do if you have to choose between hearts and spades, the likely outcome is that NS will compete to 3C or 3D and EW to 3H. Unfortunately, 3H does not make. 3S, though, thanks to the superb fit, makes in comfort! Not that 3H is easy to defeat but it can be defeated whereas 3S can't. If EW play a system where East can show BOTH majors, West is then happy to bid to 3S and might even contemplate bidding to game! However, if you limit your competitive bidding to hands with FEWER than 15 HCP, there is little risk that you will end up too high.