

## Twos and Transfers

### Chapter 3: No Trumps and Transfers

Firstly, let me say that even though most of us do play transfers these days, they are not a necessary part of bidding after a 1NT opening. They don't provide the perfect answers in all cases, but they do make much of our bidding easier and more accurate, if understood and used properly. So, with that in mind, I will now discuss transfers and their use when there has been a 1NT opening.

It is not sufficient to simply agree that you will play transfers. You will see that as we go along. There are many players who agree to play transfers but know nothing more about how transfers are used and when; nor what other benefits in using them can be developed with the basic structure of transfers.

Let me give you a very basic outline of transfers over 1NT:

The transfer responses are as follows:

2D transfer to 2H

2H transfer to 2S

2C is still Stayman.

That basic structure allows us to make a weak takeout to hearts or spades. Just the same as when in the days before transfers we would have bid 2H or 2S 'to play', a five card or longer suit and fewer than 11 HCP. The only difference is that it is the opener of the 1NT who will be bidding your long suit if he answers your request. That is the simplest form of transfers. You may be interested to learn that the first use of transfers occurred some 60 years ago. As I recall, the story goes (and it is probably wildly inaccurate) thus: A gentleman by the name of Jeremy Flint picked up something like this hand:

♠ 84

♥ 876432

♦ 95

♣ 872

His partner opened 2NT (20-22). What was he to do? In those days, 3H was forcing and he really did not want this hand played in anything but 3H. What he did I have no idea, I would just have bashed 4H and hoped for the best, but the upshot was that Jeremy Flint invented TRANSFERS, but only after a 2NT opening bid. A bid of 3D was a TRANSFER to hearts OR spades, with a very weak hand that was only good enough to play in the suit at the three level when partner had a 20-22 point hand. That was the extent of transfers in those days. Who invented transfers over a 1NT, or when, I can't say.

Why do we play transfers? There is an urban myth that it allows the stronger hand to play the contract and the weaker hand is exposed as dummy. That is true when you make a weakness takeout when partner opens 1NT but if that is all you have learnt about transfers you are well short of what you need to know about them if you are going to use them properly, so I will take you through some (but not all) sequences where transfers are also used to make bidding more accurate.

But before that, there are two more 'transfer' bids that I need to cover:

When you want to play the hand in a MINOR suit, that has to be at the three level, and you can do that by bidding 2NT, which is a transfer to 3C. If that is your suit then you will pass, and if your suit is diamonds you will convert to 3D, which opener must pass. For transferring to a minor, you should normally have at least a six card suit; with only five clubs or diamonds, sit it out unless an opponent doubles, which may allow you to escape to your five card minor suit at the two level.

Finally, when we are talking about basic transfers over 1NT, you may sometimes have a hand which is good enough to invite game but not strong enough to force to game, in other words, a normal raise to 2NT: a balanced hand of 11 or a poor 12 HCP. That is bid by using the :"Range Finder". With transfers, a bid of 2S is not needed as a weak takeout to spades, so 2S becomes the 'range finder'. It simply asks opener to bid 2NT with a minimum 1NT opener and to go to 3NT with a maximum,. That is the basic way, but once more, you can do better than that. Most advanced players play the range finder, but if opener has a maximum 1NT, that is shown by bidding their suit or suits at the 3 level. Why is that? Because responder may also be using the range finder with a hand that is so strong that a slam is possible if opener has a maximum. Finding a fit for a trump contract suit is a vital step in bidding a possible slam.

One thing to note here: with game invitational hands you should not use the range finder if you have a four card major and an invitational hand because you can use Stayman, and if partner does not have a major or bids the one you don't want to know about, you then bid 2NT. Stayman should be used in conjunction with transfers and the range finder, unless you have good reason not to. I am quite appalled at the number of indiscriminate uses of the range finder or transfers when Stayman is the best (and only sensible) way to bid a responder's hand.

Let's take a look at some hands you might hold when partner opens 1NT:

♠ KJ97

♥ 87

♦ KJ9

♣ KJ53

Bid 2C (Stayman) and if opener bids 2D OR 2H bid 2NT. If opener bids 2S, because of the trump fit, bid 4S. The hand should now be good enough for game, as long as it is in spades. If you are a pessimist or don't have faith in partner's declarer play, raise to 3S to invite game.

♠ KJ43

♥ AQ2

♦ KJ52

♣ A2

What would you do when partner opens 1NT? Normally I would recommend using Stayman, and if there is a spade fit, bid 6S if partner has one ace. But this is a good hand to ignore Stayman and use the range finder instead. Why? Because two balanced hands with a combined 30 count make slam very marginal, whereas a maximum 1NT opening will give the partnership a combined 32 count and good chance of a slam, especially if it is played in a SUIT rather than No Trumps. This is where the range finder comes in very handy. If partner has a maximum, partner bids his suits at the three level, and you will be able to locate a spade OR diamond fit. Imagine if partner has four (or five) diamonds and you end up in an unmakeable 6NT when 6D is a breeze. I cannot stress enough the importance of having a trump suit to play in, especially at game or slam level.

♠ J96

♥ 43

♦ AQJ932

♣ Q2

If partner opens 1NT, what would you do?

Without any special ‘gadgets’ it is just guesswork, whether to pass 1NT, take out to 3D (if playing transfers) or even raise to 2NT invitationally (via the range finder), because if partner has the king of diamonds, 3NT will have good chances. Much also depends on whether you are playing match points or teams, and we may revisit this at a later stage.

♠ AJ743

♥ 743

♦ QJ9

♣ K2

This is the sort of hand that so many misbid when playing transfers. They either bid Stayman (which you would need to bid if NOT playing transfers) or try 2S as a range finder, or even transfer to spades and then bid 3S!

It is a very easy hand to bid with transfers: bid 2H and transfer to spades, and when partner bids 2S, bid 2NT. That is now a perfect description of your hand. Your transfer sequence has shown a five card spade suit and your next bid of 2NT a balanced hand of 11 or 12 HCP.

Partner knows everything about your hand and can now decide to:

- a) pass 2NT with a minimum and only two spades,
- b) bid 3S with three or four cards in the spade suit and a minimum,
- c) bid 4S with a maximum and at least three spades, or
- d) bid 3NT with a maximum and only two spades.

That is so much easier and more meaningful than the non transfer sequence of Stayman followed by 3S.

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