

# NO TRUMPS PARTNER?

## Chapter 15: Avoiding Disasters

It doesn't happen often, but it does happen regularly enough. I get questions from people who have had a disaster with a 1NT opening when they have ended in 3NT and opponents have raced off the first five tricks. How, my correspondents ask, can we avoid such disasters?

My answer is twofold. Firstly, you can stop playing a 1NT opening that includes a suit with no stopper or potential stopper. Secondly, you can develop a method for finding out if the opener has a suit without a stopper. Both these are feasible, but the latter is much more sensible since adapting your system to open 1NT ONLY when you have stoppers in every suit basically means not opening a WEAK 1NT at all! Since I personally am a person who dislikes the weak No Trump, I can happily live with either of the options. But since I know there are also died in the wool Weak 1NT proponents reading this book, I will make some suggestions that may help avoid the pitfalls.

### BOARD 5 DEALER North N-S VUL

#### North

♠ A Q 4

♥ Q 8 7 3

♦ 9 2

♣ A Q 9 3

#### West

♠ 10 6 5

♥ A 10 5

♦ A 8 7 6 5

♣ 7 4

#### East

♠ 9 7 3

♥ 10 4 2

♦ K Q 10 4

♣ 10 6 5

#### South

♠ K J 8 2

♥ K J 9

♦ J 3

♣ K J 8 2

This is not an atypical hand. North has an absolute maximum weak 1NT opening and South, with a 13 count, enough for game. South starts with the obvious Stayman, and North responds 2H. South bids 3NT. East leads what is the 'book' lead of the king of diamonds and the defence take the first six tricks. Bad luck! But, should such disasters be made provision for?

There ARE ways to do this, and I'm sure you can think them up yourself. But in case you can't here are a couple of suggestions.

1. Make use of the 2NT response. As a rule, a raise to 2NT is an invitational raise and denies any interest in the majors. If you are playing transfers, it is a transfer to either 3C or 3D. There are other things that people use 2NT for as well. But why not use it to ask partner to show whether they have a weak suit? We used to do this many years ago to very good effect. We were, of course, laughed out of court by the 'experts' who were extremely scathing about the idea of announcing to opponents that this was your weak suit and they now would know what to lead against 3NT. These same 'experts' completely forgot the fact that if you were told by opener that they were weak in a suit and you still opted to play in 3NT, you were quite happy for opener to receive that lead against 3NT. And if you were NOT, then you were about to find a far better spot. The funny thing is that when you AND opener both have a weak suit, the defence always manage to lead it anyway. There are by-product advantages of using this system as well. One is that diagnosing a suit without honour cards can pinpoint cards in the other suits and lead to some very good slams that would otherwise not even be contemplated. But, to use this system, you will have to review your current methods so that you don't end up in trouble with the simpler sequences! Just how to do that will be covered in later chapters.
2. Use jumps in the minors to probe for possible contracts better than 3NT. As a rule, a jump to 3H or 3S is game forcing and asking opener to raise to game with three or four cards, and to bid 3NT with only two. But in a MINOR, because you will normally be looking for 3NT as your game and NOT 5C or 5D, the jump to 3C or 3D should be taken as a SLAM probe. But to look for slam in a minor there are other ways of doing it, or even just bidding the slam in the minor with a 6+ card suit. So the jump to 3C or 3D can be usefully employed to stop you playing 3NT with one suit wide open.
3. Much also depends on whether you are playing transfers over your 1NT, and what SORT of transfers you are playing, there are so many different variations. These will also be discussed in later chapters.

## BOARD 18 DEALER East N-S VUL

**North**

♠ Q 7 4

♥ K 6 4

♦ K 8 4

♣ K Q 8 7

**West**

♠ A 6 5 3

♥ Q J 10 3

♦ 10 9

♣ 10 6 2

**East**

♠ J 10 2

♥ A 9 5

♦ A Q 5

♣ 9 5 4 3

**South**

♠ K 9 8

♥ 8 7 2

♦ J 7 6 3 2

♣ A J

After three passes, should North open 1NT? If so, what is the best defence against it? Or should EW compete, and if they do, HOW?

The North hand has the perfect POINT count for a 1NT opening, and also the perfect SHAPE, so why would you NOT open 1NT if playing Acol or any other system with a weak 1NT opening? The North hand nevertheless is about as bad a 1NT opening VUL vs NOT as you can devise. Yes, a stopper in every suit but also gaps everywhere. I generally trend to subtract ONE point from completely flat hands, and also one point if there are no intermediate cards (my version of intermediate cards is 8, 9 and 10). Personally, I would PASS the North hand playing TEAMS scoring but would open it 1NT at MATCH POINTS and hope for the best. Now let's look at the EAST hand. Given that North opens 1NT fourth in hand, I would DOUBLE as East. One could hardly give a better description of the East hand, and who knows, it may be a good idea to either defend or to compete. After all, West is marked with up to 11 HCP.

The double of 1NT is generally 15+ HCP but after passing, it should show a hand of 11 (POSSIBLY 10) HCP. Couldn't be better, could it, but most Easts would automatically pass. As you can see, 1NT is very precarious and any doubled contract by NS of 1NT or higher should yield EW a minimum of +200.

Doubling 1NT after having initially passed is something you should seriously consider. There will be other times when you pass as dealer and your left hand opponent opens 1NT, and there are two passes back to you. This is a different situation, because NOW partner is marked with up to 14 HCP, since he could simply have a hand that was not good enough to double or take ANY OTHER action. You should therefore protect against this possibility. On the other hand, partner could have very little and NORTH have 10 HCP. That could leave PARTNER with as few as 5 HCP and YOU could now be in trouble. That is what will happen with weak No Trump openings, both for you and opponents. The next chapters will concentrate on getting the best out of YOUR 1NT openings as well as your opponents' weak 1NT openings, if indeed you decide to open a weak 1NT and if opponents still open a weak NT after hearing about how you annihilate your opponents when they do open a weak 1NT.

## BOARD 5 DEALER North N-S VUL

### North

♠ Q J

♥ Q 8 7 5

♦ 9 6

♣ 10 9 7 4 2

### West

♠ 6 4 2

♥ K J 9 6

♦ A Q 7 2

♣ Q 3

### East

♠ A K 9 4

♥ A 4

♦ K 8 5 4 3

♣ J 8

### South

♠ 10 8 7 5

♥ 10 3 2

♦ J 10

♣ A K 6 5

This time, an off shape 1NT opening that got what it deserved. One of the country's best pairs were EW and East opened a 13-15 1NT. Maybe the modern trend is to be clever asses and open 1NT with that shape, maybe the 'sophisticated' bidding system that EW used necessitated that, who knows? West used Stayman and over East's 2S response went straight to game in 3NT. What else was there to do, anyway? Fortunately for South, he had been reading a bit about opening leads against No Trump contracts: With FIVE to the AK I have recommended the lead of a LOW one if there are no entries. But with FOUR to the AK, my recommendation has been to lead the ACE, and get partner to signal ATTITUDE. The reasons for 'fourth from five and top from four' have been outlined earlier in "No Trumps Partner?".

South led the ace, got an encouraging signal from partner (the TEN), and continued with the king and another. That was one down. The irony is that there is no makeable game for EW anyway, despite a combined 27 count. Nevertheless, a number of EW pairs did manage to stay in a part score in diamonds, for a very good result. And some, who pressed on to 5D, actually made when South either led a third club and offered a ruff and slough, or switched to a low heart at trick three, North playing the queen when dummy played low. I believe that opening 1NT with 5422 shape will get you into more wrong contracts than opening in your five card suit, as you should. No big deal you might say, and South might not have an obvious club lead or might lead fourth highest. True, but I am pleased to relate that when the hand was played in an "A" grade club event, playing in 3NT did not produce the best result for EW.