

# NO TRUMPS PARTNER?

## Introduction

I am writing this book on NO TRUMPS, not because I like No Trump bidding and play, but more so because I don't like some 1NT openings at all. Also, because so many people have so little knowledge about what should be the most basic part of bridge bidding, a 1NT opening, and the subsequent bidding after that. While I intend to mention more than one convention in relation to No Trumps, I will do what I think will be best for my readers. I will offer suggestions and advice that I think is best, and that I personally have found to help my own bridge and results at the table.

There are hundreds of 'experts' all over the world who all think their way is best. That is their prerogative, and if the reader thinks there is better advice elsewhere, all they need do is look for it! As far as I am concerned, nobody is a true expert at this game. YOU decide for yourself what is best for your bridge results, that is the only 'expert advice' that I will give you here and now. To paraphrase a well known expert who said 'Points, Schmoints', let me say this: "Experts? Schmexperts!"

I have also chosen this title because it is very difficult to write something that will be of universal use to players of all levels. What follows will, by and large, be of interest and help not only to the broad section of 'average' players, but also help the newcomer who is looking for early advancement. As for the other end of the scale, I am sure that my ideas, crazy or otherwise, will give them food for thought in areas they have yet to venture into themselves.

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## Chapter 1

### Why No Trumps?

#### ***The 1NT OPENING***

All bidding systems currently in vogue have, as one of their cornerstones, a 1NT OPENING. All the standard systems also base the 1NT opening on two things: The POINT COUNT, and the DISTRIBUTION. The distribution required for all the basic 1NT openings is BALANCED, and the point count varies according to the players' preferred system. Let's have a look at the three most commonly played systems and their 1NT openings.

<b>ACOL</b>	12-14 HCP
<b>PRECISION</b>	13-15 HCP
<b>STANDARD AMERICAN</b>	15-17 HCP

These are, of course, not the only ranges for a 1NT opening, but the most common ones.

The principles governing the choice of 1NT opening vary, but I can possibly summarise them as follows.

#### **12-14:**

This is known as the 'Weak No Trump' and was first popularised as the cornerstone of the ACOL system. It superseded the 'Strong No Trump' that was part of the 'Goren' system and many other 'old time' systems. The original Goren system used a 1NT opening of 16-18 HCP. It is interesting to note that these days the American way is to open 1NT with 15-17 HCP, a one point step down from Goren! But, to return to Acol. The reasons for introducing the 'Weak No Trump' were valid enough, though at the time they were considered revolutionary and quite daring.

The main reasons were:

1. By far the most bridge hands fall neatly into the category of being balanced and in the 12-14 point count range.
2. Because the nature and point count of the 1NT opening is reasonably accurately described with the opening bid of 1NT, it makes subsequent bidding by the partnership much easier.
3. Because the One Level has been taken away from opponents, it has a distinctly advantageous preemptive effect. Opponents must enter the bidding at the Two Level, and they are doing so 'in the dark', whereas the partner of the 1NT opener knows sufficient about partner's hand to take care of subsequent business once opponents interfere.

That, in theory, was the great benefit of the Weak 1NT opening. It did work extremely well for a very long time, and still does when used by those who know how to get the most out of it. Unfortunately, too many partnerships still have no idea how to make the best of the Weak No Trump, and too many good partnerships can turn the opposition's Weak No Trump to their own advantage. Just how this can be done, I hope to show you in the chapters to come, whether you yourself decide to play the Weak No Trump, or opponents do so against you.

**13-15 No Trump.** This is the range that goes with the Precision system, though in some versions of Precision the 1NT opening is 12-15. The reason is that a 1C opening in Precision is artificial and shows a high card point count of 16 plus, and includes all balanced hands. The 1NT opening therefore falls neatly into the 13-15 point range.

The Precision system also uses 'Five Card Majors', where an opening of 1H or 1S guarantees at least a five card suit. Therefore unbalanced hands with no five card or longer major have to be opened either with what could be a 'short' 1D (in some versions it can be as short as NONE) or 2C or 2D. Depending on the version, the 2D opening might show a 6+ card diamond suit or a 4414 or 4405 hand with 1 or 0 diamonds!! But, we're talking about the 1NT opening, and to all intents and purposes it is still a 'Weak No Trump' despite the upper limit being 15 rather than 14 HCP. Much the same information is known about the 1NT opener as in Acol, and the frequency that these No Trump openings occur is much the same (less if using a 13-15 point count and, naturally, more if using 12-15). It is interesting to note that there seems to be a psychological barrier for opponents when an opponent opens a Precision 1NT with a maximum point count of 15 as against an Acol 1NT with an upper point count of 14! But, more on that later.

**15-17 No Trump.** Most of the 'Standard American' systems these days have a 15-17 1NT opening, the reasons for that being quite valid also. Standard American systems normally open 'Five Card Majors'. Therefore, with only four cards in either or both majors and a weak opener (12-14 HCP) it is much safer to open 1C or 1D. This allows for the possibility of finding a major suit fit, or at least escaping undoubled when the Acol payers might open 1NT with a weak hand and never be able to find any fit at all, even if they do have one!

The next chapters will deal with the 'Weak No Trump' opening and how to use it for YOUR benefit, whether it is the opponents, or you, who open 1NT.