

# NO TRUMPS PARTNER

## Chapter 04: Basic No Trump Bidding

So that we can look further into the pros and cons of different No Trump opening bids, we now need to go further and return to some basics. Basics in terms of where, and how, to proceed after one of your partnership has opened 1NT. Only if you understand the basic concept of bidding and playing in No Trumps will you be able to move on and make the most of whatever you, and your partner, decide to use a 1NT opening for. So, let's start with the basic 1NT opening bid.

A 1NT opening bid, in most systems, shows a quite specific POINT count, and a BALANCED hand. Most people, irrespective of system and point count for a 1NT opening bid, will open 1NT with balanced hands including a five card minor but not a five card major. Some of these systems do not open 1H or 1S unless they have at least five of them, therefore they would NEVER open 1NT, irrespective of point count, if they have five hearts or spades. However, ALL systems that open 1NT with balanced hands, will do so irrespective of which FOUR card suits the hand contains. If the partner of the 1NT opener has nowhere better to go, 1NT will be the final contract, even when there is a fit in one or more suits. That is the price you pay for having a 1NT opening which defines a set distribution and point range. However, if the partner of the 1NT opener has better ideas of where the contract should be placed, it is imperative that there be a way to make the choice of final contract a matter of discussion and not guesswork.

Hence, you need to be able to do the following when your partnership has a 1NT opening:

1. Sign off in a more suitable contract, one that you believe has better prospects than 1NT.
2. Invite game if partner has a maximum point count and/or suitable support for your suit.
3. FORCE to game while ensuring that you reach the BEST game contract where possible.

It really does not matter whether you open a 12-14, a 13-15, a 15-17, or even a 16-18 HCP No Trump. The basic 'rules' are the same, but the POINT COUNT that responder might do certain things with, will be different. For instance, with a Weak 1NT, responder would invite game with 11-12 HCP, whereas with a Strong 1NT of say 15-17 HCP, responder would invite game with 8-9 HCP. It is simply based on the 'magic' number of 25, which is the COMBINED point count that a partnership needs to have a good chance of making 3NT or 4H or 4S. 5C or 5D generally requires a combined point count of closer to 28-29, which is why often you will prefer to play in 3NT rather than 5C or 5D. And, as you will have seen from the previous chapter, why you might often land in a ridiculous 3NT down one when you can actually make a small slam in a minor! But, that is a side issue at the moment.

There are two basic ways to bid when either you or partner has opened 1NT.

One, the old style way, is to bid naturally. The other, more modern way, is to use the 'TRANSFER' system. I personally do NOT think that transfers are the best thing since sliced bread. What I do believe is that whatever you decide to do, you do things properly and avoid misunderstandings that will land you into ludicrous contracts.

While I will cover natural as well as transfer bidding over a 1NT opening, there is ONE 'artificial' tool that is indispensable when you have a 1NT opening which can include either one, or two, four card majors. That tool is STAYMAN, and that is where we will start our discussion.

## STAYMAN: 1NT-2C.

This is an artificial bid that has nothing to do with clubs, but is a question related to the MAJORS. It asks the 1NT opener whether they have a four card major. Opener responds by bidding 2D if the answer is NO, or bidding whichever four card major they have. With both, they bid 2H and can later bid spades if the Stayman bidder shows no interest in hearts. Note that to use Stayman, in the most basic system, you MUST have at least one four card major, otherwise why bother asking. Furthermore, you must also be able to stand the RESPONSE without getting too high in the bidding. For instance it is no use bidding Stayman in the hope that partner might have a fit for your four card heart suit if a SPADE response will take you too high. Therefore, the simplest thing to do is to use Stayman ONLY when you have a good enough hand to at least INVITE game. Once you do that, you can start using Stayman on suitable weaker hands. More on that later.

Natural bidding opposite partner's 1NT opening. No matter what 'size' your 1NT opening, you will need to use Stayman, and you will also need to be able to stop at a low level in a SUIT contract when the hand is not suitable for play in 1NT. I will now discuss two ways to be able to play the hand in a suit contract when you do not wish to play in 1NT.

The NATURAL takeout method is quite simple:

If you want to play in 2D, 2H, or 2S opposite partner's 1NT opening, bid that suit at the Two Level and partner will KNOW that they must PASS. As straight forward as that. If you want to play in CLUBS, you can't do it in 2C, because 2C over partner's 1NT opening is STAYMAN. But if you think playing in clubs will still be better than 1NT, you can do so in 3C. Simply bid STAYMAN first, and whatever partner responds, bid clubs again, which has to be THREE clubs. One level higher of course, but partner will know to STOP. The response to your Stayman can not be higher than 2S, so there is no danger in asking the question. As long as partner also knows that your 3C bid now denies any interest in either major and is simply a statement that you want to play this in 3C.

The TRANSFER method is also simple enough, as long as you don't forget of course!

If you want to play the hand in 2H, bid 2D as a TRANSFER to 2H, and partner will bid 2H, as told. Then you PASS and the contract is 2H, but declarer will, of course, be the 1NT opener. This CAN have some advantages, but the stated advantage of having the 1NT opening hand hidden during the play is not as great as some would like to believe. Often this might achieve a good result simply because defenders are not adept at defending when there is a long suit in dummy as trumps, and declarer may have as few as two in hand. If you want to play in 2S, then you bid 2H, which tells opener to transfer to 2S. Because 2C is STAYMAN, and 2D is used to transfer to hearts, you cannot choose to play the hand in either 2C or 2D. But that is no big deal. After all, the minor suits score much less anyway. However, there will be times when your hand is simply much better if played in the minor, and the standard way to transfer to a club or diamond contract is to respond to 1NT with a bid of 2NT. Opener MUST now bid 3C. Thus, 2NT is ALSO a transfer bid. If clubs is where responder wants to play, they pass the 3C bid. If it is in diamonds that they want to play, they 'correct' to 3D.

That, then, takes care of the "WEAK" takeouts when there is a 1NT opening bid. We still need to be able to INVITE game, as well as FORCE to game. How you do this will depend on what you choose to do, whether you choose to play transfers, or not. In the coming chapters I will briefly outline BOTH ways of bidding, so you can decide what you prefer to do. What I must emphasise, though, is that, if you do choose to play transfers, don't be as ignorant as some others who say: "yes, let's play transfers", and then learn just what I have outlined in the paragraph above, and go no further. Believe it or not, I have seen MANY players who do just that. They then haven't got a clue what to do when different hands, and different situations present themselves in the context of a 1NT opening.