

START WINNING

Chapter 4: Bidding Without Opposition

Now let me give you a very simple little deal that every pair should be able to bid correctly. I have selected this particular deal because I believe it should be exactly the same in “Simple” bidding as well as in ACOL. I will also explain what the differences are so that you can understand the reasons for both ways of bidding.

Board 4 Dealer W All Vul

♠ K42	
♥ Q96	
♦ J106	
♣ Q962	
♠ AQJ	♠ 10987
♥ A53	♥ K742
♦ A752	♦ K84
♣ J74	♣ K10
♠ 653	
♥ J108	
♦ Q83	
♣ A853	

The bidding options are few, whether you are playing my “Simple” version of bidding, or playing Acol. West opens 1D and East responds 1H. No, not 1NT just because you have “6 to 9” points.

This is where many inexperienced players go wrong. It does not matter what system you are playing, you should never fail to bid your suit if it falls within the accepted parameters.

1H is mandatory the way we play it. No Trump bids come later and should be the final resort if no suit fit is found.

West has promised to make a rebid if East responds in a suit; with no other option, West therefore bids 1NT. Playing my “Simple” bridge, that says West does not have four spades or a suitable rebid in diamonds or clubs, nor four card heart support. In other words, there is nowhere other than 1NT to go. Nor does West have enough points to jump to 2NT because that would require 17-18 points. So, 1NT is as far as West is prepared to go with his rebid. This is the same rebid if EW were playing Acol. You see, the only difference between Acol and the Simple version is in the No Trump rebids at the 1 level. That is because in Acol, a 1NT OPENING BID has been introduced, whereas in Simple bidding there isn't a 1NT opening.

Let me now explain the reasoning behind the weak 1NT opening as it was first introduced many many years ago. Even too far back for me to remember the exact reasons, but just bear with me while I explain it to you as I see it.

In the very old days, most players played the Goren system, which opened 1NT with 16-18 high card points and a balanced hand. The reason was that with that many points it was considered safe to open 1NT and to bypass whatever suit the opener had, in other words take the risk of missing a fit, because having that many points 1NT was no doubt a safe place to play, and if partner wanted to investigate for a fit in a major suit, it was probably also safe to do so with fewer points.

Then, at a later stage, about 1950 or so and don't quote me on that, along came the avant garde English lot who decided it would be a good idea to open 1NT with only 12-14 high card points. That was somewhat risky because you were already at the 1NT level without having mentioned a suit. But against that, there were a large number of hands which would fall into the parameters for a 1NT opening, which were that the hand had to be balanced, i.e. 4333 or 4432, shape.

Then the Acol players also added the slightly less balanced hands (5332 shape) if the five card suit was either clubs or diamonds, i.e. a Minor suit.

While such a weak 1NT opening was a bit risky, it was thought that it had the advantage of being somewhat preemptive. Opponents had to enter the bidding at the Two level if they wanted to bid. And if they did want to bid at the two level and did so, the partner of the 1NT opener could make a penalty double with the balance of power, i.e. at least 10 HCP.

Things are a bit more sophisticated these days, and the weak 1NT opening bid no longer presents much of a problem for opponents, and there are many ways to bid different hands. I won't go into it now.

Let me return to the present discussion though, about how to bid this very simple-to-bid hand.

(Hands repeated for convenience)

Board 4 Dealer W All Vul

♠ K42

♥ Q96

♦ J106

♣ Q962

♠ AQJ

♥ A53

♦ A752

♣ J74

♠ 10987

♥ K742

♦ K84

♣ K10

♠ 653

♥ J108

♦ Q83

♣ A853

West opens 1D, East responds 1H and West's rebid is 1NT. In my simple version, that shows an upper limit of 16 HCP because with 17-18 West would jump to 2NT and with 19 or 20 West would jump to 3NT or make some other game forcing bid. East has no reason to go anywhere else and passes 1NT. If playing Acol, West also rebids 1NT but that shows exactly 15-16 HCP. Why? Because a 1NT opening bid is made with 12-14 HCP and there is no sense in the rebid showing the same thing because why would you open 1D with a balanced 12-14 point hand? This is something that some less experienced players simply do not understand. If they play Acol then they have no option but to open all balanced hands in the 12-14 point range with 1NT. You cannot have it both ways. So, when West rebids 1NT that shows 15-16 in Acol.

You have no doubt been taught that a combined point count of 25 is required to make 3NT, so with East's nine points, if West has 16 rather than 15, game is possible. But is it probable, and really worth looking for? Many rookie Easts will bid 2NT if they are point count addicts, but even with a 16 count in the West hand, East should realise that it isn't just points that matter. East's hand has little merit opposite a balanced 16 count, anyone should be able to see that such a balanced hand with a nine count made up of three kings backed up by little else is just not good enough to produce the required tricks unless declarer is very lucky and/or gets worse than average defence.

I hope that every reader would have passed a 1NT rebid by West. Learn to recognise the value and limitations of your hand not just based on a strict point count.

Now take a look at the deal as it was when it was played in a lower grade session and decide for yourself how declarer would have got on in 1NT or 3NT.