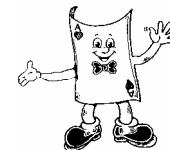


GOLDILOCKS AND THE THREE BALANCED HANDS



The experts have come up with guidelines for choosing your first bid and your rebids. Following these suggestions will allow you to paint a complete picture of your hand so that you and your partner will find the best trump suit.

- A *balanced hand* has no singleton or void. A balanced hand may have one doubleton and even a five-card suit.
- Notrump opening bids show a specific point range. There is no stopper requirement. You might even open 1NT or 2NT with a small doubleton.
- A 1NT opening bid shows a balanced hand in a narrow point range. The modern range for opening 1NT is 15-17 points. Responder insists on game with 10 points. A 2NT opening shows a balanced hand with 20-21 points. ***When you have a balanced hand in the "just right" point range, open 1NT or 2NT.***
- With a balanced hand that is "too small" to open 1NT, open with a suit. Once partner responds, consider rebidding 1NT. But remember that finding a major suit fit is more important. *Opener's 1 NT rebid shows a balanced hand that opened with 13-14 points* (Many times will become 12-14 HCP).
- A balanced hand that is "too big" to open 1NT and "too small" to open 2NT should open in a suit and rebid 2NT over a minimum response from partner (unless opener fits responder's major). For us, this rebid shows a balanced 18 or 19 points and is highly invitational but not forcing.

When choosing your opening bid, try to plan ahead. Is there one opening that's "just right" to describe your hand? Will it take more than one bid to make your description? If you get started on the wrong foot, there may be no rebid that fits just right and you may find yourself as uncomfortable as Goldilocks was when she sat in the wrong chair.

RESPONDER'S DECISION

RESPONDER IS THE CAPTAIN! After opener makes a descriptive notrump bid, responder is often in a good position to decide the final contract immediately.

Opener's strength is known within a narrow range; opener's distribution is known to be balanced. Responder asks two questions: **Do We Have Game?** (or How High?) and **Do We Have A Fit?** (Fits are preferably in a major suit. Without that, we prefer 3NT to a minor suit game.) When responder can answer both questions, responder places the contract.

EXERCISE: Choose your opening bid and try to plan your rebid.

HAND 1

♠A 7 6
♥K Q 10
♦A K 9 4 3
♣9 8

HAND 5

♠A 4
♥K Q 9 7
♦A J 9 4
♣7 4 3

HAND 2

♠A 7
♥K J 9 7 5
♦K 10 4
♣A J 9

HAND 6

♠4
♥Q J 6 3
♦K 9 8 4
♣A K 10 6

HAND 3

♠A 7 6
♥K 10 3
♦A 9 4 2
♣Q 9 8

HAND 7

♠A Q 7
♥K Q 9
♦A 9 7
♣K J 4 2

HAND 4

♠A 10 7 3
♥J 6
♦K Q 9
♣Q J 4 2

Hand 1: ♠A 7 6 ♥K Q 10 ♦A K 9 4 3 ♣9 8

This hand is balanced with 16 HCP and is just right for an opening 1NT.

Hand 2: ♠A 7 ♥K J 9 7 5 ♦K 10 4 ♣A J 9

Many players wonder what the right opening bid is with a balanced hand containing a 5-card major. We love those major suit contracts and opening 1NT could cause us to miss our fit. But not opening 1NT with a hand that is "just right" for that bid causes difficulty when we try to find a rebid. Suppose you decide to open 1♥ and partner responds 1♠. You can't raise spades; you can't rebid your hearts (that would show a six-card suit); you can't bid 1NT which would show 12-14 points; and you can't jump to 2NT because that would show 18-19 points. After the opening bid, we aren't crazy about bidding 3-card suits either but bidding 2♣ or 2♦ is the only choice left. *There is no rebid to describe a balanced hand with just the right point count for 1NT; these hands should start with a 1NT opening bid --- even when you have a 5-card major.* If you don't open 1NT, you will have to choose a rebid that either distorts the strength or distribution of your hand.

Hand 3: ♠A 7 6 ♥K 10 3 ♦A 9 4 2 ♣Q 9 8

This balanced hand is "too little" to start with 1NT. It will take two bids to describe. Open 1♦. If partner responds 1♥ or 1♠ showing a four-card suit, rebid 1NT.

Hand 4: ♠A 10 7 3 ♥J 6 ♦K Q 9 ♣Q J 4 2

At first glance, the above hand doesn't seem different from Hand 3. It's balanced and "too small" to open 1NT, so you open 1♣. Suppose your partner responds 1♥. A 1NT rebid would give a good description of your distribution and strength but there is something more important to do. There could still be a major suit fit in spades. Bidding your spades takes priority over bidding 1NT. *Given the choice of rebidding a 4-card major on the one level or 1NT, bid the major.* A 1NT rebid would deny four spades. Our top priority in bidding is to find a major suit fit as long as we can do so without distorting our strength and distribution. A 1♠ rebid promises four spades and anywhere from 13 to 18 points. (A maximum 19-21 point opening hand would jump shift to 2♠.)

Hand 5: ♠A 4 ♥K Q 9 7 ♦A J 9 4 ♣7 4 3

This hand looks similar to our last hand --- balanced and too little for a 1NT opening bid. Open 1♦. Life is wonderful if partner responds 1♥; you can describe a minimum opening hand with a fit by raising to 2♥. What if partner responds 1♠ instead of 1♥? You might want to show your major and bid 2♥. There are several reasons why you should rebid 1NT instead. Partner isn't that likely to have four hearts. We respond *up the line* with four-card suits; with four hearts and four spades, partner would have bid 1♥, not 1♠. Partner could have four hearts and longer spades but, if that is the case, his hand is unbalanced and he won't want to stay in 1NT. He can mention the hearts himself next. A third and more complicated argument for rebidding 1NT rather than 2♥ is that a minimum opener has to be careful when rebidding a new suit on the two level whenever there is a chance that responder could have a minimum hand. **A minimum opener should not bid past two of his original suit when looking for a fit.** When opener does bypass two of his original suit, he is said to *reverse* and shows more than minimum strength. After your 1♦ opening bid, you cannot go past 2♦ because your partner only bid on the one level and could be quite weak. Make the descriptive rebid of 1NT.

Hand 6: ♠4 ♥Q J 6 3 ♦K 9 8 4 ♣A K 10 6

The bidding rules suggest that this hand open 1♦. We play 5-card majors and cannot open hearts. The guideline with two 4-card minors is to open 1♦. This hand explains the reasoning behind the rule. After you open 1♦, partner responds 1♠. Does a 1NT rebid describe your hand? No; it would show a balanced hand and you have a singleton. You don't want partner to expect more spade support. You don't want to bid 2♥ for all the same reasons we gave in the last example. But 2♣ is a safe, low rebid and only promises four clubs. If you had opened 1♣ without thinking about your rebid, you would find yourself in a predicament. 1NT and 2♥ are still out and 2♦ is also higher than 2♣. It would be a reverse bid showing more than minimum strength.

Hand 7: ♠A Q 7 ♥K Q 9 ♦A 9 7 ♣K J 4 2

This balanced hand adds up to 19 points --- "too big" to open 1NT but "too small" for a 2NT opening. Open 1♣. If partner bids 1♥ or 1♠, jump to 2NT. If partner gives a minimum 1NT response, a simple 2NT rebid will do.