



By: Don Rogers

I. Weak Hand (0-7 pts)

With a hand this weak there is no real chance of game. As captain your responsibility is to do your best to avoid a minus score (1NT may not succeed). It may seem counter-intuitive, but **the weaker your hand the greater the necessity for you to take action**. A normal 1NT opener vs a Yarborough may take only 3 tricks. If your side is vulnerable and the opponents double, down 4 is worth more to them than any game. If you have a really bad hand, think of bidding as damage control.

Almost all duplicate pairs use transfers when partner opens and they have 5 card or longer major suit. This is always correct, regardless of the strength of the hand, because the major may play better, scores almost as well as NT, and you can play at the two level in the major when that is right. Some pairs also have methods to transfer to a minor suit when partner opens 1NT. Transfers to a minor suit should not be made except in rare situations!

The reason for this is that when you transfer to a minor suit, you will be playing at the three level. Therefore, you need a six card (or longer) suit to transfer into a minor. Also, in general we prefer to play in NT rather than the minor suit because NT scores so much better. You should only transfer to a minor suit with a really terrible hand and a long minor, or a hand so strong that a slam in the minor suit might be possible! Hands with intermediate values (~6 to 14 points) and long minor suits should be played in a NT contract.

A few examples will help to explain these ideas. In each case assume partner has opened a standard 1NT, and RHO has passed.

1. A-xx H-xxxxx D-xxx C-xxx

This is about as bad as it can get. At 1NT you can expect this hand to take exactly 0 tricks. At 2H, you can expect at worst to make a couple of small hearts good by ruffing. Therefore, you can expect a contract of 2H to play at least 2 tricks better than 1NT, and if partner has a good heart holding (it could happen) you might even make 2H. However, the main point here is to reduce your minus score by playing in hearts. Transfer partner to hearts and pass.

2. S-xx H-xx D-Qxxxxx C-xxx

The same logic applies here. With six diamonds, 3D is likely to be a much better contract than 1NT. Occasionally opener will have a magic hand that allows 1NT to roll, but about 97% of the time 3D is better. Use whatever tools you have to get there.

3. S-xx H-Kxx D-Qxxx C-xxxx

With this sort of a balanced weak hand with some values, a pass is probably best. Your side has somewhere between 20 and 22 pts, and declarer will likely be able to reach your hand at least once. 1NT may not make, but it is unlikely to be down more than 1.

4. S-xxx H-xxxx D-xxxx C-xx

OK, so this is the worst hand you can have – no points and not even a five-card suit. Time for desperate measures. Bid 2C (Stayman) and pass whatever opener bids. The logic is that if partner does not have a four-card major, they have at least three, and probably four, diamonds. Anything is likely to be better than 1NT.

5. S-xxx H-Kxxx D-xxxx C-xx

This one is almost as bad, because you are right on the edge of passing and hoping partner can gut out 1NT. Either pass or 2C per example 4 could be right, and it might be a 50-50 deal. I would probably pass, but the “garbage” Stayman approach could work too.

6. S-xx H-Kxx D-Qxxxxx C-xx

It might seem right to bid 2S to transfer to the minor, but you should not. If partner has a partial fit for diamonds, they can probably make 1 or 2 NT. If they don't have a partial fit for diamonds, 3D is probably down at least one trick.

7. S-xx H-xxx D-Qxxxxx C-xx

This is the type of hand that is correct for a minor suit transfer. 3D may not make, but 1NT is likely a disaster.