

No Trump Bids by Responder by Maritha Pottenger

When **partner opens a suit and you respond 1NT**, you are showing **6-10 HCP** and denying four cards in any major you could have bid below 1NT. However, **if the opponents enter the auction** with an overcall at the one level, you are **now showing 8-10 HCP** and guaranteeing at least one stopper in the suit in which they overcalled.

No trump bids at the 2 level by responder do not change. If partner opens a minor and you bid 2NT, standard treatment is that shows an invitational hand: 11-12 HCP and no 4-card major with stoppers or semi-stoppers in both majors. If partner opens the bidding and RHO overcalls a suit, a 2NT bid by you still shows 11-12 HCP and guarantees at least 1-1/2 stoppers of the suit which was overcalled (and denies a hand appropriate for a negative double).

One of the important decisions for responder to make is **when to make a negative double and when to bid no trump after the opponents overcall partner's opening bid.** There are several guidelines. The more you have in the overcall suit (in terms of length and strength—up to four cards), the more you should consider no trump. The weaker the suit(s) you are promising by a negative double are, the less appealing that option is. A no trump stopper that is based partially on length (e.g., QJxx behind overcaller or Q109x) works much better in no trump. In a suit contract, it might go Ace, King, ruff in that suit. If however, too much of your hand is in the overcalled suit (e.g., AKx), you may not have enough outside to set up tricks in time if playing no trump, but your two quick tricks could be very useful in a suit contract. If you only have one stopper in the opponent's suit and can negative double, don't even consider no trump. Make your negative double! Once the opponents have identified a 5-card or longer suit to lead against no trump, you want AT LEAST 1-1/2 stoppers, preferably two stoppers to consider a no trump contract.

Occasionally, you may choose to bid NT even when you have a fit for partner's suit. Again, this is often when you have “soft” values (mostly queens and jacks) which will not bring quick tricks to partner, but can be very useful in low-level no trump contracts.

A most vital note: **KNOW WHEN TO PASS.** If an opponent is bidding your best suit, do NOT rescue him or her by bidding 1NT or 2NT. Pass, and wait for your partner's reopening double. You should expect to collect a good score. A reopening double by the Opening bidder is MANDATORY at the 1 and 2 level when partner passes and you are short in the suit which was overcalled. Responder cannot make a penalty double—because a double by responder would be a negative double. Thus, the opening bidder must protect partner. If an opponent overcalls at the 1 level and you have five or more good cards in their suit—PASS! If they overcall at the 2 level and you have 4 or more trumps with at least two trump tricks and a couple quick tricks, pass. You may not have game, but you expect the opponents to go down at least two for a better result than any part-score you could have made. **On misfit hands, strive to DEFEND, not to declare.** [Example hand for passing at two level when partner opens one spade and RHO bids 2H: xx AQ109 KQx xxxx. You will be thrilled to pass partner's reopening double and a no trump game by your side is unlikely to make. If partner has enough extras for you two to make 3NT, then RHO is going minus 800 or minus 1100.]

Sometimes you don't have enough to defend, however. If an opponent overcalls a suit and you have 4 or 5 of them and 5-7 HCP, you will pass. When partner makes a reopening double (as is mandatory), you now can bid 1NT with your stopper, and partner will know that you have fewer than 8 HCP because you did NOT bid at your first opportunity.