

## HINTS FOR HARD-TO-CLASSIFY HANDS WITH NO TRUMP, ETC.

**One eternal challenge is whether to open a 15-17 HCP hand with a 5-card major with one of the major, or with 1NT.** In one of his many excellent books, Eddie Kantar recommends opening a 15-16 HCP hand with 5 hearts 1NT (to avoid the rebid problem). He recommends opening a 17 HCP hand with either major in the major and then jump-shifting to 2NT. (You upgrade your 17 HCP hand with a 5-card suit to an 18 HCP hand.) He recommends opening a 15-16 HCP hand with a 5-card spade suit with spades, unless the suit is very bad, and then open 1NT. (Spade are the “boss suit” in competitive auctions, anyway, so are almost as good as opening a NT.) This approach has worked well for me for the last year, including at least 3 times when opening 1NT instead of one heart kept the opponents out of their spade fit.

**Most people nowadays do not worry about opening 1NT with a worthless doubleton.**

However, would you open 1NT if you had two doubletons? I will IF at least one doubleton has an honor card (not with two worthless doubletons!) and IF only one doubleton is in a major. (If I am 4-5 or 5-4 in the minors, I do not open 1NT. Partner has a right to expect me to have 3 cards in at least ONE of the majors.) This is another area to discuss with a partner. You don't have to play it may way—just make sure you and your partner(s) are on the same wavelength.

**If you are responding to a 1NT opening with a game-forcing hand (10 or more HCP) and you are 4-5 or 5-4 in the majors, I recommend using Stayman.** That allows you to find a potential 4-4 fit (even a 4-5 fit on occasion) which will sometimes play a trick better than the 5-3 fit. The potential drawback is that if partner does not have a 4-card major, you must jump in your major 2<sup>nd</sup> round and will probably play the hand from the weaker side. (If you play Smolen, you can make partner Declarer.)

If you are playing garbage Stayman, you can use Stayman even with a very weak 4-5 (in majors) or 5-4 (in majors) hand. If partner bids 2D, simply bid your 5-card suit. That is to play.

**When choosing between suit play and no trump, remember that Ace and Kings are very suit-oriented. Intermediate cards are oriented toward NT.** Remember to upgrade hands that have lots of 8's, 9's, and 10's. Those cards can get promoted rather quickly.

Many people add a point to their hands, when bidding no trump, if they have a 5-card suit.

**If partner makes a quantitative bid** (e.g., 4NT over 1NT or over 2NT; or 5NT over 1NT or over 2NT), **evaluate not only your high card strength, but also your controls** (Aces and Kings are extra good) **and your spot cards.** Lots of intermediate spot cards (7, 8, 9, 10) are good. Lots of low spot cards (2, 3, 4, 5, 6) are not so good.

**You should not open NT with a singleton, but people sometimes do it anyway**—particularly when their singleton is a King or Ace. Bear in mind that if you do this often enough for it to be continued “systemic” (that your partner can come to expect and allow for it), it is illegal unless the opponents are also informed. I don't do this because Murphy's law guarantees that if I did, my partner would transfer into the suit in which I have a singleton!