

Better Bidding with Bergen



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Overcalls — Easy as Pie

If you'd like to bid after an opponent's three-level preempt, think 3NT.

4♥ and 4♠ are usually the most desirable game contracts, but once an opponent shows a seven-card suit, you should reconsider. 3NT is now the #1 priority. Why?

When one opponent shows a long suit and several short suits, you have good reason to be concerned about ruffs and bad trump splits. These would be a big problem in a suit contract — but notrump is a different story.

If you're concerned about their long suit in notrump, don't worry. It's very unlikely that the preemptor will ever get in to run his long suit. Entryless defenders are harmless in notrump.

A 3NT overcall includes a very wide range of high-card points and distribution. With a balanced hand, 16 HCP is the usual minimum, while the maximum is a lot higher.

It is comforting to have two stoppers, but one is okay. A-x or A-x-x is the most desirable single stopper because a holdup play will cut the opponents' communication.

West	North	East	South
		3♥	?

♠Q842 ♥A9 ♦AKJ ♣KQ52

Bid 3NT. You might belong in spades, but if partner holds ♠K653, you could have three trump losers. You have no such worry in notrump. If you double and partner bids 4♣ or 4♦, you are not well placed.

♠K6 ♥A85 ♦AKQJ84 ♣J2

Bid 3NT. Definitely gorgeous diamonds, but the time to talk about them is when they're on your finger. Picture partner with just the ♠A and decide where you'd like to play after a heart lead.

♠K93 ♥KJ5 ♦J ♣AKJ952.

Bid 3NT. Many players would be afraid to overcall 3NT with a singleton. Bidding 4♣, however, would represent "scared bridge."

The opponents will not know that you have only one diamond. Your chances of making 3NT are infinitely better than making 5♣.

Look, Ma — no stopper

You don't need a stopper in opener's suit to balance with 1NT. All you need is 10 to 14 HCP.

Once your right-hand opponent passes opener's bid, you know partner must have some values. He'll often have good cards in their suit. If you don't have a suit to bid or the right shape to double, a stopperless 1NT is your only alternative to a pass.

By the way: As a passed hand, you need only 9 to 11 HCP to balance with 1NT.

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	Pass	?

Bid 1NT with

♠AJ10 ♥K7 ♦KJ53 ♣6432 and also with

♠A2 ♥QJ43 ♦A1042 ♣J75.

West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	Pass	?

Bid 1NT with

♠K652 ♥Q2 ♦1064 ♣AKJ9 and

♠A4 ♥AQ10 ♦984 ♣J7643.

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	Pass	?

Bid 1NT with

♠K4 ♥8742 ♦KQ94 ♣A73 and

♠74 ♥972 ♦AJ108 ♣AQ92.

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	Pass	?

Bid 1NT with

♠8432 ♥K5 ♦AQ9 ♣KJ84 and

♠J94 ♥92 ♦AK87 ♣A1062.

Don't force the issue

After partner overcalls at the one level, the bid of a new suit should not be forcing.

I don't recommend that a new-suit bid be forcing, even by an unpassed hand. The opening bidder has promised the values to open the bidding, but partner has not. After an auction such as:

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♠	Pass	?
♠4	♥KQ10732	♦843	♣A52

I'd like to bid 2♥ and show my nice suit without forcing North to bid again when all he has is a minimum overcall.

♠A4 ♥KQ10732 ♦A83 ♣A5

Cuebid 2♦. You have such a great hand that you can't risk partner's passing a 2♥ response. If partner rebids 2♠, you'll bid 3♥ — which is 100% forcing. □

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