

# Mike's Bridge Lesson



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## Balancing against 1NT

Your left-hand opponent opens 1NT, showing 15–17 points. This is passed to you. Their side is vulnerable, yours is not. What should you bid with the following four hands? What you do depends on your methods, so my answers will be generic.

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	Pass	?

- ♠Q 10 7 ♥K J 8 3 ♦A K 2 ♣Q 7 3
- ♠7 3 ♥K 9 7 6 4 ♦K Q 6 ♣A 6 2
- ♠K Q 7 3 2 ♥2 ♦Q J 10 4 2 ♣8 7
- ♠3 2 ♥Q J 8 7 ♦A K 7 6 ♣8 6 3

## Answers

1. Pass. Even if you play a double as penalty, doubling with this hand is bad. LHO has most of the missing HCP, and if dummy has half of the rest, your values will be compromised. Some players like to double with 10 points, thinking that partner *has* to have a good hand. Some of the time he does, and you set 1NT doubled. Some of the time he doesn't, and they make an overtrick. Keep this in mind. It is much easier for declarer, who knows what he has to work with in the play. The defenders often don't learn what is going on until it is too late.

2. Pass. This hand falls into the category of the previous hand. It is balanced, with fewer high cards. When you have a balanced hand with a poor suit, do not bother

bidding. If your partner has enough for you to make 2♥, he probably has enough to set 1NT.

3. Bid whatever your system calls for. If using Cappelletti/Hamilton, bid 2♠, showing spades and a minor. If using DONT, bid 2♦, showing diamonds and one of the majors. When you have shape and can offer two suits to play in, your chances of finding a fit are way better than when you have just one suit. This hand has only 8 HCP, but it is way safer for you to bid than with the 15-point hand shown in problem No. 1.

4. Bid 2♦ if using DONT. Do not bid if you are using Hamilton/Cappelletti. DONT gives you a fair chance of playing in 2♦ or 2♥. You do not have a lot of shape but you are showing two suits, and all you require is for partner to have a few good values and four cards in one of your suits. This is a dangerous bid, but when you think of the pleasures of defending 1NT with partner's lead of the ♠4, you can see that bidding has its merits. For the record, you should balance on almost any hand that has a singleton.

Here are two examples of the extremes you might go to balance.

- ♠J 10 7 6 4 ♥K 9 8 4 3 ♦4 ♣9 3
- ♠2 ♥A J 10 4 ♦9 8 4 ♣Q J 8 6 3

Both of these examples require

good fortune. But why shouldn't you get it? West has an average of 16 HCP. On No. 5, you have 4 HCP, but the bidding tells you your partner has a lot. If he has a fit (and why shouldn't he?), you can seriously hope to find a making contract. On No. 6, you have 8 HCP. This leaves 16 HCP unaccounted for. East's silence usually hints at 6 or fewer, leaving 10 or more for your partner. Take a chance and bid. Also, bid like you really mean it. Do not show by your tone that you are not happy with bidding. Let them discover that later.

One reminder for both of these hands. If you pass, you will end up defending, and on both of these hands you *know* your partner will lead a suit that you do not like. Here's my advice in a nutshell: If 1NT is passed to you and you have a singleton, try really hard to bid something. □