



BY KEN MONZINGO

The best bid in bridge is the 1NT opening. It describes your hand to partner and intimidates the opponents. A good 16-18 (or 15-17) balanced hand with no voids or singletons may be opened with a one notrump bid. That point count for opening the one notrump (1NT) bid will be whatever is mutually agreeable between you and your partner. The 1NT bid will be the foundation for your power bidding structure and partnership agreements. Use it, use it often . . . and correctly!

Strong notrump ranges vary with each partnership. The most common are 15-17 and 16-18. (Notice they both are 3-point ranges.) This enables the responding partner to better reach the correct contract level by adding *his* hcp to *opener's* middle of range. By doing so you will always be within one point of your exact combined partnership total! Simple addition

The acceptable opening notrump hand patterns are all balanced: 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, and 5-3-3-2.* These are the only "true" balanced distributions, all other hand patterns are considered "unbalanced." Balanced hands contain no singletons, voids, or long suits (six or more).

Notice nothing has been mentioned about unstopped suits. The fact that you hold three small (or even *two* small) in a suit should not prevent you from opening a notrump bid (even 2NT!) if the size and shape criteria are met. Since your notrump opening bid is *easily* the most descriptive bid you will make, it should lead to your most precise auctions and successful contracts.

Look for reasons to open 1NT - not for reasons to fear opening 1NT!

* A tainted balanced pattern is: 2-2-4-5 (we all hate this pattern!)

© Let's use a 16-18 hcp notrump range and see how balanced hands are described

1. Opening 1NT shows a balanced hand of 16-18 hcp, therefore . . .
2. Opening one of a suit and a *jump* rebid of 2NT shows 19-21 hcp.
3. By opening one of a suit and *rebidding* 1NT we show 13-15 hcp
4. An immediate 2NT opening bid is 22-24, again with balanced distribution.

Final Contract

We open 1NT to describe our hand. We do not necessarily intend to play the contract there. An eight-card major fit is usually superior. By using certain "tools" such as the Stayman 2♣ bid and the Jacoby Transfer, the final dimension is added to reach the best contract.

I do not recommend you open 1NT (or 2NT) with a five-card major. Others do.

1. hcp: high card points