

TIPS FOR TOPS

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All boards referred to in this article were played in the 299er game at Bridge Centre of Niagara on January 25, 2022 (Game #1072). Full results and game schedule at

- Alerting online
- When partner opens 2C
- Who bids 1NT?

Bd: 1	♠ 732	Optimum
Vul: None	♥ K743	NS 1N, S 1C+1: +5
Dlr: North	♦ T8	
	♣ K754	
♠ KJT9	N	♠ Q64
♥ J9	W 1 E	♥ Q862
♦ AK42	S	♦ J75
♣ QJ9		♣ 863
6	♠ A85	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
15 HCP 5	♥ AT5	N 1 1 1 1 1
14	♦ Q963	S 2 1 1 1 1
	♣ AT2	E - - - -
		W - - - -

Board 1 this week is a perfect illustration of a principle that's worth keeping in mind. In situations where the HCP are fairly evenly distributed between the pairs as they are here; with neither side vulnerable, if one side is going to play in 1NT, you want it to be your side - whether you can make it or not.

If this seems counterintuitive, consider the math. If your side can take seven tricks, you will score 90 if you are the declaring side, but only 50 if you are defending - the penalty for setting the opponents by 1 trick.

And, if you can take only 6 tricks, you will lose 90 if you are defending, but only 50 if you are declaring. If, by chance, you can take eight tricks, the numbers change, but the principle still works; gain 120 as declarer, but only 100 as defender.

On today's hand, South opened 1D, and West had to decide what to do with her 15HCP hand. With diamonds well stopped, and a hand unsuitable for a take-out X, 1NT should be an easy choice. With perfect defence, West can't make 1NT, but those who

didn't overcall 1NT found themselves defending against 1NT played by South - with below-average results. And, because perfect defence isn't easy, some of the West declarers found themselves succeeding in their contract, for an even better board.

Keep it in mind. Be bold. If NT is a possible choice, it's usually the right choice.

Board 2 also offers a chance to discuss an important principle. In this case, most Wests opened the bidding 2C; East responded 2D - either waiting or positive, depending on your agreement - and West rebid 3C. The important principle here applies to East: when your partner opens 2C, whatever your response means, unless their rebid is at game level or 2NT, you owe them another bid. 2NT is the exception because that bid describes their hand very precisely; 22-24HCP, balanced. That precision makes responder captain, and

Bd: 2	♠ A7543	Optimum
Vul: N/S	♥ J	EW 3N+2: -460
Dlr: East	♦ 862	
	♣ 9763	
♠ QT	N	♠ K98
♥ A5	W 2 E	♥ QT862
♦ AQ7	S	♦ T943
♣ AKQJ54		♣ 8
5	♠ J62	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
22 HCP 5	♥ K9743	N - - - -
8	♦ KJ5	S - - - -
	♣ T2	E 5 5 3 3 5
		W 5 5 3 3 5

with a flat bust hand, they may pass. But if the 2C bidder doesn't have a NT hand, they can't be expected to name the exact best final contract at their next call. So, while you don't like their 3C bid, you can't pass; tell them something else about your hand, and help steer them towards the right final contract. Here you have a heart suit; a 3H call shows a 5-card suit that wasn't strong enough to show as a direct response to 2C - Perfect!

As for the two North-South pairs who decided to get involved in this auction: what were they thinking? You're vulnerable; 2H or 2S on this hand, would have cost you 1100 points if you were left to play there doubled. That's not worth even thinking about when your opponents are heading for a 400 - 490 point game.

I'm going to spend a bit of time discussing legalities here. I see quite a few bids which should be alerted, and which aren't. On **board 11** alone, these included:

Overcalls of 1NT openers: If you are showing two suits, or if you are promising a suit which is not the one you are naming - alert and explain.

"Stolen bid" doubles: When you double their overcall, if it's not for penalty, it's alertable.

Bd: 11 Vul: None Dir: South	♠ AKT5 ♥ A864 ♦ AQ2 ♣ 85	Optimum EW 5Hx: +300
♠ Q743 ♥ JT53 ♦ K4 ♣ 942	N W 11 E S	♠ -- ♥ KQ972 ♦ T76 ♣ AKQT6
17 6 HCP 14 3	♠ J9862 ♥ -- ♦ J9853 ♣ J73	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N - 5 - 4 - S - 4 - 4 - E 2 - 3 - - W 1 - 3 - -

Transfer bids: Whether or not there is interference, they must be alerted

There is one small difference regarding some alerts, in the online game vs the face to face game. Alerts which are "delayed" in f2f play, must be made simultaneously with the bid in online play. One effect of this is that your responses to your ace/keycard asking bids should be alerted. Not the 4NT or the 4C asking bids, but the responses to them. Write "2A", for example, or "1 or 4 KC". The protocol for live play is to announce after the auction is over "we had an ace-asking auction and my partner showed xx Aces".

The same rules apply to control bids - delayed in f2f play but at the time online.

And, to save some of you some trouble: 1NT overcalls do not need their range announced - only opening bids.

There is another small legal issue to mention. There is a minimum requirement for an opening bid, which is that it shows at least "near-average" strength, and if you open hands with less than this, you can find yourself in trouble. If you and your partner have decided to adopt a very aggressive style, please read the convention charts so you know what the limits are. And if you routinely open hands at the legal minimum level, your card should be marked appropriately - there is a box to tick for "very light" openings. But that's all I'm going to say, because I think it's a very bad idea to push the limits of aggressiveness in this way.

Instead, my advice is that you resist the temptation to be a daredevil and instead be a dependable partner at all times. If your opening bids might be very light, how will partner know whether to push to game with their opening hand? If your overcalls are often four cards, can partner raise you with three small? If you open NT with a point-count that's not in your agreed range, how does partner know to try for game? Partnership bidding is much more successful and enjoyable if you know your partner has what they say they have. ♠