

WEAK NOTRUMP - FOURTH SEAT ONLY

With a marginal fourth seat opening such as ♠93 ♥AJ76 ♦Q103 ♣KJ87 in a matchpoint game, you figure that your side is a slight favorite to make a plus score if you can stop at a low level. If you open 1♣, however, you could be in trouble if partner jumps to 2NT. Or suppose someone bids spades. If it's partner, you must either pass or rebid 1NT. If you pass, she may have only four spades. If you rebid 1NT, she may raise. If either opponent bids spades, you may get outbid. Finally, if you open a standard weak notrump (12-14 HCP) partner may try for game. What to do? In deciding, consider the following:

- 1) Game chances are practically nil.
- 2) Neither opponent could open, even in third seat, so their hands (and suits) are limited.
- 3) In view of 2), partner is unlikely to have a bad hand.
- 4) A 1NT opening prevents a one-level overcall.
- 5) The danger of being outbid is lessened if fourth hand has four spades.
- 6) The main goal with a marginal hand in this position is to get a plus score of any sort, not to achieve the optimum result.
- 7) You do not want to get as high as 2NT or three of a suit with such hands.

Putting all these considerations together leads to the idea that a 1NT opening in fourth seat should be treated differently from other positions. The following describes such an approach:

At matchpoint scoring only, a fourth seat opening 1NT bid shows 11-13 HCP, balanced. It tends to deny a spade suit, with which a suit opening is preferable. With the highest ranking suit there is less need for a preemptive 1NT opening that risks shutting out your own major. With four very weak spades in a 4-3-3-3 hand, the 1NT opening is acceptable.

Game will rarely be reached voluntarily--the 1NT opening gives up on game unless partner has passed an unusual hand.

Responses

No Stayman, no transfers. Any two-level response is a signoff, but 2♣ or 2♦ (Alertable) shows hearts too (unless you're prepared to bid again if opener bids 2♥). With spades and a minor you pass 1NT, since opener is not supposed to have spades. Be quicker to bid 2♥ with five hearts than to bid 2♠ with five spades--opener will sometimes have four hearts. A 2NT response is unusual, even in competition, asking for opener's longer minor. With equal length, opener bids 3♣.

When There is Competition

If the opponents come in, opener cannot count on a minor suit responder to have four hearts:

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	Pass	1NT
Pass	2♦	2♠	?

East should not bid 3♥ over 2♠ when he has four hearts, for West may not have a heart suit. A solution for this is to have East bid 2NT, an impossible bid, when he has both four hearts and good support for partner's minor. West can't do the same if 2♠ comes around, because a 2NT reopening would show six diamonds and four clubs.

Negative doubles apply in all situations in which the 1NT bidder's partner has not yet bid or doubled, even in a balancing situation--except that the 1NT bidder can double his right hand opponent for business:

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	Pass	1NT
2♣	Pass	Pass	Dbl - takeout

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	Pass	1NT
Pass	Pass	2♣	Dbl - penalty

But if 2♣ is passed around to West, a double would be for takeout

After any kind of double--penalty, negative, takeout--any further double by either partner is for business:

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	Pass	1NT
2♣	Dbl	2♠	Pass
Pass	Dbl - penalty		

After the opening side has bid a suit, any double is for business:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♣	2♦
Pass	Pass	Dbl - penalty	

The use of negative doubles in most situations can cause an occasional large penalty to be missed. When either partner has length in the opposing suit, he must usually pass--even in a reopening situation, when a pass closes the auction. The main goal, however, is to get a plus score. Even if they go down undoubled, the goal has been met.

When opener has shortness in the opposing suit, he must make a takeout double in the pass-out position. Suppose you have ♠32 ♥AJ97 ♦K103 ♣K974 and open a fourth seat 1NT. If LHO overcalls 2♥ and this comes around to you, just pass. A double would be for takeout, and you will probably beat the pairs who pass the hand out. If a 2♠ overcall comes around, you double for takeout. Partner may have enough in spades to pass.

If the opponents overcall conventionally (e.g., Brozel, Astro), the usual countermeasures apply. See section 5-3, When the Opponents Intervene vs 1NT, and section 12-7, Defense Against Two-Suited Conventions.

If You Don't Open 1NT

After opening one of a suit in fourth seat, a 1NT rebid shows 14-16 HCP; a jump rebid of 2NT shows 17-18 HCP, and a 3NT rebid shows 19 HCP or more. The jump notrump rebids can be weaker than usual because responder is unlikely to have a bad hand when the opponents are doing so much passing.

A *non-jump* 2NT or 3NT rebid is standard:

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♥
Pass	2♣	Pass	2NT shows 15-16 HCP, the standard bid

Opening one of a suit does **not** promise 14 HCP or more--opener may have a weak hand that is unsuitable for a notrump opening, or may have a spade suit. Only when he rebids notrump or makes some other strong call does he show a good hand.