

Help! My 1NT Overcall Just Got Doubled for Penalty

There isn't much more of a sinking feeling in the game of bridge than when your 1NT overcall gets doubled for penalty. You know two things for certain: (1) your partner has a bad hand, and (2) you are going to get massacred. It is at this time that you wished that you had a handy escape mechanism - one that you had discussed with your partner...

The following solution has been suggested to me by Shannon Cappelletti of Delray Beach, Florida. It is flexible, yet simple to use, and can help to mitigate a very bad situation. For those of you that play DONT over opponents' opening notrumps, the treatment will be quite familiar.

Suppose the bidding has proceeded:

	Partner		You
(1♠)	1NT	(Double)	?

and you hold:

♠ 5 2
♥ 9 7 5 2
♦ 8 7 4 3
♣ T 9 2

Clearly, if you can find as much as a 4-3 fit in one of the red suits, it will play better than 1NT. And it has the advantage that, although it may still be doubled, defending may now be less attractive to opponents, especially now that they cannot run a long suit, and you are still at the two-level. So our objective is to find a safe(r) landing place.

There are three "paths" out of the fire:

- 1) An immediate bid indicates the bid suit and another, higher-ranking suit. A partner tolerant of this suit (three card support)

passes. A partner intolerant of this suit bids the next higher suit and you can "correct" to your other suit.

2) An immediate redouble indicates a single-suited hand. Partner MUST bid 2♣; you now pass or correct to your suit.

3) A pass indicates no particular preference. Partner should initiate the escape sequence, using a redouble to indicate a single-suit (usually, but not always, five cards), and a suit bid to suggest a choice of two suits (usually, but not always, four cards each).

Note that the notrump overcaller normally does not hold two doubletons, so the assumption is made that partner has a tolerance for one of your two suits.

Let's look at some extended sequences:

1)		Partner		You
	1♠	1NT	Double	2♦ ^a
	Pass	2♥ ^b	Pass	Pass ^c
	?			

^aDiamonds and a higher suit

^bI do not have three diamonds

^cHearts is my second suit

2)		Partner		You
	1♣	1NT	Double	2♦ ^a
	Pass	2♥ ^b	Pass	2♠ ^c
	?			

^aDiamonds and a higher suit

^bI do not have three diamonds

^cSpades is my second suit

3)		Partner		You
	1♠	1NT	Double	Redouble ^a
	Pass	2♣ ^b	Pass	2♦ ^c
	?			

^aSingle-suited hand

^bI am completing the relay

^cDiamonds is my suit

4)		Partner		You
	1♠	1NT	Double	Redouble ^a
	Pass	2♣ ^b	Pass	Pass ^c
	?			

^aSingle-suited hand

^bI am completing the relay

^cClubs is my suit

5)		Partner		You
	1♠	1NT	Double	Pass ^a
	Pass	2♦ ^b	Pass	Pass ^c
	?			

^aBalanced hand; no preference

^bDiamonds and a higher suit

^cI have tolerance (3+) for diamonds

6)		Partner		You
	1♠	1NT	Double	Pass ^a
	Pass	Redouble ^b	Pass	2♣ ^c
	Pass	2♦ ^d	Pass	Pass
	?			

^aBalanced hand; no preference

^bSingle-suited hand (usually 5 cards)

^cI am completing the relay

^dI have a diamond suit