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This Week in Bridge

(374) Opener's Rebids after a 1NT Semi-Forcing Response

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Level: 5 of 10 (2 of 6)

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General

When we open the bidding with 1-Major and partner responds 1NT Semi-Forcing, we are “highly encouraged” to make a rebid. We can pass this 1NT response with a balanced minimum opener (about 12-13 HCP), because with that hand we are not interested in game and would like to keep the contract as low as possible. This semi-forcing agreement also helps us have better follow-up bidding by making our rebid of a second suit extremely likely to be a 4-card suit.

Passing 1NT Semi-Forcing

The difference in 1NT Forcing and 1NT Semi-Forcing is simple. Opener is allowed to pass 1NT Semi-Forcing with a balanced, minimum opening bid.

Example 1

1♠ 1NT*

___?

Pass with any balanced hand, some 5332 shape (any doubleton), and minimum opening values, 12-13 points.

Example 2

It is possible that with 4-5-2-2 shape and about 12-13 HCP we have a problem rebid and it can be best to simply pass 1NT.

♠ JT84

♥ AJ854

♦ A5

♣ Q4

1♥ 1NT*

___?

It is best to pass with this hand.



Rebidding 2-minor after 1NT Semi-Forcing

Since with a balanced minimum opening hand pass is available as an option, if we choose to rebid something over a 1NT Semi-Forcing response it shows more information about our hand.

When playing 1NT Forcing, Opener's rebid of 2-minor usually only promises a 3+card suit, occasionally only 2 cards in ♣. But when playing 1NT Semi-Forcing, a rebid of 2-minor is more likely to show a "real" second suit – extremely likely to be at least 4 cards in that suit. Knowing that Opener's 2-minor rebid is a real second suit, Responder can better describe their hand by raising Opener, bidding NT, or bidding a new suit.

Still a Small Problem Hand for Opener

As Opener we still have a problem balanced hand: 14 HCP with 5332 distribution. In this one case, we have enough values to accept an invitational bid if partner has one, 10-11 points. Thus, we cannot pass 1NT, and must find another bid to see what partner shows next. This is the case where we as Opener might need to rebid a "short minor" with only 3 cards, but it is a rare situation.

There are other problem rebids for Opener when they start with 1♥ and Responder bids 1NT. If Opener is 4-5-2-2 with 12-13 HCP they can pass 1NT. If they have 4-5-2-2 shape with 14 HCP it is often best to upgrade and open 1NT, so as not to have to rebid a 2-card suit. With 4-5-3/1 then Opener may be forced to rebid a 3-card suit, as they have an unbalanced hand and do not want to pass 1NT.

Other Rebids by Opener

The other rebids, like 2-Major, 2NT, and suits at the 3-level are natural in these auctions. With a 1-suited hand, we place our hand in a bucket and describe it well to partner. With a 2-suited hand, our rebid shows either 12-17 points or 18-21 points. That leaves some ambiguity about our strength.

Example 3

1♠ 1NT*

___?

- 2♣ Usually 4+card ♣, 12-17 points, could still have 6+card ♠
- 2♦ Usually 4+card ♦, 12-17 points, could still have 6+card ♠
- 2♥ 4+card ♥, 12-17 points, could still have 6+card ♠
- 2♠ 6+♠, 12-14 points, usually a 1-suited hand
- 2NT 18-19 points and a balanced hand
- 3♣/♦ 3+card suits, usually 4-card or longer, 18+ points, game forcing
- 3♥ 4+card ♥, 18+ points, game forcing
- 3♠ 6+card ♠ 15-17 points, non-forcing
- 3NT Good hand with lots of tricks; usually long strong ♠



Example 4

1♥ 1NT*

___?

- 2♣ Usually 3+card ♣ (4-5-1-3), 12-17 points, could still have 6+card ♥
- 2♦ Usually 3+card ♦ (4-5-3-1), 12-17 points, could still have 6+card ♥
- 2♥ 6+card ♥, 12-14 points, usually a 1-suited hand
- 2♠ Reverse, 4+card ♠, longer ♥ than ♠, about 17+ points
- 2NT 18-19 points and a balanced hand
- 3♣ 3+card ♣, usually 4+card, 18+ points, game forcing
- 3♦ 3+card ♦, usually 4+card, 18+ points, game forcing
- 3♥ 6+card ♥, 15-17 points, non-forcing
- 3NT Good hand with lots of tricks; usually long strong ♥

Playing 1NT vs. 3-Major

One issue when we pass 1NT Semi-Forcing is that partner may have a 3-card limit raise. But if we were going to pass partner's 3M invite on the next round of bidding, then we can pass 1NT instead. In this case, we end up playing in 1NT when the rest of the field is in 3-Major. This is not a problem, it is blessing! Frequently, we will go plus in 1NT when the rest of the pairs go down in 3-Major. Also, we may take the same number of tricks and actually score better because we are in notrump. Yes, occasionally we will get a bad result, but more often than not we will get a great board when partner's hand was a 3-card limit raise.

Conclusion

After partner makes a 1NT Semi-Forcing response we have a variety of bidding options for describing our hand - everything from pass to a strong jump shift. One issue that we have with our rebids is placing our hand into a bucket. With 1-suiters or balanced hands, our rebid does the trick. But with a 2-suited hand we still have some work to do. Make sure that you and partner have good agreements about the meaning of your rebids!