

Opening 1-NT With a 5-Card Major

Until recently, Bridge Players were reluctant to open **1-NT** when holding a 5-card Major; i.e., a hand with a **(5-3-3-2)** distribution. Today, however, to do so is not uncommon, for doing so holds several advantages, and, as an aside, not necessarily a resultant difficulty in having originally concealed one's 5-card Major, especially if, and when, the Partnership utilizes "**Puppet Stayman**," in lieu of "**Regular Stayman**."

The Potential Problems Inherent in *Not* Doing So

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If you were to have opened with **1H**, here, holding 5-Hearts and 16 HCP's, Partner is likely to respond **1S**. Partner's mention of a new suit forces you to re-bid, and therein lies the potential problem.

- a. Re-bidding **1-NT** would show 12-14 HCP's
- b. Re-bidding **2-NT** would show 18-19 HCP's
- c. Re-bidding **2C** or **2D** would show a 4- or 5-piece Minor suit
- d. Re-bidding **2H** would show 6 or more Hearts

(All of the afore-mentioned are incorrect and would be misleading to Partner!)

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Opening **1S**, here, holds a different set of potential problems.

a. If Partner were to respond **1-NT** and the Partnership were *not* playing a "**Forcing 1-NT**," bidding system, and Opener, were to "**Pass**," it makes the weaker hand the Declarer, the stronger hand exposed to the Opponents, and the opening lead coming through the stronger hand.

b. Alternatively, if Opener were to re-bid an invitational **2-NT**, and if Responder were at the bottom of his/her 6-10 HCP count, the contract might, potentially, be un-makeable.

The Advantages of Opening 1-NT with a 5-Card Major Suit

1. Opening **1-NT** (15-17 HCP's) with one 5-card Major can have an effect in potentially keeping the bidding with Partner at a lower level. Had you opened **1H** or **1S**, and Partner were to have responded **1-NT**, Opener would re-bid **2-NT** inviting Partner to a **3-NT** final contract, seeking whether or not Partner were at the top of his/her **1-NT** response, (9-10 HCP's). Alternatively, had one opened **1-NT**, Partner would have "**Passed**" with a weaker holding of 6-8 HCP's. In the latter instance where **1-NT** was the opening call, two distinct benefits occur:

- a. The Partnership would be committed to a **1-NT** (7-trick obligation) instead of a final **2-NT** (8-trick) commitment.
- b. The stronger hand remains concealed as the Declarer.

2. Opening **1-NT** with a concealed 5-card Major suit discloses less information to the Opponents. Had one opened **1H** or **1S**, and reached a final contract of **3-NT**, the Opponent on lead is not likely to lead your Major suit. Not having previously mentioned it, however, the Opponent on lead might be tempted to lead an un-bid Major suit, possibly, beneficially, yours.

3. Opening **1-NT** allows for transfers to be utilized by Opener's responding Partner. Had one opened **1S**, for example, and Partner were to hold a weak 5 (+) card Heart holding, he/she would have "*Passed.*" Under this latter condition, the Partnership is likely to be in a far-better contract of **2H**, or even **3H** should Opener have made a "**Super Acceptance**" of the transfer.

4. Even when Responder holds game-values (11 {+}), having the stronger hand as the Declarer holds an advantage for the declaring team.

5. An opening bid of **1-NT** gives an immediate 3-point spread of the strength of Opener's hand which might, under some borderline circumstances, lead to a game which might, otherwise, have been missed.

6. Opening **1-NT** eliminates the potential problem by simplifying Opener's re-bid difficulty, especially if he/she had opened **1H** or **1S**, where any potential re-bid by Opener might have been awkward, especially had Opener's **1-NT** holding been, specifically, with 15 HCP's.

7. Opening **1-NT** makes it more difficult for the Opponent's to compete in that they are forced to enter the auction at the 2-level, whereas, had the Opener opened **1H**, a **1S** overcall becomes facilitated. Furthermore, opening **1-NT** eliminates Opener's left-hand Opponent (LHO) from overcalling **2C** or **2D**, with a single 5-card suit, since such overcalls, oft times, used artificially by Conventions such as that of "**Cappelletti**," or "**DONT**," in order to show specific, conventional holdings.

8. Even when a 8-card, Major suit, "**Golden Fit**" exists, a final **3-NT** contract might be the better and safer contract. In **3-NT**, a ruff by the opposition can be avoided. In addition, a **(5-3-3-2)** distributional pattern, opposite a **(4-3-3-3)** pattern, often makes the same number of tricks in No-Trump as it would have generated in the Major suit game, even if the trump fit is 5-3 or 5-4, or, possibly, even with a 6-4 Major suit fit.

9. Lastly, a further benefit of a **3-NT** contract vs. a four-of-either-Major suit contract is that strong Players will infrequently lead away from an Ace against a suit contract, but they are likely to do so when leading 4th best against a No-Trump contract, and having done the latter, could enable an extra trick for the declaring team.

The Disadvantages of Opening 1-NT with a 5-Card Major Suit

1. Opening **1-NT**, when holding a 5-card Major suit, can have the negative impact such that, should the opening team wind up on defense, and Opener's Partner were to be on lead, the leader to trick #1 holds less information as to which suit beat to select.
2. After an auction of **1H – 1S – 2H – 2S**, if Opener "*Passes*," the Opponents, if holding 9-trump pieces within the Partnership are likely to re-enter the auction with a **3H** call, thereby either stealing the contract, else forcing you to consider a possible **3S** re-bid.
3. In some instances, had Opener opened either **1H** or **1S**, Responder, in some Partnerships, might have made a pre-emptive call of **3H** or **3S**, if holding 3-5 HCP's and 4-pieces of Opener's Major suit. Doing so might preclude the Opponents from entering the auction.
4. Unless the Partnership is playing "**Puppet Stayman**," a potential 5-3 Major suit "**Golden Fit**" may remain undiscovered.

Summary

As is the case with almost any subject in Bridge, few course of action are always good or bad, statistically effective or non-effective. The decision as to use one method or the other is strictly a matter of Partnership agreement and acceptance. In the final analysis, however, there appears to be more advantages in this instance than there are disadvantages.