



Issue 9: 2007 BridgeHands Newsletter

Notrump Bidding Gymnastics

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Welcome to *Bridgehands* eMag Newsletter, Issue 9. In this issue, we will focus on Notrump bidding and responses. You may recall two issues back we discussed captancy and our last issue we covered material from Marty Bergen's new book, "[More Declarer Play the Bergen Way](#)." So let's continue to build our Notrump bidding foundation by practicing our bidding and responses with some Notrump hands.

The **Rule of 7** is our next step progressing up the "Rules of . . ." When playing a Notrump contract with losers in opponents' suit and insufficient quick tricks to guarantee the contract, considering the Rule of 7 is useful to disrupt communications between opponents.

Note: Viewing the hands below requires your EMAIL reader to use "fixed fonts" (not proportional). If you have problems reading this document, please view our [online web-based copy](#) or [Adobe Acrobat PDF file](#) suitable for printing.

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Notrump Gymnastics – Bidding and Responses

On Sunday, January 28, 2007 *BridgeHands* was invited to present an online teaching lesson for over one hundred Bridge Base Online BIL (BridgeBase Beginner/Intermediate Lounge) members. The two hour session covered the following areas which are reprinted here for our *BridgeHands* subscribers. By the way, communications in these sessions are entirely via text messaging and animated card bidding and play. The following is an extract from our recent BIL session.

Welcome, Bridge friends. In today's session we will cover the following areas:

- Notrump shape and strength requirements
- Notrump shape and strength evaluation
- Notrump responder bids and opener/responder rebids
- Some common partnership Notrump agreements and conventions

Opening Notrump is the most descriptive bid in Bridge, showing exacting shape and strength. We will discuss strength in greater detail a bit later, but for now let's assume we open 1 Notrump with 15-17 HCP.

By the way, Bridge teachers and authors love to adjust and modify hand evaluation techniques. For the most part, we will use the "Work" High Card Point (HCP) **4-3-2-1** (Ace-King-Queen-Jack) method.

[Please refer to our hand evaluation methods for more details.](#)

Perhaps you have heard of the term "Captaincy". Essentially, whenever we open in Notrump or rebid Notrump at some level, we are limiting our hands. Thus, the partner of the Notrump bidder is the "captain" and should steer the contract since the partner's hand is not fully defined. Please refer to our [lesson on captaincy](#).

So, let's take a look at the Notrump Prerequisites.

Shape - the basics. I'll be using standard Bridge notation, so **4333** means four cards in the longest suit, and three cards in each remaining suit. If we wanted to express the hand as exactly four Spades and three Hearts, Diamonds, and Clubs, we would show it as **4=3=3=3**

So here are our three balanced hand shapes:

4333
4432
5332

By the way, we normally don't worry about worthless doubletons.

Which hand shape has the highest probability of occurrence?

It's the **4432** shape, a 21.6 percent chance - making it the most common hand shape in Bridge. [Here's the link for hand patterns.](#)

So the **5332** is the second most likely, a 15.5% chance while the super-flat **4333** shape comes in fifth place, a 10.5 percent chance. Now let's take a look at our first hand.

S K Q 3 2
H A K Q 2
D 3 2
C Q 3 2

[xxx] [xxx]

S J 5 4
H 5 4 3
D A Q 4
C J 10 5 4

North's worthless doubleton usually is fine. Here the bidding would begin:

1N - 2N;
?

A close call for opener. North's cards are working and we love the Heart **A K Q 2** so with everything working, we rebid 3 Notrump.

Then there are the semi-balanced hands that don't have a singleton or void, yet have a more irregular shape than our three balanced hands. A **5422** shape is a classic semi-balanced hand, still fulfilling the criteria of a balanced hand when it contains a primary honor (Ace or King) in the doubleton suits.

S K 2
H A 2
D Q J 9 3
C K Q J 3 2

[xxx] [xxx]

S Q J 4 3
H K 5 4 3
D K 2
C 6 5 4

Our last semi-balanced hand is the **6322** shape. This certainly is a marginally balanced hand! Incidentally, we can safely assume the 6 card suit is Clubs or Diamonds; with a 6 card major suit, we would definitely open in Hearts or Spades. To be considered a balanced hand, we certainly would want some primary honors in the doubleton suits since as declarer we will need to establish tricks in our long suit (ostensibly Notrump).

S K 2
H Q J
D Q J 2
C A Q J 5 4 3

[xxx] [xxx]

S A Q 5 4 3
H K 3 2
D 5 4 3
C 7 6

North holds a poor 16 High Card Point hand with 2 distribution points - many of us would find it difficult to open 1 Notrump with this hand, although with an objective scrutiny we can see the hand is indeed semi-balanced. As always, before making a bid we should be prepared to make a descriptive rebid based on various responses from partner and overcalls from the opponents. Assuming North opened 1 Notrump, the bidding might proceed:

1N - 2H; 2H mandates partner "transfer" to Spades (Jacoby)
2S - 3N; Now responder gives opener a choice of games
Pass

1N - 3S; Those not playing Jacoby transfers jump to force game
3N - Pass;

Let's pause for a moment and look at hand evaluation. Incidentally, the following HCP adjustments pertain to the opening bidder; should the responder hold these card combinations when partner holds an opening hand, we do not downgrade our hand.

A K = initially downgrade one point, it's not worth 7 points without a third card in the suit.

K Q = again, downgrade one point without a third card.

K x = full values.

Q x = probably full values.

Q J = downgrade at least one point.

J x = unlikely to produce any tricks.

4441 With a "Kingleton" (singleton King) in a minor suit, some frisky advanced players might be tempted to open 2 Notrump to avoid the classic rebidding problem.

```
S A Q 10 2
H K J 10 2
D A K J 2
C K
```

[xxx] [xxx]

```
S K 5 4 3
H 4 3
D 5 4 3
C Q J 3 2
```

By the way, North's hand comes from Augie Boehm's book "[Private Sessions - a Bridge Education](#)" on page 114. On an upcoming **BridgeHands** audiocast/podcast, we will interview Augie and discuss his new book "Three Notrump in Depth."

And just for the record, opening 1 Notrump with a singleton technically isn't against the laws - as much as your opponents (and perhaps your partner) may not like it! [Here's the link](#) which provides Bridge Directors guidance on this questionable practice. Nonetheless, we do not recommend mortals open 1 Notrump with a singleton King, and never with a singleton in a major suit.

Incidentally, BridgeHands is a big advocate of the term the "[Rule of Anticipation](#)." If our hand is strong, others should be weak and vice-versa. If we have a long suit, partner is usually short in our suit. If we have a very long suit, at least one other player will have a long suit or a two-suited hand. This isn't meant to be a pessimistic attitude, rather a more realistic expectation based on our initial facts at hand. So while most Bridge teachers would shun opening 1N with a singleton, it's not surprising that partner will have length in our short suit.

How about opening 1 Notrump with a 5 card major and 15-17 points? Since this is such a controversial topic, apparently no one method is infinitely superior. Certainly an argument can be made that when opener has a 5 card Heart suit, responder bids 1S, opener is stuck for a rebid since rebidding 1 Notrump shows values beneath 1 Notrump opening values. Rebidding 2 Notrump also distorts our hand, showing 18-19 points. Had we initially opened with 1 Notrump, our rebid would not have been an issue, however we might miss a 5-3 Heart fit. Sigh, life is not always perfect. Does the same problem occur when we hold a 5 card Spade suit? Not really, since opener's rebid is not a problem; should responder bid 1 Notrump or 2 of a suit, our 1 Spade opener has comfortable rebids.

So some will bid 1N with a 5 card Heart suit, provided the suit is not heavy in honors - as always, opener should evaluate for a balanced hand, even if it requires an honor assessment in each suit.

Speaking of honor assessment, how should we evaluate these suit holdings?

```
S  K 3 2
H  A J 10 3 2
D  A 2
C  K J 2
```

[xxx] [xxx]

```
S  A 6 5 4
H  Q 4
D  K 10 5 4 3
C  4 3
```

Primary honors, Aces and Kings, often generate more tricks than secondary honors (Queens and Jacks). Suits headed by Queen and less take more time to promote and develop extra tricks while opponents (who have the benefit of the opening lead) have the first opportunity to establish **their** long suit - perhaps with primary honors. If the declarer is in a notrump contract, the opponents might "win the race." Here North's 16 HCP plus 1 distribution point (5 card working Heart suit with 3 honors) evaluates to 17 points. South's hand evaluates to 9 HCP plus one distribution point for the working 5 card Diamond suit; the primary honor King may help establish the suit when Notrump opener holds an Ace or Queen.

1N - 2C; Stayman, asking for 4 Spades
2D - 3N;

Notice that if North initially opened 1 Heart, South would bid 1 Spade and North would be stuck for a rebid:

1H - 1S;
1N? Too weak, South will Pass assuming North is 12-14 HCP
2N? Too strong, South will assume 18-19 HCP by North
2H? Too weak and no 6 card suit
2S? Too weak and only 3 card Spade support

Now let's take a look at working/non-working honors and the ability to generate tricks through finesses.

K x All honors are working well
A Q 10 x x
K J 10
A x x

A Q x x Honors working together in long suits
K Q x x
Q x
K x x

Q J Hardly anything working
J x x x x
K J x
A K x

A K Everything seems to be wrong, nothing is working here
K x x x x
Q J
Q x x x

Incidentally, it's nice to have "body cards" - intermediates like 10s and 9s.

S K Q 3
H K 9 4
D A 5 4
C A 7 5 2

[xxx] [xxx]

S J 9 5
H J 10 7
D J 10
C K J 10 8 2

North opens 1N and South responds 2N with 5 Clubs (working) and "pushers" (intermediates). With a middle of the road 16, North upgrades and accepts game with primary honors (Aces and Kings)

Of course, honor sequences are always lovely holding:

K Q J x
K Q 10 x
K J 10 x
Q J 10 x
Q J 9 x
Q 10 9 x

And what about length? Is a 5 card suit always worth an extra length point?

While there isn't a simple answer when playing a Notrump contract, if the suit is indeed promotable, consider adding an extra point. Here are a few examples:

A K x x x = a great holding to run the suit, especially if responder holds the Queen.

A Q J x x, **A Q 10 x x**, or **A J 10 x x** = also very nice holding (repeated finesse opportunity).

K J x x x = okay, especially if responder holds the Ace or Queen.

A x x x x = not likely to promote unless partner holds 2 honors.

Q x x x x = probably no chance to promote the suit, initially forget length points.

Another question, what about an honor rich suit as **A K Q J**? It's good for four tricks, but no chance to promote extra tricks. It's a shame to have so many points locked in one suit without a chance to develop extra tricks. Even worse, the likelihood that opponents will run their long honor-bound suit is more troublesome.

In our next issue, we will continue our discussion of Notrump bidding.

The Rule of 7 – Disrupt Thy Opponents’ Communication

When playing a Notrump contract with losers in opponents' suit and insufficient quick tricks to guarantee the contract, considering the [Rule of 7](#) is useful to disrupt communications between opponents. Okay, so what is this all about?

The idea is that when the declarer doesn't have sufficient tricks to make a Notrump contract, consideration should be given to tactics which frustrate the opponents' ability to run a long suit before the declarer. This sounds all well and nice, but what are we really saying?

Let's say you have a five card Club suit, needing to take a finesse to make the contract; for this discussion, let's imagine a 3 Notrump game contract. But you are missing either the Ace or King in the long suit opponents have led. Assuming the opponents also have a 5 card suit, you may fall one trick short of making game. If your Club finesse fails, the opponents will take 4 cards in their long suit plus 1 finesse loser yields 5 losers – one too many.

But what if the opponents were unable to run their long suit? Then you would win the race, making your 3 Notrump game. Therein lays the Rule of 7 strategy – the declarer hopes that if the finesse fails, the opponent has no more cards in their partner's suit to run the long suit. To disrupt the opponents' transportation, the declarer does not immediately win the Ace or King stopper in opponents' long suit. So the Rule of 7 provides a guide of how many tricks the declarer should hold-up before winning the trick in their suit. To determine the number of holdbacks before winning the trick, subtract your side's combined cards from 7.

Rule of 7	Combined cards in long suit	Holdback = 7 - combined cards
7	4 (as 3 + 1)	7 - 4 = 3 times
7	5 (as 3 + 2)	7 - 5 = 2 times
7	6 (as 4 + 2)	7 - 6 = once

BridgeHands Back Issues

If you missed a back issue of a ***BridgeHands*** Newcomer-Novice eMag newsletters, here are the links:

[Issue 0 - Finesses](#)

[Issue 1 - Promotions](#)

[Issue 2 - Notrump Leads](#)

[Issue 3 - Leads Against Suit Contract](#)

[Issue 4 - Trump Power](#)

[Issue 5 - Trumps are wild - Part 1](#)

[Issue 6 - Trumps are wild - Part 2](#)

[Issue 7 - Captaincy](#)

[Issue 8 - Orchestrating Notrump Contracts](#)

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Best wishes,

BridgeHands



email: support@bridgehands.com

phone: 707-769-4499

web: <http://www.bridgehands.com>