

Learning Points – Overtricks in a 1 NT Contract

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N Deals
None Vul

♠ 10965
♥ QJ106
♦ AJ4
♣ A8

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June 10, 2008 Tuesday Evening Open Pairs, Ms. Kay Mulford,
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♠ 73		N		♠ KQJ2
♥ K42				♥ A85
♦ Q9732	W	1	E	♦ K102
♣ K102		S		♣ Q95

The Bidding

While North's 1♦ typically promises 4 cards (true 85% of the time) here's where opening 1♦ on 3 cards is right. East's 1NT overcall is a minimum for many methods and right on shape, strength, and texture. South has a close call – whether to bid 2♣ or pass. While pass could be right opposite most minimum hands, South's 5 card ♣ suit is an asset that might enable a cheap escape – and keep EW out of a profitable partial. South's pass is right if South suspects a 4432 minimum in North (three 7 card fits and a 5 card fit). South passes and West must pass - we play systems on over a 1NT overcall. North decided South's pass meant they had no business trying to declare.

♠ A84
♥ 973
♦ 85
♣ J7643

Deep Finesse:
EW 3♦, 2N

North	East	South	West
1♦	1N	Passed Out	
South leads	♣4		

The Play

South led ♣4. South has one entry and needs 2 honors from North in ♣ to make this lead effective. The 1NT overcall made leading ♦ from a small doubleton much less attractive. When partner opens a minor and opponents overcall 1NT, opponents might own the suit as is the case here. When partner opens a major guaranteeing a 5 card suit, leading that major is often right even with the NT overcall to gain tempo and set up the long major suit.

Declarer knew that the ♣9 in hand meant EW had 2 ♣ tricks now, regardless of distribution. Dummy ducked and North played the ♣A (this implies that South holds the ♣J or that North has ♣AJ exactly). Declarer now had 4 winning tricks (2 ♣ and 2 ♥) and needed to find 3 more tricks to make the contract. The obvious choice is ♦. After all, North opened the suit and the interior cards (♦9 and 10) make it more likely we can play ♦ for only one loser.

Since responder has failed to bid counting the hand becomes simpler. South could not have more than 6 HCP and certainly did not have a 5 card major nor a fit for North's ♦. (South would have made some 2 level bid with these assets). Declarer first set out to find the ♠A. Declarer reasoned that the ♠A and the ♦A are likely split between North and South. There was nothing either defender could attack profitably at this point in the hand so discovery in the spade suit (*Who holds the ♠A?*) is free. (Note North could not hold all 3 Aces and the ♥QJ since that would be a 1NT opening, not a 1♦ opening. Discovering the ♥QJ is fool's work. South would likely lead from ♥QJ and did not, so they're either split or with North).

Declarer played the ♠K to South's ♠A. South returned the ♣3 (a current count signal showing 4, meaning that South started with 5 ♣). North won the ♣K to prepare for leading a diamond from the dummy. North followed with the ♣8, strongly suggesting the ♣J is in South. Now there's ample evidence to assume North has ♥QJ, ♦AJ, ♣A or 12 HCP for the opening bid. Declarer leads ♦2 from dummy and confidently finessed the ♦J, setting up 4 winners in the ♦ suit. Declarer took 10 tricks (2♣, 4♦, 2♥, and 2♠) for +180 and 8 Match Points out of 8.

EW Pair	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>
MP	5x	5x		5x		2	x	8	5x	x	3
Score	150	150		150		90	-50	180	150	-50	120

Making 9 tricks in NT was the most frequent result. 2 EW pairs were set 1 trick, and 2 pairs made 1 and 2 NT respectively. I do not like 3NT. We lack both power and shape. 23 HCP with one 8 card fit and 3 6-card fits is not enough. Indeed a heart lead holds us to 8 tricks after a lot of work.

Post Mortem

Opening bid – North's 1♦ is standard. Some like to play a short ♣ (could be as short as 2) and some require partner to have a 5 cards in a major suit response at the 1 level (making the 1♦ bid promise a 4 card major), but this device has little to recommend it. Modern bidding enables us to find 5-3 fits in the major when partner opens 1♦ or 1♣. (See the many variations of New Minor Forcing or Checkback Stayman, 4th suit forcing. Responder can rebid a 5 card major on a weak hand confident that opener will pass most often in match points). Opening 1♣ with only 2 cards is a distortion for ♣. This helps only 15% of the hands where we don't have 4♦. When partner opens a short ♣, the lead implications if we defend are muddled. Better to imply 4♦ and 3♣ when opening a minor in Standard or 2/1 Game Forcing.

1NT overcall – East's overcall is standard. Strength ranges vary, but 15-18 HCP is fairly common. Be sure to discuss with your partner if your bidding systems are on after a 1 NT overcall. Note that with both 4-card majors (and a 4432 or 4423 shape) a takeout double might be better than a 1NT overcall. Why? If South raises or responds in a new suit the auction is jammed, and West will have a harder time judging whether and how to compete when holding less than game-going hands with a fitting major. Since 27-28 of the HCP are accounted for, West does not rate to have the 10 HCP EW need for game in NT. (Don't fear distorting your hand with a double nor do you have rebid problems should left hand opponent make a call – you can always double again).

Responder's 1st bid - Standard bidding approaches make South's actions clear after East's 1NT Overcall:

- Pass on hands with no offense.
- Double to show 8+ HCP and imply a desire to penalize.
- Raise or bid a new suit to offer a place to play. Suit bids by responder are destructive or preemptive. With most all good hands redouble first.
- 2NT (Rare) a **cue bid** showing a Limit Raise or Better in partner's suit. This is usually a distributional raise since a power raise would double 1st. When vulnerable against non-vulnerable opponents, your game bonus might be bigger than setting their contract!

Opening lead - As the cards lay a ♥ lead offers the defense a tempo. Declarer will find the hand much harder to play as entries to dummy now appear scarce. This will likely limit EW to their 8 tricks for a good NS result in this field.

Finding the ♥ lead is difficult. Consider that North's pass shows a minimum. Then is it reasonable to expect North to have ♣AK, ♣AQ, or ♣KQ? - certainly not with ♣ length, and perhaps not even with as many as 3 ♣ cards. The ♣ lead begins to look as unattractive as a ♦ lead.

Let's return to the possibility that partner holds a 4432 minimum (why South did not bid 2♣). Now a major suit lead seems more promising. How can we decide whether to lead a ♠ or a ♥? Many would choose ♠ where South owns the ♠A. Some would see that the ♠A is an entry that might enable a 2nd ♥ lead for partner's hoped-for tenace and lead a heart. Good Luck!

I'm not sure I would have found the heart lead on this auction, but I would lead a major suit. Often a 1NT overcall implies less interest in the unbid major(s). Since EW never moved toward a major suit contract, either their hands are too weak (not so here), or neither side owns the majors (Bingo!).