

Learning Points – Overcalling Their 1NT opening Bid

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Bidding Level: Basic

When newcomers hear Right Hand Opponent (RHO) open 1NT, there is a temptation to run and hide. 15-17 (or 16-18) HCP sounds like a lot of power. Good Bridge strategy proves that if we have enough distribution we can improve our score by removing the opponents from 1NT and forcing them to find a fit at a slightly higher level. We benefit because: 1) we remove them from the high scoring 7-trick contract 1NT; 2) we interfere with well balanced tools for constructive bidding; and 3) we find a fit at a low level that enables us to survive a potential penalty double, and perhaps even improve our score (and often our defense)!

Mel Colchamiro proposes a way for you to decide when to overcall their 15-17 NT. He calls it his Rule of 8.

Overcall 1NT (15-17) when:

The # of cards in your 2 longest suits **minus** the # of losers (Losing Trick Count) is **2 or more**
-AND-
You have at **least 6 HCP** (in the 2 longer suits).

Use this simple loser count: For every suit 3 or more cards long, count 1 loser for each missing A, K, or Q. Ignore Js and lower cards. Never count more losers than the number of cards held in the suit. A void counts as zero losers. A singleton is 1 loser unless it is the Ace (then zero losers). A doubleton is 2 losers unless it is the Ax or KX (1 loser each) or AK (zero losers). Note Qx or QJ are 2 losers. KQ is one loser.

Your Hand	HCP	Loser Count	#Cards in 2 longest suits	Rule of 8
♠ A96 ♥K42 ♦873 ♣K732	10	2♠+2♥+3♦+2♣ = 9 Losers	7	NO - 7-9 = -2
♠ 96 ♥K42 ♦73 ♣ AK8732	10	2♠+2♥+2♦+1♣ = 7 Losers	9	Yes - 9-7=2 and 10 HCP
♠ AK6 ♥942 ♦KJ3 ♣K732	14	1♠+3♥+2♦+2♣ = 8 Losers	7	NO - 7-8 = -1
♠ AK6 ♥9 ♦KJ432 ♣K732	14	1♠+1♥+2♦+2♣ = 6 Losers	9	Yes - 9-6=3 and 14 HCP
♠ A6 ♥K92 ♦KJ43 ♣K732	14	1♠+2♥+2♦+2♣ = 7 Losers	8	NO - 8-7=1
♠ 62 ♥4 ♦ AQ9873 ♣9732	6	2♠+1♥+1♦+3♣ = 7 Losers	10	Yes - 10-7=3 and 7 HCP
♠ 62 ♥4 ♦ A10987432 ♣97	4	2♠+1♥+2♦+2♣ = 7 Losers	10	NO - 10-7=3 but only 4 HCP. Consider a Preempt.

Observations when overcalling 1NT (15-17):

- In general we need 5-4 in 2 suits or better to overcall. We do NOT need an opening hand. The idea is to disturb the opponents while landing safely ourselves. Having 2 places to play makes this possible.
- 4-4 and 5-3 shapes do not have enough distribution to afford overcalling. Better to pass until you reach the power required for a penalty action. Not all approaches provide a penalty action.
- Why 6 HCP? That represents two winners in the target suits for your side and provides insurance against major losses should opponents double.
- The right 6 HCP are a better overcall than a sound but balanced 14 HCP!
- DO NOT apply this rule to weak 1NT openings (11-14 HCP). These do require stronger hands for overcalls, approaching an opening hand.
- Do not apply this rule to 2N openings.