

vulnerable.

A "telling" hand, North and East are at the wheel. Two passes to North who holds:

♠ Q52
♥ QJ10
♦ AQ
♣ KQ863

What's the problem? Balanced hands with 16 points open 1NT¹. But four Norths opened 1♣, fittingly their average score was 13%.

All balanced and almost balanced hands with 15-17 points are best opened 1NT. Opening 1NT gives partner a good description of your hand and makes it difficult for the opponents to disrupt you. Less experienced players are intimidated by an opponent's 1NT opening and pass far too often. North opens 1NT.

East do you bid over 1NT? ♠ AJ86
♥ A73
♦ K9875
♣ 9

At the club 12 out of 14 Easts passed, their average score was 30%. Two Easts overcalled 2♦, they both scored 87%. Unsurprisingly the Easts who got in and bid over North's 1NT scored well.

To assist in disrupting them out of 1NT there are a number of schemes to enter the auction². I have successfully played ASPRO over their 1NT³ opening where the bids (in agreement with partner) are:

2♣ = ♥s + another suit, at least 5/4 either way
2♦ = ♠s + minor suit, at least 5/4 either way
2NT = ♣s + ♦s, at least 5/4 either way.

If you were playing ASPRO you would bid 2♦ showing spades and a minor suit. Over this partner can bid 2♠ to stop in 2♠ or they can bid 2♥ (the step) to ask you to bid your five card suit. Or they can bid 3♣ (pass or correct) to play in your minor suit.

Summary:

Get in and bid over their 1NT opening with unbalanced hands; disturb their 1NT.

There have been many conventions developed over the years to compete over opposing 1NT opening bids. The system described previously is just one and some of the more common are **Landy**, **Cappelletti**, and **DONT** (Disturbing Opponents No Trumps).

Two Principles

There are two principles to keep in mind when you think about competing over an opponent's 1NT opening:

1. Penalty doubles of 1NT opening bids are generally a bad idea (for two reasons).
2. Shape beats points.

Let's look at each of these in more detail:

Penalty Doubles

In the olden days, people liked to double a 1NT opening bid when they held a hand of the same value. Here's an example:

Example 1

<p>♠ K Q 7 ♥ A Q 8 7 ♦ K J 4 ♣ Q 8 6</p>	<p>Holding this hand, you might lick your lips and double when an opponent opens 1NT.</p>
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Why is doubling for penalty with this hand a bad idea? It's because you have too much strength concentrated in your hand. Declarer will expect you to hold 15 to 17 points; he will look at the points in his hand and dummy, add your 16 (average), subtract the total from 40, and know immediately what values your partner holds. And usually, your partner won't hold much of anything.

Why does that matter? Because almost every time you take a trick with the above hand, your lead will give at least one trick away. Declarer will almost always make 1NT unless your partner happens to have all the missing points.

The second reason that a penalty double is not such a good idea is that you rarely get a hand that is suitable for it. There are hands that occur more frequently that need a specialized bid, and "double" is a useful one to use.

Shape Beats Points

If you're playing a trump contract, and either your hand or dummy's hand is short in a suit, you can trump some of the opponent's high cards to win tricks. Here's an example:

Example 2

<p>♠ A J 7 4 3 ♥ A Q 8 7 2 ♦ 8 ♣ 8 6</p>	<p>Assume an opponent opens 1NT when you hold this hand. If you get to play in a major suit, the opponents will win three tricks in the minor suits. Assume they have all the high cards in those suits: they've used 20 points to take three tricks. Not a great return. Give your partner the ♠K and ♥K, and you can likely win ten tricks. Not bad for 17 combined points. You have 3 fewer points, and took 7 more tricks.</p>
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This doesn't mean you can compete on hands with absolutely no high card points at all. There are several factors to consider when deciding whether to compete or not:

- **Your partnership's tolerance for risk.** This is the most important factor. The more risk you and your partner are willing to take, the fewer high card points you need to interfere over an opponent's 1NT opening.
- **Vulnerability.** Be more cautious when your side is vulnerable, especially when the opponents are not vulnerable.
- **High card location.** You try to compete whenever you have one or two long suits. Your high cards should be in these long suits. If your high cards are in your short suits, you should be much less inclined to compete.

As a very rough guide, consider a minimum of 8 high card points when not vulnerable, and 11 when vulnerable. Once you gain more experience in competing over 1NT opening bids, you can judge whether you and your partner want to reduce (or maybe increase) these requirements. Remember: partnership agreement is most important.

When To Compete

Applying these principles, we can see that there are two types of hands which should compete over an opponent's 1NT opening bid. They are:

1 Hands with one long suit.

2 Hands with a choice of suits.

These are the hands like Example 2: you would like to compete in either spades or hearts if partner can cooperate.

Conclusion

Interfering with an opponent's 1NT opening is one of the best ways to get a good result. Many of your opponents will be uncertain as to how to continue their auction, whether to double you, or whether a double is for penalty or takeout.

Do not squander your tactical advantage by continuing to bid. Settle for a contract at the two level. If the opponents continue bidding, let them. Quite often they will have a misunderstanding and will end up in a poor contract.

Sometimes, you will get a bad result (partner has a bad hand with no fit for any of your suits, and the opponents pass or double for penalty). That's life. The number of good results you get will more than make up for the occasional bad one. Just be sure your partner understands this as well!