



Respond Often Non-vulnerable

by David Gold

WE all learn that if partner opens one of a suit we must respond with 6 points and pass with fewer. I agree that one must respond with 6 points, otherwise a game may routinely be missed. However, there are many reasons to respond on some hands with fewer than 6 points.

For example, playing match-pointed pairs at Love All, you hold:

♠ A 10 9 3 2
♥ 8 7 6 5
♦ 6 4 2
♣ 2

Partner opens 1♣ and your right-hand opponent (RHO) passes. Holding only 4 points should you pass? Absolutely not! Responding 1♠ has so many ways to be good for your side.

1. It makes it harder for the opponents to enter the bidding – it may well be their hand.
2. It may improve the contract.
3. You may even reach a making 4♠ (or 4♥ facing a club/heart reverse). Partner might easily hold, say:

♠ K Q 5 4
♥ A 3
♦ A 7
♣ A 9 8 6 4

Only 17 points and no singleton but an excellent 4♠, and of course partner may hold more! Yes, partner may rebid 2NT but perhaps that is a better spot than 1♠. If partner rebids 3♣ – OK, you apologise, but responding 1♠ is a long-term winning approach and even 3♣ one off may be a save against a red-suit contract for the opponents.

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Now let's look at a less obvious example.

Playing teams, non-vulnerable against vulnerable opponents, partner opens 1♠ and RHO passes.

You hold the following measly collection:

♠ Q 2
♥ 10 7 6 5 3
♦ 8 2
♣ 7 6 5 2

Surely an obvious pass, you think? I would, however, respond 1NT, which I am sure you think is crazy, but here is why.

Opponents are quite likely to have a game on, perhaps 3NT if partner is minimum. If you pass, it will be trivial for them to reach it; however, 1NT makes it very hard – perhaps the points are split and the next player is unsuitable for a double but if you pass he would have an easy 1NT bid.

What is the downside of responding 1NT? Well partner may raise to 2NT; OK, so you pass and go off in 50s, but who cares? 1♠ was probably failing anyway. Partner bids 3NT? Nowadays that usually shows running spades, so partner is unlikely to bid that. Partner bids 3♣ game forcing? Well, you pass! Maybe it's a better spot than 1♠. Partner bids 3♥? You try 4♥. Partner bids 3♦? OK, not great; you pass or bid 3♠ and pray, with an apology ready. The point is that 1NT has many more ways to win than lose and it retains the initiative that your side has gained as a result of opening the bidding. Essentially you are investing a few cheap undertricks in return for stealing many hands from the opponents.

So in summary:

Respond as often as you can non-vulnerable!

Don't give away the initiative, be a difficult opponent. When vulnerable, a response should deliver 6 points, or close to that with redeeming features. I would respond on the first example hand even if vulnerable since our side may well be able to make four of a major. I would not respond on the second example vulnerable though, since I would not want to be conceding many vulnerable undertricks! □