

Dealing with a 1NT Overcall

Let's start this topic by looking at what may be the worst hand you've ever seen in a bridge lesson:

♠84
♥10852
♦9642
♣J76

Lovely, isn't it? Have you ever opened 1NT and had the auction go pass, pass, pass and had a dummy like this get layed down? It's not a lot of fun to play. You can never get over to dummy to take a finesse and you invariably end up going down, probably by multiple tricks.

Now let's look at a whole hand and think about how an auction might go, West will be our Dealer.

♠K107
♥AJ7
♦QJ85
♣KQ3

♠A6532
♥K4
♦K103
♣A109

♠QJ9
♥Q963
♦A7
♣8542

♠84
♥10852
♦9642
♣J76

I think most everyone would open the West hand with 1♠ and overcalling 1NT with the North hand is completely normal. Now we move the spot light to East - what are they going to do? The action East should take should be very clear and the answer is DOUBLE. When you partner opens and there is a natural 1NT overcall, double is for PENALTY. Depending on how East/West defend this contract will go down two or three tricks so somewhere between +300 and +800. It turns out that East/West can't even make game so +300 is an excellent score. You might be thinking "Well, what if East/West could have made game?". If that's the case, then 1NTx is going down even more so it's still going to score better for E/W.

What about when East doesn't have such a great hand? Let's make a small change to our layout. We're going to take East's ♠Q and ♦A and swap them with South's ♥10 and ♦4.

	♠K107	
	♥AJ7	
	♦QJ85	
	♣KQ3	
♠A6532		♠J9
♥K4		♥Q10963
♦K103		♦74
♣A109		♣8542
	♠Q84	
	♥852	
	♦A962	
	♣J76	

Now East is definitely not good enough to double, North/South can easily make 1NT. What can East do? The answer is that they can bid 2♥. There's an exception to almost every rule in bridge and this is one of them. "New suits by Responder are forcing". Well not only are they not forcing after Opener is overcalled by a natural 1NT, they are a warning to Opener that Responder has a bad hand and it's a strong suggestion to play it

there. To do this, Responder needs at least a 5-card suit and preferably a 6-card suit. Of course, Responder can also raise Openers suit to the 2-level if they have a fit.

With the change we made above, East/West can take 8 tricks in hearts while North/South can make 1NT. Even if East/West couldn't make their 8 tricks in hearts, it's most likely that it's going to give them a better score than letting their opponents play 1NT and make +90 or +120.