

No Trump Openings

Most of us know to open 1 no trump with 15 to 17 high card points and balanced distribution. It is simple. However, there is sometimes more to it.

Balanced Distribution: By balanced distribution, we mean a hand with

- No void
- No singleton, and
- At most 1 doubleton.

There are three possible balanced distributions:

- 4-3-3-3
- 4-4-3-2, and
- 5-3-3-2

In some cases, no trump openings can be made with 5-4-2-2 distribution. Under ACBL rules, it is illegal to have an agreement that allows no trump openings with a singleton or void.

Strength of Hands: Opening balanced hands with the following point counts:

- 12-14 HCP Open 1 of a suit, rebid 1 NT
- 15-17 HCP Open 1 NT
- 18-19 HCP Open 1 of a suit, rebid 2NT
- 20-21 HCP Open 2 NT
- 22-24 HCP Open 2 Clubs, rebid 2 NT
- 25-27 HCP Open 2 Clubs, rebid 3 NT
- 28-37 HCP You accidentally picked up a Pinochle deck.

Some people will open 1 NT with other point ranges such as:

- 12-14 Weak NT
- 14-16 Some players
- 16-18 Goren Standard American

These are all legitimate openings (note the 3 point range) but I will not talk about them today/

Stoppers: An opening bid of 1 NT does not promise stoppers in all 4 suits. You can open 1 NT with one suit unstopped. Open 1 NT with the following hand:

S K Q 8 6
H 8 3
D A Q 4 3
C A J 7

If 2 suits are not stopped, open one of a suit.

If your hand meets the strength and distribution requirements, it is much better to open 1 no trump rather than something else. Why:

- It paints a thorough picture of your hand
- Partner knows the strength of your hand within 2 points
- It makes it more difficult for the opponents to compete
- It solves a lot of rebidding problems.

Generally, you should open 1 NT with a 5 card minor if you can: Open 1 NT with the following hands:

S K J 3	S K 2	or	S A Q
H A 9 6	H A J		H K 7 3
D A Q J 10 4	D A 10 7 5		D A K
C 8 3	C K 10 9 4 2		C 9 7 6 5 4 2

But open 1 diamond with the following hand:

S J 6
H J 8 6
D A K J 7 3
C K Q 9

Generally, I don't open 1 NT with a 6 card minor. But the hand above is described better with 1NT than 1 club.

Opening 1 NT with a 5 card major: This is more a matter of style and partnership agreement. Some players often open 1 NT with a 5 card major. Others rarely do.

There are two considerations when deciding whether to open 1 NT or 1 of a major with a 5 card suit. Strength of suit and Ease of Bidding.

Suppose you hold the following hand:

S 8 7 3
H K J 8 6 5
D A Q 10
C A Q

If you open 1 Heart and partner bids 1 Spade, you are stuck for a rebid. You are too strong for 1 NT and not strong enough for 2 NT. Your suits are not good enough for a 2 Diamond or 2 Spade rebid. Your heart suit is not very strong. It is better to open this hand 1 NT.

However, with the following hands, you can open 1 Heart:

S A 3	S A J 6
H K 9 8 7 4	H K Q J 8 7
D K 4	D 9 2
C K Q 5 2	C K Q 9

With the first hand you have a convenient rebid over 1 spade or 1 NT. In the second hand, you have a worthless doubleton. Although you can open 1 NT with a worthless doubleton, it is not a good idea to do this with a 5 card major. Your hearts are good and you can rebid 2 hearts over 1 spade.

Opening 2 NT

- With 20 – 21 HCP, you should make every effort to open 2NT
- Ideally, all 4 suits should be stopped
- If one suit is not stopped (no worse than Q x or 3 small) open 2 NT
- Often open 2 NT with a 5 card major.

With the following hands, open 2 NT:

S Q 8	S A K 5 4 3
H A K 8 4	H K J 7
D A K Q 5	D A Q
C Q J 5	C K 10 8

1 NT Overcalls

A 1 NT overcall shows:

- 15 – 18 HCP in direct position
- 11 – 14 HCP in reopening position
- A stopper in the opener's bid suit

With 15 – 18 HCP in reopening position, Double and then bid NT.

Remember this hand:

S K Q 8 6
H 8 3
D A Q 4 3
C A J 7

Over a 1 spade opening bid 1 NT. Over 1 heart, make a take out double.