

The 1NT Overcall Verses the Take-Out X Overcall?

By Neil H. Timm

The new Open Convention Chart (April 15, 2024 – available on the Villages Duplicate Bridge Club Web site by first clicking on the Education Link and then on Other Educational Links) states that a 1NT **direct overcall** bid requires a strong hand with at least 15HCP or at least 14HCP and meets the “Rule of 24”, or at least 5 control points. **Not meeting at least one of these requires an alert=*** for the 1NT overcall is required.

The Chart also restricts a direct **take-out X of a bid**; it must show a hand with at least “Near-Average Strength”, or the Rule of 19; about 8HCP.

While the strong 1NT overcall bid is restricted, the overcall take-out X is undefined, except for the minimum 8HCP requirement, and has no maximum strength limit e.g., it may be a power double with 15/16+HCP and need not be alerted!

The probability of having a balanced hand with 15-17HCP occurs only about 5% of the time, while the probability of having any hand with 8-12HCP more than six times more frequent or about 45%.

With this information are there better uses for the two bids: the 1NT and the take-out X overcalls bids playing either Precision or 2/1? Yes!

Playing 2/1

A simple scheme playing 2/1 is to interchange the meaning of the X and 1NT bids when the opponents bid 1m (1♣/1♦).

The bid of 1NT*=take-out with 11-14HCP and at least 3-cards in the unbid suits and X=15+HCP (as if partner had opened 1NT=15-17 and no alert is required – a power X) with all systems ON/OFF and includes Lebensohl by agreement

This agreement forces the opponents to the 2-level when bidding over 1NT* but allows the opponents to compete freely over the strong X. Partner knows you have a big hand for his/her X and if the opponents bid to the 3-level partner may X for penalty.

Over 1M (1♥/1♠), the X=11-14 HCP and is negative to show the other major and 1NT=15-17HCP, playing strong notrump bids with systems ON/OFF by agreement.

Note: In Sweden and Poland over a 1m/1M bid they play 1NT* to show a 4-card major and a 5-card minor called the Raptor Convention (published in a Toronto magazine in 1993 under the acronym "wRAP around TORonto") which occurs more often than a strong 1NT=15-17 bid.

Playing Precision

Over the bid of 1♣ define the overcall X=16+HCP with partner's responses to the power X with no interferences as if partner opened a strong club. The agreed responses to the overcall double are made and alerted as necessary following your partnership agreements, e.g., 1♦*=0-7.

With overcalls defined as 8+HCP or perhaps 10-15HCP, one may use the bid of 1NT* as a take-out bid over 1♣ or a hand with at least 3-cards in the unbid suits with club shortness.

What is one to do over the bids of 1♦ or 1M. For the bid of a major the X may be a negative take-out bid with 8/10-15HCP and 1NT may be 14-16HCP. However, some may use transfer bids over 1♥ and the negative X over 1♠.

What about your overcall bid over 1♦? Most play natural bids showing a 5-card suit with 1NT as 14-16HCP. Of course, there are other agreements playing Precision.

For example, as in 2/1 the bid of 1NT* may again be a take-out bid where the X shows a hand with 15/16+HCP where the responses follow those you use for responding to 1NT with systems ON/OFF.