

No Trump Bidding Ladder

No Trump bids are very useful because they show a number of things in a single bid:

- ♠ A balanced hand
- ♥ A very narrow point range
- ♦ A bid that limits your hand
- ♣ After Opener's No Trump bid, **the Responder is Captain.**

What is a balanced hand:

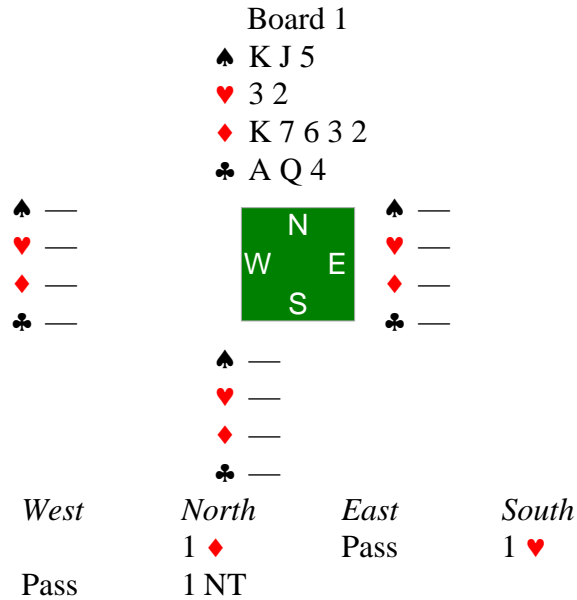
- ♠ No void or singleton. At most, 1 doubleton.
- ♥ 5-3-3-2, 4-4-3-2, or 4-3-3-3 shape
- ♦ ACBL allows 1 NT opening bid to contain one singleton (it must be A, K, or Q) and may not contain a doubleton. For example, 5-4-3-1 or 6-3-3-1.
- ♣ On some occasions, you might considering opening a hand with two doubletons with a NT bid.

The No Trump Bidding Ladder addresses how to bid balanced hands with a variety of point ranges. This is a Standard American approach using a 1 NT range of 15-17 HCPs. There are other systems that are common (such as a weak No Trump), but they are mainly used by more advanced players. The No Trump Bidding Ladder is important to newer players. It gives them a good starting guideline to figure out how high to bid- part score, game, or slam. When players deviate from this approach, their partnership may fail to reach a biddable game or overbid a contract, both of which can give a poor score for the board.

Note: Hands based on training material from Ron Kral. Lesson based on training material from Debbie Hoveland.

No Trump Bidding Ladder

Opener Bid	Responder Bid	Opener's Rebid	Opener's Meaning	Notes
1 ♣/1 ♦/1 ♥	1 ♦/1 ♥/1 ♠	1 NT	12-14 HCPs	
1 NT			15-17 HCPs	Systems on (Stayman, Transfers)
1 ♣/1 ♦/1 ♥	1 ♦/1 ♥/1 ♠	2 NT	18-19 HCPs	
2 NT			20-21 HCPs	Systems on
2 ♣	2 ♦	2 NT	22-24 HCPs	Systems on
2 ♣	2 ♦	3 NT	25-27 HCPs	Systems off (some play transfers on)
2 ♣	2 ♦	4 NT	28+ HCPs	Systems off
3 NT				Advanced- commonly used as gambling NT



With 13 HCPs, North opens 1 ♦. E and W pass in this auction. South is responder and bids 1 ♥. North bids 1 NT to show a balanced hand with 12-14 HCPs.

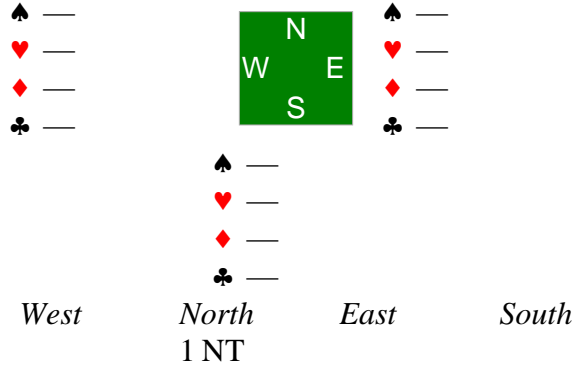
Systems are off. What are systems?

Systems refers to Responder's tools to help determine the strain of the contract. Some of these tools are:

- Stayman
- Jacoby Transfers
- Texas Transfers
- Invite with 2 NT or 4 NT
- Gerber
- Garbage Stayman
- Four suit transfers

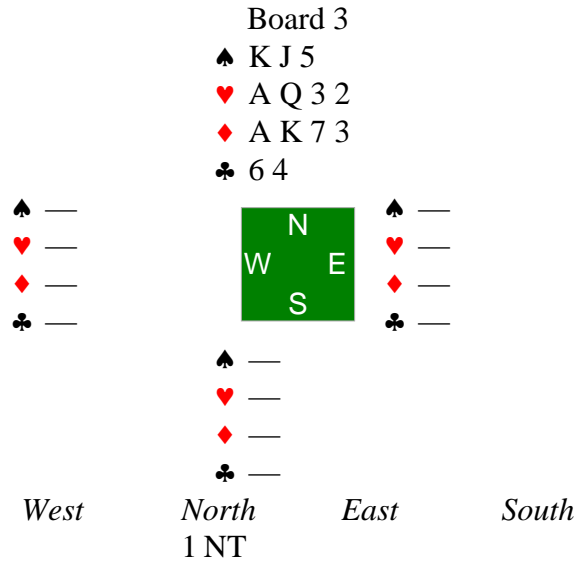
Board 2

♠ K J 5
♥ A 3 2
♦ K 7 6 3
♣ A Q 4



North has a balanced hand with 17 HCPs. Open 1 NT.

Systems are on.

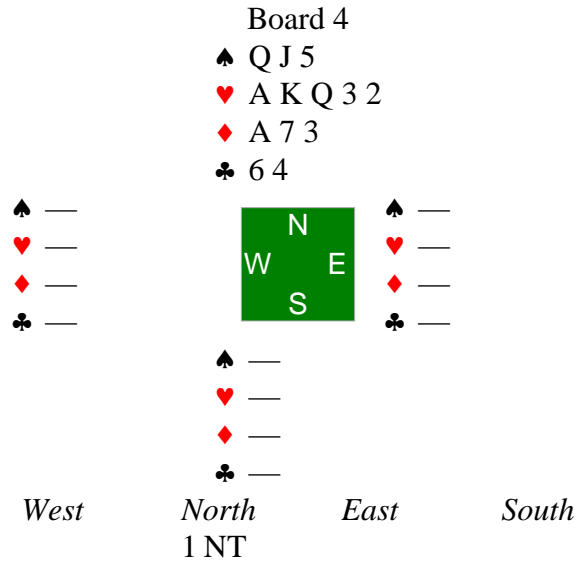


Similar to Board 2, North has a balanced hand with 17 HCPs. Again, open 1 NT. Some players are worried about their "worthless doubleton" in clubs. The guideline is- don't worry about it. Bid the descriptive bid and hope partner will have clubs covered. Depending on partners hand, you may have game (or even slam) in hearts or spades. Give partner a chance to get involved in the bidding.

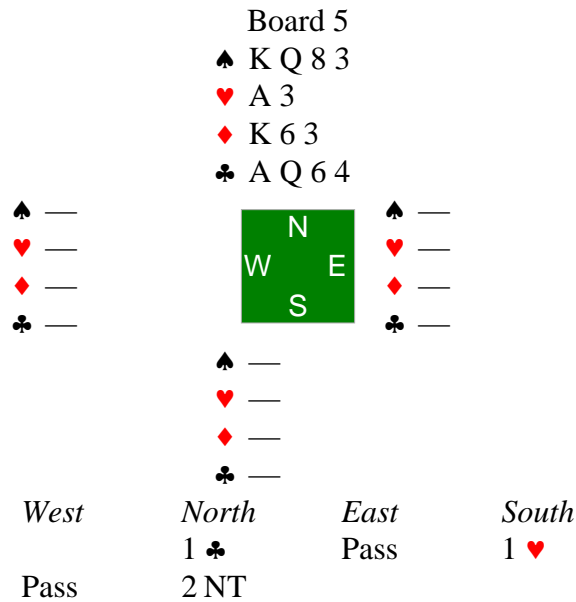
When does a No Trump bid require a stopper in a specific suit?

- If the opponents have bid a suit and your side subsequently makes a No Trump bid, the No Trump bidder is promising a stopper in the opponents' suit.

- If your side has bid three suits, bidding No Trump then promises a stopper in the fourth suit (since that is a likely lead from the opponents).



North has 16 HCPs and a balanced hand. N also has a 5 card major. Do you open the hand 1 ♥ or 1 NT? The guidance here is to open the hand 1 NT. Before you make a bid, think about what your rebid will be. If North opens the hand 1 ♥ and South bids 1 ♠, a rebid of 1 NT undervalues the hand (shows 12-14 HCPs) and a bid of 2 NT overvalues the hand (shows 18-19 HCPs). In most cases, it is poor bridge to rebid a 5 card suit. The best opening bid here is 1 NT.



North has a balanced hand with 18 HCPs and opens the bidding 1 ♣. East and West pass during the auction. South bids 1 ♥. North's next bid should be a jump to 2 NT which shows a balanced hand with 18-19 HCPs. North does not need to mention spades. A jump shift to 2S would show a game forcing hand that is not balanced.

Some players incorrectly open his hand 1 NT. If partner has a balanced 7 HCPs, they will usually pass, and the partnership might miss a game. Be precise in your No Trump bidding.

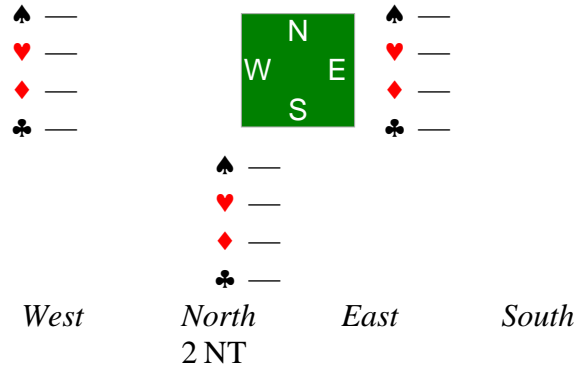
If this were a 19 HCP hand (replace the ♠ 8 with the ♠ J), it would be bid the same way. Some players might incorrectly open the hand 2 NT because it "looks" like a 20 point hand. Partner might go to game with only 3 or 4 HCPs and the contract will be too high. No Trump bidding should be precise, not gambling.

On this auction, if South responds 1 ♠ (showing 4 spades and 6+ points), North should bid 4 ♠ instead of 2 NT. If South uses New Minor Forcing over 2 NT (bidding 3 ♦), North should bid 3 ♠ showing a four card spade suit and denying 3 hearts.

Systems are off.

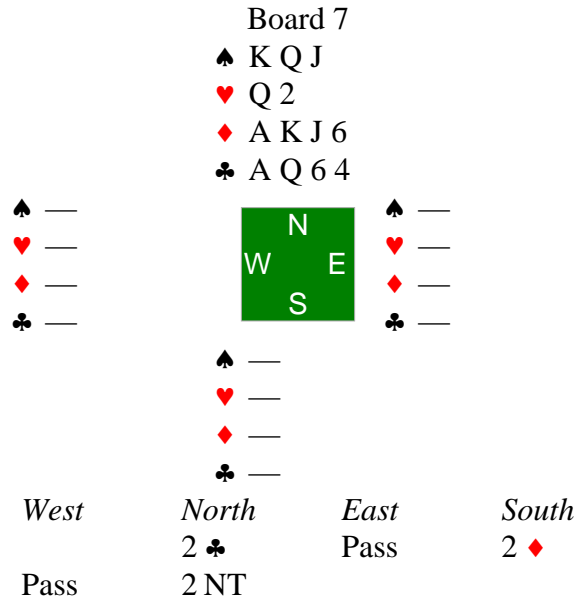
Board 6

♠ K Q J
♥ 4 2
♦ A K J 6
♣ A Q 6 4



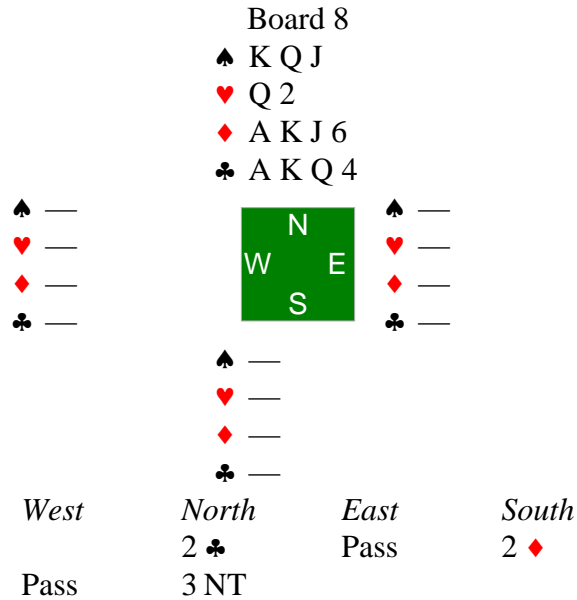
North has a balanced hand with 20 HCPs. Open 2 NT.

Systems are on.



North has a balanced hand with 22 HCPs. Open 2 ♣. After South's 2 ♦ waiting bid, then bid 2 NT to show 22-24 HCPs and a balanced hand.

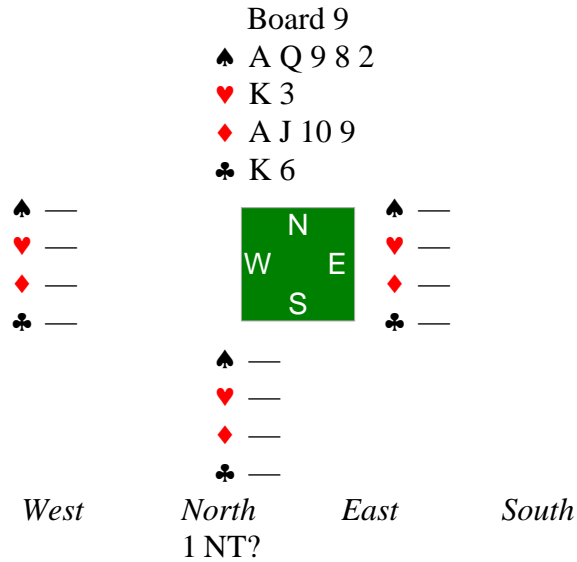
Systems are on.



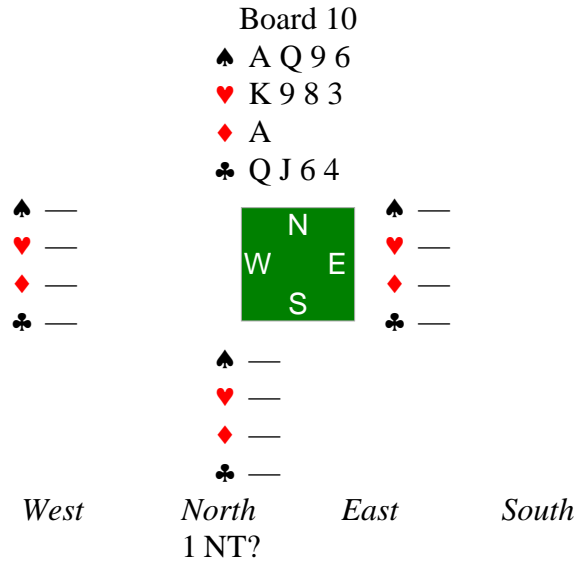
With a balanced hand and 25 HCPs, North opens 2 ♣ and rebids 3 NT. This is much more descriptive bid than opening 3 NT.

With a bigger hand (28+ HCPs), the rebid is 4 NT.

In Standard American, Stayman and Transfers are not available after the 3 NT rebid, but there are some partnership agreement bids to discuss. Some partnerships play that transfers are on over 3 NT (4 ♦ and 4 ♥ would be like Texas transfers showing a six card suit). Some play that a 4 ♣ bid is Gerber, asking opener for aces.



North has 17 HCPs, but the hand is not balanced since it contains two doubletons. Both doubletons are protected from the opening lead. A rebid on this hand is a problem. If North opens 1 ♠ and South bids 1 NT (forcing in 2/1, not forcing in Standard American), North has a hard time describing the hand. A bid of 2 ♦ is too weak, and a jump shift to 3 ♦ is game forcing on too few points. Also, South might become the No Trump declarer, and the doubletons are no longer protected. It might be better for North to open this hand 1 NT and hope it works.



North has 16 HCPs, but the hand is not balanced. It presents some rebid problems. If North opens 1 ♣ and South responds 1 ♥ or 1 ♠, North can jump to 3 of the major. If South responds 1 NT, North does not have enough to bid 2 NT (showing 18-19 HCPs). If South responds 1 ♦, North's rebid of 1 ♥ does not clearly show the strength of the hand. This could be a time to open the hand 1 NT and hope partner has a hand that will support these cards.

Evaluating Long Suits

When evaluating a hand for No Trump, how do you value a long suit? Many of us were taught to add a point for every card in a suit longer than 4. So a five card suit would be worth 1 point, a six card suit 2 points, etc.

This has led many players to evaluate a 14 point balanced hand with a five card suit as 15 points and open it 1 NT. Or, they might evaluate a 17 point hand with a five card suit as 18 points and open at the one level, intending to jump to 2 NT on their rebid. While this may work on occasion, there are some pitfalls to consider before you add this practice to your bidding agreements. Often, your side may get too high using those point additions.

Making a No Trump contract is all about taking tricks. Not all five cards suits are the same.

- ♥ KQJT9 will likely take 4 tricks. This is a good suit to have in No Trump.
- ♥ AQ432 may only take 1 trick. It could be foolish to inflate the value of your hand.
- ♥ J85432 may be worthless by the time you get to use it. It is certainly not worth 2 points.

While HCPs are no guarantee that a No Trump contract will make, newer players are better served using point count to guide their No Trump bidding decisions.

Responder's Responsibility

Opener's No Trump opening bid or rebid narrowly shows the point value of their hand. Now, the **Responder is in charge** of determining where the contract should be.

Responder should add their points to Opener's point range.

- If < 25, contract should be in part score
- If > 25, contract should be in game
- If maybe 25, invite
- If > 33, go to slam
- If maybe 32, explore and invite

Responder should use available tools to help determine the strain of the contract. Some of these tools are:

- Stayman
- Jacoby Transfers
- Texas Transfers
- Invite with 2 NT or 4 NT
- Gerber
- Garbage Stayman
- Four suit transfers