

# 1NT with a 5-Card Major?

By Neil H. Timm

What do you bid with a balanced 5-3-3-2 hands with a 5-card major in 15-17 HCP range playing 2/1 and strong NT? These hands may be opened 1M or 1NT. If you open 1NT you may miss a 5-3 major suit fit and if you open 1NT you may have an awkward rebid.

There is no correct answer; but the better part of valor is to open these hands 1NT since it avoids difficult rebids and communicates shape and points to partner with a single bid!

Holding for example the following hand: ♠K2 ♥AQ952 ♦KJ7 ♣Q83 suppose you were to bid 1♥ and partner next bids 1♠/1NT. How do you show your hand? Over 1♠ you cannot bid 1NT since you are showing less than 15HCP and 2NT shows more than 17HCP. Over 1NT, you cannot pass and 2NT shows 18-19 so you must bid 2♣ and hope partner does not pass, playing 1NT as semi-forcing. Playing it forcing, suppose partner next bids 2♠/3♠ over 1NT? The bidding becomes very difficult.

Or over 1♥ suppose partner next bids 2NT\* (Jacoby). You are not strong enough for the bid of 3♥, so you must next bid 3NT showing a good minimum or perhaps pass.

**Generally, it is best to open 5-3-3-2 hands 1NT and to add 3♣\* as either Puppet or Muppet Stayman since this will prevent you from missing 5-3 or 5-4 major suit fits.**

If you do not want to add Puppet/Muppet what is another option?

Open 1NT with a 5- card major only with 16 or 17 and never with 15. The reason for this is that with extra values, a NT contract may score as many tricks in NT as in the major. Two hands that have an 8-card major suit fit will usually score an extra trick playing in the major. The exception occurs when there are extra values in the combined hands. Then, you have a good chance to win the same number of tricks in NT as in a major.

Another option is too open 1NT with a 5-card major only when you also have 3 cards in the other major. This will prevent you from playing in an inferior 7-card major suit fit if partner transfers into your 2-card major while holding 3-cards in your 5-card major. Some players never open 1NT with a 5-card major and a worthless doubleton major. Why? It is very likely that the opponents will lead a major against a NT contract.

Some partnerships agree to open 1NT with 16 points and a 5-3-3-2 pattern and with 15 or 17 points they open the major suit. If you open 1M with a 15-point hand, one plans to rebid in such a way that shows a minimum balanced hand, a slight underbid.

With 17 points, and the same pattern, if you open 1M, one makes a jump rebid of NT, a slight overbid which usually shows 18 or 19 points.

What do you do with a balanced 5-4-2-2 hand with a 5-card major and 15-17 points? Clearly you always open 1M, but what if the 5-card suit is a minor and you are 2=4=5=2 with a 5-cards diamond suit with a 4-card heart suit and less than 17HCP?

For example, holding the hand: ♠K2 ♥K1095 ♦KJ953 ♣AJ, if you open 1♦ you cannot bid 2♥ if partner responds with 1♠, what is your rebid?

You have just endplayed yourself in the bidding! The hand is not good enough for a reverse rebid of 2♥; the diamond suit is not long enough for a jump to 3♦; and the bids of 1NT/2♦ are underbids!

Yes, the bid of 1NT solves the potential bidding problem.

You and your partner should discuss these issues when you will open with 1NT with hands in the 15-17 point range playing strong NT.

Kit Woolsey (2015, p.93), "Matchpoints", 2nd Edition, Bridge Winners Press.