



Weekly Wisdom

The Sydney Bridge Centre mini lesson

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative) will be analysing an interesting hand from each Saturday ARVO BBO session. To subscribe, please email your name and email address to office@sydneybridgecentre.com.

You are also welcome to [send questions](#) about hands that you have played. Please use "Weekly Wisdom" as email subject. We will collate them and let our panellists leading by Julian Foster to answer them.

Bidding after a 1NT overcall, including running when it's doubled.

#67651 BBO – Saturday 4th December 2021

6		♠ J953	Dlr: E
		♥ AQ1094	Vul: E-W
		♦ Q	
		♣ K95	
♠ KQ2	♠ 1087		
♥ KJ8	♥ 653		
♦ K82	♦ 97643		
♣ QJ108	♣ 43		
12	♠ A64		
15	♥ 72		
13	♦ AJ105		
	♣ A762		

On Board 6 last week North South had a combined 25 points yet only one pair bid game. What's more many had the chance to take some very large penalties from East West but no-one did. Let's have a look.

The normal start to the auction is Pass, 1♣ or 1♦ from South, and 1NT from West. The 1NT overcall typically shows 15-18 with a stopper in opener's suit. The key to the auction comes from North's next action.

Almost every North bid 2♥. It's natural to presume that this is like a 2 level response to a regular opening bid (for example an auction 1♣ 1♠ 2♥) where the 2 level response shows at least 5 hearts and at least 10 points but in fact the situation after a 1NT overcall is different.

North should instead double (for penalties). Most experienced players play a double of a 1NT overcall as penalties – usually any reasonably balanced hand with about 10+ points (so that your side is known to have a majority). Here you have 12 points and partner has opened the bidding. Your side is very close to game values – how do you think the opponents are going to fare playing in 1NT? Extremely badly! What's more they are vulnerable as well. See advanced section for more on why this is a very good position to double the opponents.

So what do 2 level bids mean then? Given that a better hand will start with a double, normally they show a WEAK hand with a desire to just play there. Usually a 6 card suit like a weak two that doesn't have confidence defending 1NT. Obviously if opener has a big hand they will go on anyway but otherwise they will usually pass.

What happens if North does double? On this hand it's a bloodbath! East may well try to run from 1NT doubled into 2♦ (see advanced section for a discussion of running methods) but that's not much better on this hand. It can be seen from the Deep Finesse analysis that North South can make 3♦ (9 tricks) – that only leaves 4 for East West which, given they are vulnerable, is a penalty of 1100! No trumps isn't any better – North South make 4NT (10 tricks) which leaves 3 for East West – also 1100!

So how can North South penalise East West after North doubles and East West do run? The simplest approach is to just play further doubles as penalty. Here if East tries 2♦ South should definitely double that. See advanced section for another option. Note that East West are vulnerable and North South are not – that makes it even more appealing for North South to try for a penalty.

Poor old West is unlucky here – there's nothing really wrong with the 1NT overcall, it just so happens this time that all the opposing values are with North and none with East.

At the table most pairs played in 2♥ and made 10 tricks. A club lead was the most common. Declarer wins with the ♣A, takes a winning heart finesse, then runs the ♦Q not minding whether it wins or loses. It will be expected to lose but that's OK – it sets up more diamond winners in South to discard some of North's black suit losers.

But let's consider what might happen in 2♦x by East West. South will probably lead their doubleton heart (not wanting to risk leading away from any honours and knowing almost all the points are in the West hand). North wins and should probably return their ♦Q. Remember when you are penalising the opponents at a low level you are effectively saying you want to play in that suit yourself – so leading trumps to remove their chances to ruff is often a good idea. South ducks that to the ♦K and poor old declarer has few good options. If they try a club, that should run to South who can now draw 3 more rounds of trumps and then play another heart. North continues with hearts until East ruffs with his last trump. Now the defence will still score the ♠A, the last heart in North (declarer has no more trumps left) and the ♣K. That could actually limit declarer to just 3 tricks and -1400!

1NTx would be almost as bad. North might in practice, however, lead a heart so declarer may score a trick in each suit and get away with "only" -800! Still ample compensation for the +430 or +450 North South could score in game!

Key points to note

- After a 1NT overcall doubles should be penalty (about 10+). 2 level bids are just natural and weak.
- After you have doubled 1NT for penalties you should agree whether subsequent doubles are takeout or penalty. Either method is playable – but it's important to know which.
- Penalties after a 1NT overcall can be lucrative as all the opponents' strength tends to be concentrated into one hand. For the same reason game can often be made on light values (see advanced section).
- After your own 1NT is doubled it's important to have a method of running somewhere else – you may be able to find a much better spot that the opponents can't double as easily or profitably.

More advanced

There's another reason why it's often well worthwhile doubling a 1NT overcall. It's because almost all the opponent's strength is in the one hand. That makes it very hard for them to play as they will constantly be stuck in that hand and have to lead away from honours. Your own points are distributed more evenly between the two hands. Often a hand with 20 points can make surprisingly few tricks if the opponents have 10 points each.

That also has implications if North South want to bid their own contract. Here the vulnerability points to North South trying to take a penalty. But if it were the other way around they might prefer to just bid a vulnerable game. Game can often be made on as few as 22 or 23 combined points in these sort of positions partly because it's known from the auction where almost all the points are, and partly because that defender will frequently be forced on lead to give tricks away. Hence it is well worth bidding aggressively to games in these positions.

When your own 1NT is doubled it is important to have a means of running. This more commonly applies to the weak NT but, as here, it can be equally important after a strong NT has been doubled. While it wouldn't have helped East West on this hand, it can often be the case that they do have a better spot to play in and one that the opponents may not be able to double. So running is well worthwhile. I have played the weak NT for many years and even after the opponents do start with a double it is amazing how seldom you actually do end up conceding a large penalty (even if one was available!)

There are lots of different running methods in use but the common ones allow the partner of the 1NT bidder to show 1 and 2 suited hands to maximise the chances of finding a better spot to escape into. The method I use is:

- Pass = neutral (either nowhere to go so we might as well stay at the 1 level – or have values and content to stay in 1NT x as it may well be making).
- XX = a single suited hand (asks partner to bid 2♣ – unless they happen to have opened 1NT with a good 6 card ♦ suit or a good 5 card major when they may choose to bid that). You then either pass 2♣ or bid your own suit.
- 2 level bids = that suit and a higher suit. Partner either passes or bids the lowest suit they are prepared to play in and the pair scrambles until they (hopefully!) find somewhere!

Another common method involves pass forcing opener to redouble – responder either passes that if they are confident 1NT will make, or they bid something else which usually shows a different combination of two suits. Personally I am

not a fan of that because it doesn't allow you to play in 1NT doubled. Frequently the opponents will risk leaving you in 1NT doubled and you never get a bad score when it does make. But very seldom in practice do they risk leaving you in 1NT redoubled when it's making – they tend to bid and now you have to decide whether to bid on or try to take a penalty yourself – typically harder to judge.

It's also important for pairs to know what they are doing after the opponents do start running from 1NT doubled. As I mentioned above the simplest approach is just penalty. But another approach (usually preferred by most stronger players) is to play takeout doubles. So here South would pass over 2♦ but North would then re-open with a takeout double which South would be happy to pass. Takeout doubles tend to offer the best of both worlds – if the opponents do find a playable spot to run to, they allow you to find your own fit and play there. But they also offer the chance of taking a penalty when the cards lie suitably for that – as they definitely do here! Note that this means pass over a runout bid is usually forcing – partner must either re-open with a double (catering for their partner wishing to penalise) or bid something else (if they aren't prepared to have partner pass a takeout double).

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

Holiday Operating Time and Events



Our clubroom on Goulburn Street is still open for F2F sessions the next two weeks before the Holiday Break from Christmas Eve 24th December 2021 - 2nd January 2022.

There will be F2F sessions every morning from Monday - Thursday, an extra Supervised session on Wednesday morning, night game on Tuesday (Open 7.15pm) and Wednesday (Supervised 6.30pm). BBO will continue to run through the holiday seasons on Monday morning (10.15am), Thursday and Saturday ARVO (1.45pm), including Xmas Day and New Year's Day.

Our F2F sessions on Goulburn Street will restart on Monday 3rd January 2022, [session timetable](#) remains the same. We will kickstart F2F sessions at Canada Bay on Monday 10th January 2022, with sessions on Monday morning and Thursday morning (10am start).

A lot of RED points sessions are scheduled during the Holiday Seasons! Please check out the **RED POINTS FRENZY** events to grab some RED masterpoints before the end of the year:

For Face-to-Face sessions:

- **RED** F2F Open on Monday 20th December 2021, 10am start
- **RED** F2F Open on Tuesday 21st December 2021, 10am start
- **RED** F2F Open on Wednesday 22nd December 2021, 10am start (There will be a separated field for Supervised players, Green masterpoints)
- **RED** F2F Open on Thursday 23rd December 2021, 10am start

Normal table money fee.

For BBO sessions:

- **RED** BBO Christmas Day on Saturday 25th December 2021, 1.45pm start
- **RED** BBO on Monday 27th December 2021, 10.15am start
- **RED** BBO on Thursday 30th December 2021, 1.45pm start
- **RED** BBO New Year's Day on Saturday 1st January, 1.45pm start

BB\$4 for 24 boards.