

96. Balancing Over Opponent's Notrump

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	♠ J10 ♥ AQ9 ♦ A74 ♣ J10986		
♠ A643 ♥ KJ3 ♦ KQ5 ♣ A54		♠ Q752 ♥ 8765 ♦ 6 ♣ KQ32	
	♠ K98 ♥ 1042 ♦ J109832 ♣ 7		
			W N E S 1NT P P 2♦ All Pass
--East West Vulnerable--			

As we saw in last week's column, balancing is done in the pass-out seat because the opponents are at a low level (usually two hearts and below and often two spades and below). This is also done over opponent's one notrump.

Rule of Two

If your left hand opponent (LHO) opens 1NT in any seat and it is followed by two passes, you should bid with two or more points in distribution. That means two doubletons or better and pretty much any point count. What you don't have, your partner will have. You cannot take advantage of any favourable distribution you have, either shortness or length, with the opponents playing in notrump and partner on lead. Furthermore, the more points your partner has, the more points that are behind the one notrump opener.

This rule will feel strange to you, but once you start using it, you will realize how good it is.

The bidding:

West, in first seat, with 17 high card points opens one notrump. North has nothing useful to say. East does not have a five-card major, nor a six-card minor, nor a trash Stayman hand nor eight plus points. So a pass is best. South, however, has two points in distribution and bids two diamonds. From the bidding or lack of further bidding over one notrump, he knows that partner has at least twelve points (opponents have at most $17 + 7$) in addition to his own four high card points.

The contract: Two diamonds by South

The opening lead: The Ace of clubs

It is rarely good to lead an unsupported ace, but the other possibilities are less desirable. In deciding between the lead of two unsupported aces, pick the minor because partner did not try trash Stayman and also did not transfer to spades.

The play:

Declarer wins the second club trick with a ruff and puts the jack of diamonds on the table. West covers. Declarer draws trump, West wins his queen and cashes the ace of spades because declarer will be pitching his spades on the clubs.

Declarer wins the king of spades and finesses to the Queen of hearts. Finessing to the nine also works but is not worth the risk because cards can go on the clubs. South plays the jack of clubs and East ducks. Declarer throws a spade and then plays the ten of clubs which East covers and South ruffs (trumps). The nine of clubs now provides the resting place for the two of hearts with the ace of hearts being the entry.

The result: Two diamonds making four for +130.

Declarer loses a spade, a diamond and a club.

In One Notrump by West

North leads the jack of clubs. Declarer wins the ace and sees that his longest suit is spades. He then cashes the ace of spades and loses the king of spades. South, with no more clubs, plays the jack of diamonds. West covers, but North wins the ace and returns the diamond.

Once South switches to a diamond, diamonds are now the suit the defense attacks. Flip flopping between suits helps the declarer.

West ducks the diamond and then wins the queen. He now cashes two clubs and plays a small club. North cashes his last club and has to play a heart into declarer's waiting king and jack. This is called an end-play because South has no cards other than a heart to return.

Defense will get one spade, one heart, two diamonds and two clubs. Declarer will make one notrump. He will win one spade, two hearts, one diamond and three clubs.

Note:

-Do you have a question or a hand of note that occurred at your bridge table? If yes, send it to me at wt.watson@yahoo.ca and I will answer it. The questions may appear in a future column.