

BIDDING 15 – TRANSFERRING AFTER A 1NT OPENING

Dealer: S

Vul: NS

	♠ 107643		
	♥ A7		
	♦ KQJ876		
	♣		
♠ AQ9		♠ 82	
♥ 9854		♥ Q102	
♦ 95		♦ 106	
♣ K762		♣ Q109854	
	♠ KJ5		
	♥ KJ63		
	♦ A42		
	♣ AJ3		

S	W	N	E
1NT	P	2H	P
2S	P	3D	P
4S	P	P	P

After you have opened 1NT, a transfer followed by the bidding of a new suit by partner is 100% forcing to game. While the prime purpose is, as always, to find a major suit fit, partner is likely to be up to one (or both) of two other things:

- (1) Given the number of cards they have in the 2 suits, they are short in another suit (or both other suits) and harbour doubts about 3NT as a contract, or
- (2) They have slam ambitions if they can find a fit with you.

I respond in the following way:

- 4 major = 3+ support for the major but a minimum hand
- 3 major = 3+ support for the major and a maximum hand
- 3 new suit = A or K in the suit and 4+ support for the minor
- 4 minor = 4+ support for the minor and 3NT looks seriously wrong
- 3NT = none of the above and looks the right place

Hopefully with this information, partner can select the correct contract or take the next step. Always remember though, that in duplicate/pairs 3NT is the easiest game contract to make (only needing 9 tricks) and that the tricks are worth more than minor suit tricks. You bend over backwards to play in 3NT rather than 5 of a minor if you reasonably can.

As you can see on the above hand, North has doubts about a 3NT contract given the club void. North also has some slam ambition if partner has EXACTLY the right stuff. Remove CAJ and SJ from the South hand and replace it with SAQ and a grand slam in spades or diamonds has good chances.

However, with slam bidding, always remember the wise words of a World Champion:

“If you contract depends on partner having exactly the right stuff, partner NEVER has it.”

This is not bridge humour or cynicism but based on simple mathematical principles. If you are short in a suit, partner is likely to have length and stuff in that suit. And as you can see on this hand, North has a club void, but South has a useless CAJ rather than a very helpful SAQ and slam is not there.

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(Hand repeated for convenience)

Despite an 8 card major fit, some people try to play in 3NT anyway. What they are trying to do is get the same number of tricks as the declarers in 4 of a major but get a top because the no trump contract is worth 10 points more (eg 4S making 11 is 650, 3NT making 11 is 660). Or think 9 tricks is the limit of the hand.

This attempt is most likely to be successful where the hands are very flat and there is little scope for ruffing any losers thus taking away the advantage of the suit contract. My experience with this area is that the attempt can work (mainly due to defensive error) but it is high risk and likely to lead to a top or a bottom. Invariably you have a very weak suit and if the defence home in on this suit early, they can put the 3NT at risk (where the suit contract is safe) or force you to take your winners early and give up overtricks that can be made without problems in the suit contract.

Hence, I tend to just play in the major. It is tempting to try 3NT on this hand as you are dead flat and have what looks like a double stop in the 2 unbid suits. However, in 4S you easily make 11 tricks, just losing the SAQ. In 3NT, if the defence find an opening club lead, your contract is in potential danger if you don't take your 9 tricks on top as East might have the SA and lead through your CJ3. Even if they don't find an initial club lead, they should switch to one when later in with the SQ and get a club winner along with the SAQ and hold you to 10 tricks.