

Responding to 1NT With Weak Hands

What's the Problem?

When partner opens 1NT and you have a very weak hand with just three or four points, your side may well have less than half the total points. What's more, there is a real danger that your side has a very weak suit. The defence may exploit this and you might end up making only four or five tricks.

With a Long Major

When you have a long major, the solution is easy. As we discovered way back when, the solution is to transfer to the major and pass after partner accepts the transfer.

<p>♠ A 2 ♥ A 6 5 3 ♦ K Q T 2 ♣ A 7 4</p>	<p>West opens 1NT and East bids 2♥ to transfer to spades. West accepts with 2♠ and East passes.</p> <p>Playing in no trumps, there is no way to access East's spades and there may be only four tricks.</p>	<p>♠ Q J T 5 4 ♥ 9 4 2 ♦ 9 6 5 ♣ 3 2</p>
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In a spade contract, it is likely that declarer will make at least seven tricks.

Garbage Stayman

When we are first taught about the Stayman convention, we are told that our hand must have at least game invitational values. As with just about every other bridge convention, there are exceptions. So called **Garbage Stayman** is one of them.

You need:

- A very weak hand with five or less hcp
- At least four diamonds
- At least three cards in both majors

With this hand the idea is to bid 2♣ (Stayman) and then pass partner's response no matter what. It may seem alarming to pass partner's artificial 2♦ (no four card major) but think about this. If partner has three or less cards in each major, partner has at least seven cards in the minors. It is very likely that partner has at least three diamonds.

Incidentally, there are players who abuse the Stayman methods by bidding 2NT instead of 2♦ to deny a four card major. They will not be able to use Garbage Stayman.

<p>♠ A J ♥ K J 7 ♦ A 8 7 2 ♣ A 9 6 2</p>	<p>West opens 1NT and East bids 2♣ (Stayman). West bids 2♦ and East passes.</p> <p>Playing in 1NT, declarer will struggle to make more than five tricks.</p>	<p>♠ 8 3 2 ♥ T 9 8 4 ♦ K T 4 3 ♣ T 8</p>
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In diamonds, declarer has excellent prospects to make eight tricks – losing a spade, two hearts, a diamond and a club.

Sometimes you will not be fortunate enough to find a 4-4 fit.

♠ A Q T 7
♥ K T 6
♦ A 7
♣ A 8 3 2

West opens 1NT and East bids 2♣ (Stayman). West bids 2♠ and East passes.

Again, 1NT is unlikely to yield more than five or six tricks.

♠ J 9 3
♥ J 9 7 3
♦ T 6 5 2
♣ T 9

With careful play, perhaps ruffing clubs before drawing trumps, it is possible to make the spade contract.

Help!

Sometimes, your partner will open 1NT and your right hand opponent will double. Most likely, the double shows a similar point range to your partner's. Sometimes, opponents have a special agreement about the double; for example, it may show a single-suited hand. Because of the different possible meanings, it is always wise to ask your left hand opponent what the double means.

If the double shows a strong hand and you are very weak, it is likely your left hand opponent will leave the double in for penalty. As we have seen already, you may only make five tricks in 1NT. So a doubled contract could be quite expensive.

Even if the double shows something else such as a single-suited hand and you pass, it is quite possible that your left hand opponent may choose to pass as well – converting the double into a penalty double.

Whatever the double means and with a weak hand, it is prudent to find some way of escaping from 1NT. Transfers and Garbage Stayman are still available but now you have an extra option. You can redouble! This is called a **rescue redouble**. By making a rescue redouble, you are asking your partner to start bidding four card suits up the line. What you are hoping to find is a 4-4 fit but as we have already seen, 4-3 fit may suffice.

Let's see how it works.

♠ K 4 3
♥ Q J 7 2
♦ K Q 9 3
♣ A 5

West opens 1NT and north doubles. East redoubles for rescue. West bids 2♦. That is no good for East, who bids 2♠. With three card support, West passes.

Because of the weak clubs, 1NT will probably fail.

♠ Q J T 2
♥ T 4 3
♦ J 5
♣ 8 7 6 3

2♠ should make. You may want to ruff some clubs in dummy before drawing trumps. Alternatively, you might try to set up diamond and heart winners.