

TRAVIS-T(ip) #3

By Barbara Travis

HOW TO OPEN THE BIDDING WITH A BIG BALANCED HAND

1NT OPENING BIDS

Let's start by discussing the 1NT opening bid. If you play Goren it shows 16-18 HCP; if you play Standard it shows 15-17 HCP; if you play Acol it shows 12-14 HCP. In addition, it shows a balanced hand. For many, this means no 5-card Major but that is determined by partnership agreement. However, for all of you this means no singleton. The 1NT bid should NOT be used simply to show your point count; it shows both point count AND a balanced hand. I have noticed that people are often reluctant to open 1NT (or 2NT) with a low doubleton but this is part of bridge. If you don't open 1NT on those hands then you will not be able to show your partner that you hold (Standard) 15-17 HCP and a balanced hand.

As an example, imagine you hold:

xx
Kxx
AKQxx
Axx

This is a 1NT opening bid. If you open 1D instead, you are going to have rebid problems.

Let's say the auction starts 1D 1S and you have to make a rebid.

- 1NT shows 12-14 HCP and a balanced hand (points are wrong);
- 2D should show 12-15 HCP with 6 diamonds (points and diamonds are wrong);
- 3D shows 16-18 HCP with 6 diamonds (diamonds are wrong)

Clearly making the right opening bid of 1NT solves all the potential rebid problems. Often your partner's best suit is your weakest suit, so you shouldn't worry about a small doubleton.

2NT OPENING BIDS

What does a 2NT opening bid show? Most people use it to show balanced hands with 20-22 HCP. Personally I prefer only a 2-point range for higher-level NT opening bids, so I'd recommend 20-21 HCP or 21-22 HCP. The reason I prefer a narrower point range is that it makes life easier for partner with hands that are borderline for slams (say 10-11 HCP) and you will get too high less often. If you have more points than your designated 2NT opening points, you should start with a 2C opening bid and then rebid 2NT which, by definition, is the next higher range of points (or 3NT if bigger again).

With the 2NT opening bid, you can take a few more liberties with your distribution – meaning that you should still open 2NT with a low doubleton but you can also open 2NT with two doubletons in a balanced hand or with a 5-card Major.

Some examples of normal 2NT openings bid hands are:

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3
AKJxx	Qx	KQJx
KQJ	Kxx	KJ
AQJ	AKQJx	KQ10xx
xx	KQx	AQ

On Hand 1 it is better to open 2NT even with the 5-card Major, just to convey the nature of your hand to your partner. On Hand 2, you have a normal balanced hand. Hand 3 is only semi-balanced (being 4-2-5-2) but you don't want to be passed in 1D and, furthermore, you DO want to be declarer and have the lead coming around to your tenaces (KJ and AQ).

However, you should NOT open 2NT with a singleton so if, for example, you hold:

Hand 1		Hand 2
K	or	x
AQ10x		AKxx
AQJx		AKxx
KQxx		AQxx

On these hands you are probably best to open 1D, planning to reverse on your next bid (or bid 3NT over 1S).

HANDS BETWEEN 1NT AND 2NT OPENING BIDS

I've noticed that many players think you should open 2C with 19 HCP. I have no idea where this notion came from but I totally disapprove (unless you have a 7-card suit and a game forcing type of hand). If you hold a balanced 19 HCP hand, you need partner to hold 6 HCP to want to be in game, so if you open at the 1-level then they will respond – therefore there is no real problem. If you open at the 1-level and partner passes, then you don't belong in game anyway.

So what should you open with a balanced hand with 18 or 19 HCP? Just make your normal opening bid at the 1-level. **DO NOT OPEN 1NT.** You need to remember that when you open 1NT you show your partner a very specific point range: 15-17 HCP (Standard). Since partner can pass 1NT with a balanced 6-8 HCP hand, you don't want them passing when you hold 18 or 19 HCP.

With a balanced hand and 18-19/20 HCP, open the bidding at the 1-level and then **jump rebid** to 2NT over partner's 1-level response. Should partner respond with a new suit at the 2-level, then you need to make a forcing bid next time, in case there is slam – let them tell you about their hand. Should partner raise your opening bid to the 2-level, then you either bid 3NT or 4-Major (depending on your opening suit).

Responder's Continuations after the 2NT Jump Rebid

Your partner should expect your 2NT jump rebid to show this sort of opening hand, so they should bid again if they have 7+HCP or a long suit. They can only pass if they hold a really awful 6 HCP hand.