NOTRUMP OVERCALLS

This section does not apply to reopening notrump bids or notrump bids by a passed hand. See section 8-5, Defensive Bidding by a Passed Hand; section 8-7, Reopening the Bidding; and section 8-9, Unusual Notrump.

The Direct 1NT Overcall

The direct 1NT overcall of a natural suit opening shows a hand similar to a strong notrump opening bid. The opposing suit must be stopped, of course. With a double stopper or a solid suit, the minimum HCP requirement can be relaxed to 15 HCP. With a single stopper and no good suit, a 19 HCP hand is not too strong against a five-card major opening. Remember to upgrade tenaces a bit, since holdings like AQx or KJx are worth more when there is an opening bid on the right. The 1NT overcall is sometimes off-shape (but balanced), perhaps containing a six-card minor or 5-4-2-2 distribution.

A 1NT overcall is more likely to have a weak doubleton in some (unbid) suit than a 1NT opening bid. Also, the overcaller is less likely to have four-card support for an unbid major, with which he might have doubled instead of bidding 1NT. That does not mean that a 1NT overcall denies such major suit support. Generally speaking, a 1NT overcall is preferable to a takeout double when holding good values for the bid. Besides HCP, there should be a source of playing tricks, especially against an opponent who is likely to double.

Suppose you hold ♠A984 ♥AQ ♦KJ7 ♣QJ62 and RHO opens with 1♥. A double is unwise because you must pass a minor suit response. The hand is not strong enough to double and then bid 2NT, which shows at least 19 HCP. Also, a game could be missed by doubling. Partner could have enough to raise a 1NT overcall, yet not enough to make a jump response to a takeout double. She could have ♠K53 ♥983 ♦A10853 ♣43, a hand that could raise notrump but can only respond 2♦ to a takeout double. See section 9-1, Takeout Doubles, for a further discussion.

If overcaller's LHO passes 1NT, responses are the same as those for a 1NT opening. All bids have exactly the same meaning. Bidding opener's major in response to Stayman (which is always 2♣) shows four cards. A transfer to opener's suit, even a major known to be five cards long, just means what it says. It can happen that a suit is distributed 5-2-0-6, or that opener has psyched.

After a 1NT overcall, all doubles by either partner are for business, with one exception (below).

When Third Hand Competes

A balancing double by the 1NT bidder, partner silent, is for takeout and implies a maximum hand:

South	West	North	East
1♠	1NT	2♣	Pass
Pass	Dbl is takeout, not business		

South	West	North	East
1♠	1NT	Pass	Pass
2♥/2♠	Dbl is business, not takeout		

While playing the double of 2♥ as takeout is not unreasonable, it is best to have one simple rule, as stated above.

As usual, if third hand's bid is artificial then a double shows that suit (even if it is clubs) and a bid in that suit is natural (and invitational, since a weaker hand can double).

If opener's partner enters the bidding with a raise or a new suit, Jacoby and minor suit transfers do not apply. Texas transfers do apply (through 3♣). The rules for cue bidding are these:

-- If opener's suit can be bid at the two level, that is Stayman (Minor Suit Stayman if both majors have been bid), while a bid of the new suit is a strong cue bid:

South	West	North	East
1♠	1NT	2♣	Dbl - business
			2♠ - Stayman
			3♣ - strong cue bid

After bidding 2♠, East is likely to pass a 2NT or 3♥ bid by West, so West should bid game with a maximum hand. The strong cue bid is forcing to game, probably based on wild distribution if opener hasn't psyched an opening bid.

South	West	North	East
1♠	1NT	2♥	2♠ - Minor Suit Stayman
			3♥ - strong cue bid

The Minor Suit Stayman bid may be based on a good hand, but more likely East has a weak 5-5 in the minors or a diamond bust. If West bids 2NT (no minor) and East bids 3♣, West must prefer a minor (pass or 3♦). Whether West bids 2NT or 3♣ (showing four clubs), she must pass a 3♦ bid by East. This is standard Minor Suit Stayman.

-- If opener's suit cannot be bid at the two level, a bid of the new suit is Stayman, and a bid of opener's suit is natural, not forcing:

South	West	North	East
1♣	1NT	2♥	3♥ - Stayman, four spades
			3♣ - natural, signoff

The 3♣ is just a competitive bid that West is expected to pass. Other such auctions:

South	West	North	East
1♣	1NT	2♦	3♣ - natural, signoff
			3♦ - Stayman

South	West	North	East
1♥	1NT	2♠	3♥ - natural, signoff
			3♠ - strong cue bid

There is one exception to the "natural" rule regarding opener's suit:

South	West	North	East
1♦	1NT	2♣	2♦ - Stayman
			3♣ - strong cue bid
			3♦ - natural, a signoff

The 1NT Overcall of a Suit Response

South	West	North	East
1♣	Pass	1♥	1NT

East is very likely to have a good diamond suit as one of the assets for the 1NT overcall. If opener passes, the bidding proceeds as if East had opened 1NT. The opposing bids are ignored, having no effect on subsequent bidding.

When 1NT Gets Doubled

Whether the double is natural or negative, direct or balancing (i.e., by opener), all actions by advancer are the same as when an opening 1NT bid gets doubled. Both the opening bid and any response are completely ignored, so a bid in an opposing suit has the same meaning as when an opening 1NT bid gets doubled. A redouble is definitely not S.O.S. See section 5-3, When the Opponents Intervene vs Strong Notrump.

Jump Overcalls in Notrump

Jumps to 2NT or 3NT opening are unusual notrump (section 8-9) if made by a passed hand.

Otherwise jump overcalls of 2NT or 3NT are natural bids, usually based on a long solid minor, but could be a solid major. A typical hand for a jump to 2NT over a 1♠ opening: ♠K3 ♥J87 ♦A6 ♣AKQ1086. Add the ace of hearts and the bid is 3NT. Jump to 3NT over 1♠ with ♠QJ3 ♥AKQ9832 ♦A3 ♣A4. A heart game could be defeated by a spade ruff, while game in notrump is a near certainty. With a standard sort of notrump hand (e.g., 4-3-3-3 distribution), make a takeout double and then bid notrump. See section 9-1, Takeout Doubles.

Advancer raises 2NT to 3NT with a trick quick or so. Jacoby, minor suit transfers, and Texas Transfer bids are used, but no Stayman. Transfers are generally unwise unless the hand is highly distributional.

The natural 2NT applies even over a new suit response or a raise:

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass	1♠/2♥	2NT - natural

Respond to a double jump 3NT jump overcall in the same way as to a single or non-jump 3NT overcall (see below), keeping in mind that the double jump overcall is based on a long suit.

Non-Jump 2NT Overcall

A 2NT overcall of a weak two bid shows about the same strength as a 1NT overcall, maybe a point more. Advancer will play you for 17-18 HCP when deciding whether to pass or not, even though you may have a trifle more or less. Responses are the same as those for a 2NT opening. A transfer to opener's suit is a cue bid, since a cue bid is not otherwise available.

A 2NT overcall of a 1NT or a two-over-one response is Unusual Notrump (see section 8-9). One would double a 1NT bid with a good notrump hand, and a two-over-one response gives the opposition so much strength that a natural 2NT overcall would be rare.

A 2NT overcall of a raised opening is the same as a 2NT jump overcall (see above).

The 4♠ artificial notrump raise, less invitational than a 4NT bid, may be useful after a 2NT overcall, which tends to have a wide range in actual practice, perhaps 16-19 HCP. Advancer bids 4NT with 16-17 HCP, 4♠ with about 14-15 HCP.

Non-Jump 3NT Overcall

The 3NT overcall of a preemptive three bid requires about the same minimum strength as a 2NT overcall, but the maximum is higher. The bid could be based on a long minor, but could also be a standard notrump distribution. Most of the time partner just passes. The responses are the same as those for an old-fashioned 3NT opening bid. A transfer to the opposing suit is a strong cue bid, probably based on a void. There is no Stayman bid.

South	West	North	East
3♠	3NT	Pass	4♣ - Gerber
			4♦ - transfer to hearts
			4♥ - spade cue bid
			4♠ - notrump raise
			4NT - stronger raise (Boland applies)
			5♣ - Miller

The two ways to raise notrump are especially needed after a non-jump 3NT overcall, since the bid has such a wide range. Boland, section 5-6, and Miller, section 5-7, both apply in this situation. It is unwise to transfer to a weak six-card major, especially when holding sufficient points to be confident that 3NT will make. The 3NT bidder may be quite short and weak in an unbid major.