



In this series we are removing 1NT into a suit contract. SA version. Part 1 of 2. Updated spring 2015

VB#3 Y1 Weakness TO of 1NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 2H
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North			
♠ AK72			
♥ T74			
♦ AK2			
♣ JT3			
West		East	
♠ Q54		♠ JT98	
♥ 52		♥ AK	
♦ T985		♦ Q764	
♣ AKQ2		♣ 754	
South			
♠ 63			
♥ QJ9863			
♦ J3			
♣ 986			

This set of six deals is all about responding to an opening bid of 1NT when you have a weak, unbalanced hand.

You might think that the only thing you should do with a weak hand is Pass. Well, think again! If you were to bid a suit it tells partner two things. One is that you do not like No-trumps, and secondly, that you don't wish to go any higher.

The bid is a *sign-off* (that is: it tells partner to Pass). It is known by other names too, **A weakness take-out** or, more succinctly, **a drop-dead bid**.

Hand 1 sets the scene. Just how well do you think partner would fare in a contract of 1NT?

West	North	East	South
-	1NT	P	2♥
P	P	P	

Lead: ♣ A

Bidding.

On this deal we have a poor hand – just 4 points with a long Heart suit. Partner opens 1NT (as usual: 15-17 points) and we have to decide what to do.

Many players think that they simply cannot bid on a mere 4 points and, if they do, there is a risk that partner will take the bidding into the stratosphere (by bidding Spades or 3NT or 4♥ or something equally grotesque).

So let's be clear here. When partner opens 1NT he is making a **limit bid** – that is, he is telling us precisely what he has and is making us **boss of the auction**. We are in this position because we (and only we) are able to calculate our side's combined assets. Up to now we have used that knowledge to either Pass, raise to 2NT or bid 3NT. What, though, would a suit bid mean?

Well, it means two things. Firstly, that we hate No-trumps (so we must have an unbalanced hand with at least five cards in the suit we have just bid) and, secondly, that we don't want to go any higher. We are not attempting to have a long conversation with the opening bidder; we are boss of the auction and we are exerting our authority to bring it to a swift close.

So, when we bid a suit we are commanding our partner to Pass. The 1NT opener will duly oblige – if he wants to remain our partner. Such a bid is known as a **sign-off** or a **weakness take-out**.

Here, you can see (we hope) that 2♥ will make a hatful more tricks than will 1NT. That is why we bid it.

Play.

The resulting contract of 2♥ is actually fairly easy to make – we take (in some convenient order) two Spades, two Diamonds and four Hearts. However, as a point of technique (which will recur in this set of hands – and others), our first play on gaining the lead is to force out the opponents' trumps.

This play is called **drawing trumps** (or **fetching trumps**, or **pulling trumps** or some

colloquial expressions that you'll doubtless meet later). After all, we wouldn't want to give the nasty opponents the opportunity to trump either our Ace-King of Spades or our Ace-King of Diamonds, would we?

We will always need to count the number of trumps that have been played; so we need to take note on the sight of dummy of how many trumps we have between us, and hence how many trumps the opposition have.

If you have absorbed the lessons of this deal it's time to move on...



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VB#3 Y1 Weakness TO of 1NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 2S
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

<p>North</p> <p>♠ KQ62</p> <p>♥ K764</p> <p>♦ J64</p> <p>♣ AK</p>		<p>East</p> <p>♠ AT</p> <p>♥ AQ52</p> <p>♦ T987</p> <p>♣ 865</p>	
<p>West</p> <p>♠ 73</p> <p>♥ JT98</p> <p>♦ AKQ</p> <p>♣ T732</p>		<p>South</p> <p>♠ J9854</p> <p>♥ 3</p> <p>♦ 532</p> <p>♣ QJ94</p>	

A long suit within a weak hand is usually a sign to Pass in most auctions, but responding to partner's 1NT opening is not one of those occasions.

By taking out partner's 1NT to a suit you are telling partner that you do **not** want to play in No-trumps and you do not want to go any higher.

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	P
P	1NT	P	2♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♦ A

Bidding.

On this deal our hand is a little worse than on the previous deal (Hand 1), where at least we had a six-card suit. Here, we only have a five-card suit and, to make matters worse, our suit quality isn't the best either.

Over partner's 1NT opening (showing 15-17 points), does that mean we should now Pass?

No. Definitely not.

Remember, when partner opens 1NT he is making a limit bid – that is, he is telling us precisely what he has and is making us **boss of the auction**. The poor quality of the Spade suit still shouldn't deter us from making a weakness take-out bid of 2♠. If anything, the poor suit quality should make it even more attractive to play the hand in something other than 1NT.

"Bid 2♠ on a suit of ♠J 9 8 5 4 !? " you might ask. Well, let's think about this for a moment.

How useful do you think our hand would be for partner if he were to be declarer in 1NT? And, on the other side of the coin, how useful do you think our hand would be if we were to be declarer in 2♠?

The answer is: by having our Spade suit as trumps we'd expect to take a few tricks at least. In a No-trump contract, however, our Spade suit is likely to be worthless. Although contracting at the two-level needs one more trick than at the one-level this shouldn't be a problem. Our Spade suit is likely to be able to generate additional tricks (as a trump suit) and this should more than compensate for the additional trick required.

And what will partner do over our 2♠ bid if and when he's holding a good hand and great support for Spades? Whatever he has, he must Pass. Our 2♠ call is a **sign-off**, a **weakness take-out**, a **drop-dead bid** and it is always based on a weak hand such as this. In fact, if our Clubs were (say) as poor as ♣J 9 4 2, we would still make the same 2♠ bid. Sometimes we make a weakness take-out on hands where

we do not expect to make the contract, we just expect the resulting penalty to be less harsh than that in 1NT.

As you may see with hindsight, declaring this hand in 1NT would not have been a pretty sight. Played accurately, the opponents would have been able to set up four Diamond tricks, four Heart tricks and the ♠A. Ugh.

Play.

The actual 2♠ contract is fairly easy to make, despite West taking the ♦A K Q as the first three tricks.

In a suit contract it is helpful to look at both **losers** and **winners**. Here, we lose just three Diamonds, one Heart (the second round can be trumped) and the inevitable Ace of trumps.

In terms of *winners* we have four Spades and four Clubs. It's pleasing to see that the arithmetic balances – five losers and eight winners. You may think this is inevitable but we are here to tell you that this is far from the case.



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VB#3 Y1 Weakness TO of 1NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 2S
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

<p>West</p> <p>♠ QT8</p> <p>♥ JT983</p> <p>♦ KQ7</p> <p>♣ 96</p>		<p>North</p> <p>♠ AK6</p> <p>♥ K62</p> <p>♦ A42</p> <p>♣ QJT2</p>		<p>East</p> <p>♠ 94</p> <p>♥ AQ4</p> <p>♦ T9863</p> <p>♣ A74</p>	
				<p>South</p> <p>♠ J7532</p> <p>♥ 75</p> <p>♦ J5</p> <p>♣ K853</p>	

There are all sorts of declarer play techniques that one can use to tackle a hand.

We have touched on *drawing trumps* in this series; now we introduce *setting up the side-suit*.

As for bidding, we are still focusing on the **weakness take-out** to partner's 1NT opening.

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	P
P	1NT	P	2♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ J

Bidding.

On this deal we again have a poor collection (there seems to be a pattern in this series...) but, luckily for us, partner opens 1NT showing 15-17 points and a balanced hand.

Our suit quality seems to be diminishing hand by hand but, in similar vein to Hand 2, this is not the time to Pass 1NT. We would much prefer to use our Spades and have them as trump tricks rather than let the Spades rot away in 1NT if the suit cannot be set up. On this basis we remove partner's 1NT to 2♠, a **sign-off**. This bid ends the auction.

Play.

West leads the ♥J (the top of a sequence) and we start with our usual ritual of **Count** and **Plan** before we call for a card from dummy.

When declaring in a suit contract it is often easier to count **losers** rather than **winners** (although we ought to do both).

Now the count of winners and losers in trumps (Spades) is problematic because we cannot tell how the five missing trumps are lying. On a sunny day the ♠Q will fall doubleton on the ♠A K and we take five Spade tricks. If it is pouring with rain one dastardly opponent has all five missing Spades and we have at least two losers. Aaaarrgghh!

The normal expectation with such a suit is one loser and four winners – and that is if trumps break as evenly as is possible (one opponent with three and one with two).

The ♥J lead is ominous as it tells us that the ♥A (and the ♥Q) lie with East. Why? Well, in a suit contract, no one leads away from an Ace at trick one. The risk is too great as declarer could easily have the singleton King.

The other two suits are easy to count. In Diamonds there is one winner, one loser, in Clubs there are three (slow) winners and one loser.

Summing up we can probably see four Spades, one Diamond and three Clubs. As the great Scottish poet Burns once said, though, there's ***many a slip twixt cup and lip.***

Sometimes we may sit as a helpless spectator as the opponents start trumping our winners. It's not unheard of for the defenders to lead the ♣A and another Club, ruffed, the ♥A, another Club, ruffed...

Anyway, we have to sit and wait awhile and hope ill-fortune does not befall us.

The ♥J holds trick one and the ♥A takes dummy's ♥K at trick two (playing the ♥K from table at trick one amounts to the same thing). East tries his luck with the ♥Q at trick three and we gain the lead by ruffing that.

Now we are on lead we hasten to draw trumps by cashing the ♠A K. This gets the bad news-good news. The bad news is that the master Spade (the ♠Q) is still out there somewhere. The good news is that the Queen is the **only** trump out there – four others have been pulled.

When the opponents have the master trump (a situation that occurs often) it is usually right to ignore it and switch attention elsewhere – to our *side-suit*. If there is just one trump out that is higher than all of ours then there is usually no need to draw it. It would be poor business to use up two of our trumps up for one of theirs, which will make in any case.

Here we must play on Clubs to knock out the ♣A. Notice that we are utterly indifferent to the possibility that someone might ruff one of our Club winners with the boss trump. We can afford to lose a trick to the ♠Q; what we cannot afford is to lose tricks to low trumps.


We play high Clubs to force out the ♣A and East shifts to the ♦10. Taking the ♦A we continue with Clubs, forcing West to ruff.

This has the effect of causing our remaining baby trumps to grow up into fully mature winners so we make our contract for the loss of one Spade, two Hearts, one Diamond and one Club.



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VB#3 Y1 Weakness TO of 1NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 2H
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

		North		
		♠ AQJ		
		♥ J832		
		♦ Q73		
		♣ AK2		
West		East		
♠ 52		♠ T9874		
♥ AKQ		♥ 5		
♦ JT964		♦ AK82		
♣ 964		♣ QT7		
		South		
		♠ K63		
		♥ T9764		
		♦ 5		
		♣ J853		

Are you getting the hang of the weakness take-out yet?

Or are you still unconvinced of its merits?

West	North	East	South
P	1NT	P	2♥
P	P	P	

Lead: ♦ J

Bidding.

Holding the South cards we would not normally dream about making any kind of bid in most auctions. However, when partner opens 1NT (15-17 points) we should not Pass out of fright but bid 2♥.

If partner played in 1NT he'd be waiting ages until the Heart suit got set up for any tricks and, by the time that happened, the opponents would have set up sufficient defensive tricks to defeat him. Partner would not be a happy bunny.

In 2♥, by contrast, we are restricted to only one Diamond loser (as opposed to a lot more had our partner been declaring 1NT), and we are able to use our Hearts as trump tricks.

Even though our trump suit is headed by the Ten we still have the advantage of having length in Hearts. So we sign-off in 2♥ and partner, of course, Passes.

Play.

West leads the ♦J and we immediately thank partner for the lovely (and slightly lucky!) Heart support. Once more we settle down to **Count** and **Plan**.

Counting **losers** we can see that we have no Spade loser, one Diamond loser, at least one Club loser and either two or three Heart losers depending on how the trumps split.

The opponents have four trumps between them. If the suit splits 2-2 between East-West we would only lose two Hearts. If the Heart suit splits 3-1, however, (as on this deal), then we are destined to lose three trump tricks.

Even if we have three Hearts to lose, we should lose at most five tricks.

When the opponents play two rounds of Diamonds, we ruff the second round and must remember to immediately play on trumps, despite their poor quality. We may have no high Hearts to "draw the opponent's trumps" but we still want to extract as many trumps as possible from the enemy's hands.

As we do that we should try to keep a track of the trumps remaining. It is a habit that you should try and get into.

Now West decides to help matters along by taking his three top trumps but that leaves us with enough tricks. In practice we make three Spade tricks, three Heart tricks (actually by trumping two Diamonds in the closed hand and having the boss ♥J on table) and the ♣A K.

Contract bid and contract made. Neat job. Do you think partner would have enjoyed playing in 1NT?



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VB#3 Y1 Weakness TO of 1NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 2S
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North	
♠ 98	
♥ AKQ	
♦ AT76	
♣ A974	
West	East
♠ AQ6	♠ KJ
♥ T7532	♥ J9
♦ KQ	♦ J8542
♣ J53	♣ KQT6
South	
♠ T75432	
♥ 864	
♦ 93	
♣ 82	

Did you think that you've seen the worst of it?

You ain't seen nothing yet.

You're about to witness a hand that everybody has dreams about. Or should the word be "nightmares"?

West	North	East	South
-	1NT	P	2♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♦ K

Bidding.

As we gaze upon the unalloyed beauty of the South cards we are struck by its tremendous trick-taking potential (!)

After North opens 1NT, showing 15-17 points and a balanced hand, we may be reluctant to have anything to do with this collection. We might prefer to throw the cards in the air and run screaming from the card-room given that we know East-West have much more than we do in the high-card stakes.

However, to continue the theme of this series, over partner's 1NT opening, we should most definitely take-out partner's bid to 2♠. It is a **weakness take-out** and hands don't get any weaker than this, do they?

In point of fact, this hand, despite severely lacking in the high-card department, has more of a reason to remove partner's 1NT bid to 2♠ than any of the other hands in this series. Ask yourself this: How many tricks is this hand worth in 1NT? No tricks, probably. If that...

By contrast, how many tricks is this hand worth in 2♠? Probably two, maybe even three tricks. And, if we're lucky, it could be worth four tricks! Yes, you read that right. Four tricks despite having no points (for example, picture partner with ♠A × × as support).

Remember, partner has limited his hand with a 1NT opening bid so we are the **boss of the auction**. Therefore, when we bid 2♠ we are saying to partner that this hand will play better in 2♠ than in 1NT; so partner is forced to Pass our 2♠ **drop-dead bid**.

Play.

The resulting contract of 2♠ is (surprisingly) easy to make – provided we lead trumps at every opportunity. This is thanks to the friendly split of the Spade suit – the five adverse trumps splitting three and two. As the cards lie, we take three Spade tricks, three Heart tricks and both minor suit Aces for a total of eight tricks.


Put another way, we only lose three trumps, a Club and a Diamond.

On a serious note just look at how a 1NT contract would have fared – our partner would have only been entitled to the ♥A K Q, the ♦A and the ♣A for five tricks (that's two down in 1NT). Whereas in 2♠ we comfortably made eight tricks without needing to do anything special (besides the part about bidding with no points).



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VB#3 Y1 Weakness TO of 1NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 1N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North			
♠ J9854			
♥ 3			
♦ 532			
♣ QJ94			
West		East	
♠ AT		♠ 73	
♥ AQ52		♥ JT98	
♦ T987		♦ AKQ	
♣ 865		♣ T732	
South			
♠ KQ62			
♥ K764			
♦ J64			
♣ AK			

Just for a change we are going to sit you in the 1NT opener's seat rather than as responder.

Why? Well, all should become clear.

We hope you enjoy the (bumpy) ride.

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♦ T

You may not have recognized this deal but it is Hand 2 all over again, this time rotated 180° so that we are the 1NT opening bidder. We tortured you with this hand just to emphasize the point of just why we "rescue" 1NT when we have a poor but shapely hand.

Bidding.

On Hand 2, you may recall, we were sitting with the North cards and "pulled" 1NT into the safe haven of 2♠. The opponents cashed five tricks but were unable to take any more and 2♠ sailed serenely into the harbor.

Now, let's play **what if...**?

What if our partner were one of those players who "*Couldn't bid because I only had 4 points*"? Now we'd play in 1NT (having opened and closed the auction with that call), and we'd soon see what Schopenhauer had in mind when he said pleasure was the absence of pain.

Play.

Against 1NT West decides to lead the ♦10. As an aside, it is often better to lead from a sequential holding than a broken suit. This explains why West prefers a Diamond lead to a Heart even though his Hearts are stronger than his Diamonds.

East takes the first three Diamond tricks and then leads from **his** sequence: the ♥J. This neatly skewers our ♥K and, no matter what we do, His Majesty the King suffers the fate of royal execution. Having taken four Heart tricks West cashes the ♦9 and the ♠A. At this point East-West graciously allow us to mop up the last four tricks for three down.

"It's not my fault!" claims North, defensively, if somewhat inaccurately, "I couldn't bid, I only had 4 points and a wretched Spade suit".

If this deal doesn't convince you the need to bid with a weak hand and a five-card suit when partner opens 1NT we don't think anything ever will...