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Taking out 1NT into weak five and six-card suits. ACOL version. Part 2 of 2. Updated spring 2015

VB01 #3 Weakness TO of 1NT Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 2S By: South
Date: 24/03/2016	Board #: 1
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ JT2	
	♥ A62	
	♦ AK4	
	♣ Q742	
West		East
♠ A93		♠ 85
♥ KQJ9		♥ 874
♦ J7		♦ Q852
♣ JT53		♣ AK96
	South	
	♠ KQ764	
	♥ T53	
	♦ T963	
	♣ 8	

This series continues the theme of responding to 1NT with weak, shapely hands.

Hand 1: Here we emphasise the need of rescuing partner from an opening bid that is destined for failure.

In playing the hand we expand on the concept of **drawing trumps**.

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

Lead: ♥ K

Bidding.

Over partner's 1NT opening (12 to 14 points) we have to decide whether to bid or to Pass. On this hand (a 5-4-3-1 shape) it is clear to remove partner's bid to 2♠, preferring to play this hand in a suit contract rather than in No-trumps.

Why? Because such shapely hands usually play poorly in No-trumps and play better with a trump suit. Often much better.

If you have played through Part 1 of this "Weakness take-out of 1NT" series you will have understood the idea of removing partner's 1NT with a weak hand, and that partner will always respect your decision and Pass.

Play.

Against 2♠, West leads the obvious ♥K, the top of a sequence.

As soon as dummy comes down we immediately thank partner as a general courtesy and subsequently begin the usual procedure of **Counting** and **Planning**.

Remember – only lunatics and geniuses play quickly at trick one. The human brain is not built to absorb two bridge hands and map out a strategy in an instant. Take your time and assess your assets.

In a suit contract (as here) it is usually helpful to *count losers* as well as winners. In 2♠ we'd want to ensure that we do not have six (or more!) losers. The count of losers shows us that we have one Spade loser, two Heart losers, one (possibly two) Diamond losers and a Club loser.

So the worst case scenario is that we have six losers if we have to lose two Diamond tricks. If we could reduce that to one Diamond loser we'd be in good shape.

What about *winners*? Well, it is easy to see that we have four Spade tricks (once the ♠A has been driven out), one Heart trick and two Diamond tricks. That's seven. This is comforting in a way because the arithmetic balances:

seven winners, six losers. Things don't always balance like this and some hands can be very awkward to analyse.

That's by-the-by. We have completed the preliminary Count and need to form a Plan. How could we generate an eighth trick (or avoid a sixth loser; it amounts to the same thing)?

After winning the opening Heart lead with dummy's ♥A we should turn our attention to Spades and we should **draw trumps**, not forgetting to count them as they are played. Here, we have a total of eight trumps between us and dummy, leaving five for the opponents.

At trick two we play the ♠J and West takes this trick with the ♠A as East follows suit.

West cashes two top Hearts and then turns his attention to Clubs, leading the ♣J. We trump the second round and play another round of trumps, both opponents following. That means four trumps have been played and one more round of trumps will extract the final trump from East or West.

Having completed that task we turn our attention to our *side-suit*, Diamonds. The play here is to cash the ♦A K and see what happens. It is entirely possible that we have two losers in this suit but here West obligingly drops the ♦J on the second top Diamond honour.

This promotes the ♦10 9 in our hand into useful cards. By playing a third round of Diamonds we drive out East's ♦Q and set up the ♦10 as a winner or, if you prefer, avoid a second Diamond loser.

It is worth noting that we would have made a third Diamond trick if each opponent had three Diamonds – after taking the ♦A K a third round would have seen the ♦Q and ♦J “crash” on the same trick with the effect that the ♦10 was again set up as a winner.

Anyway, we emerge with eight tricks – four Spades, one Heart and three Diamonds. If you prefer to look at it from the other perspective, we lose one Spade (the ♠A), two Hearts, one Club and one Diamond.



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VB01 #3 Weakness TO of 1NT Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 2H
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North

♠ A42
♥ J98
♦ KQ8
♣ K532

West
♠ Q975
♥ K72
♦ 732
♣ A74



East
♠ JT8
♥ A3
♦ AT64
♣ JT98

South

♠ K63
♥ QT654
♦ J95
♣ Q6

So far we have been dealing with weak, unbalanced hands over partner's 1NT opening and the need to make **weakness take-outs**.

What should you do when your hand is essentially *balanced*? Bid or Pass?

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

Lead: ♠ 5

Bidding.

Over partner's 1NT opening (12 to 14 points) we have to decide whether to bid 2♥ or to Pass. We have been saying for some time now that 5·3·3·2 hands are essentially balanced; so should we take out 1NT into a five-card suit with a balanced hand?

In fact, statistics show that it is generally the right move to take-out to our five-card suit even with this type of balanced hand (that is: 5·3·3·2).

If partner has four trumps it is certainly the right thing to do (a nine-card fit is where we want to play, rather than 1NT) and if partner has three trumps we'd have eight trumps between us and 2♥ is probably a better spot than 1NT.

There are tactical and scoring considerations here as well. Many players will remove 1NT into two of a major with a five-card suit but will Pass 1NT when holding a five-card minor. The reasons are a little subtle but they are sound – in the meantime we suggest you go with the flow.

Play.

Against our 2♥, West leads the ♠5. With a broken suit (that is: one not headed by a sequence) West chooses to lead the fourth-highest card.

This hand revolves around the principle of **drawing trumps** (and not forgetting to count them!)

We should start with a **Count** and **Plan** (this is always true but it bears repetition). In a suit contract we should note *losers* as well as *winners*.

In terms of *losers* there is one Spade (a slow loser but a loser nonetheless), two Heart losers (you cannot avoid paying the ferryman when you are missing the Ace and King of trumps!), one Diamond and one Club. Pleasingly, that totals only five losers.

Counting *winners* we see that we have two Spades, three Hearts (when the top ones have

been knocked out) two (slow) Diamonds and a (slow) Club. That totals eight so we can see eight winners and five losers. A neatly balanced piece of accountancy.

The Plan is to draw trumps and then, painstakingly, force the ♦A and the ♣A from the opponents' reluctant, grasping mitts, setting up slow tricks in the minors. We have, as bridge players say, a lot of work to do.

We take the first Spade lead (it doesn't matter where – we chose the ♠A on table) and immediately set about drawing trumps. The ♥8 runs to West's ♥K and he continues with Spades. We take the ♠K and play another trump to East's ♥A, noting that West follows suit. East plays a third Spade and West takes his ♠Q.

Now, West is in a hole, not wanting to play either Diamonds or Clubs. A further Spade lead would be useless as we could trump that in either hand. So, with a shrug, he flicks a Heart onto the table just to get off lead. Having noted that both opponents followed to two previous rounds of trumps we know that this is the last of the enemy's trumps.


So, with trumps drawn, we should set about the *side-suits*. We knock out the ♦A (a low Diamond to the ♦J and a small Diamond to the ♦Q) and then knock out the ♣A. Finally we emerge with eight tricks and the contract.



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VB01 #3 Weakness TO of 1NT Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 2S By: South
Date: 24/03/2016	Board #: 3
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ 963	
	♥ AKQ	
	♦ K732	
	♣ Q93	
West		East
♠ Q2		♠ KJT
♥ T9		♥ J7642
♦ A986		♦ T5
♣ AT854		♣ KJ2
	South	
	♠ A8754	
	♥ 853	
	♦ QJ4	
	♣ 76	

Firstly you have a decision to make in the bidding. Do you "pull" 1NT or Pass it?

Then you have to play the deal in a fair contract. Counting the opponent's cards is key on this deal – have you got a hold of the technique yet?

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

Lead: ♥ T

Bidding.

On this deal, in similar vein to Hand 2, we remove partner's 1NT to 2♠ despite holding a hand that may appear suitable for No-trumps. Since it's possible that partner has three- or four-card support for Spades, playing in a suit contract rates to be better than 1NT.

The same principle applies here as with unbalanced hands; our suit may be worth only one trick in 1NT but worth two or three tricks in 2♠. Yes, we have a balanced hand (5·3·3·2) but it is still generally right to "pull" 1NT to a five-card major suit.

Play.

Playing in 2♠, this contract revolves around the trump suit and illustrates (again) the importance of drawing trumps.

West leads the ♥10 and we win that in dummy. Before we analyse this deal fully just look what would happen if we don't draw trumps; say we play two further rounds of Hearts. West would be able to ruff the third Heart with the ♠2, and East would subsequently be able to take two trump tricks with his ♠K J 10.

The opponents are entitled to two trump tricks; the Great Dealer in the Sky has ensured that East-West will make two tricks in Spades on this deal. What we cannot afford is to lose a trick to the ♠2 as well – it would be downright humiliating.

Right. Let's perform a **Count** and **Plan** here...

Counting **losers** we have an unknown number of Spades as we cannot know (at the outset of the hand) how the suit is splitting. With the most favourable lie (three trumps in one opponent's hand and two in the other) we'd have just two losers. We have no Heart losers, one Diamond loser and two Club losers. It should be clear that a loss of three trump tricks would spell defeat as we are sure to lose three tricks in the minors.

A count of winners gives us three Hearts and two (slow) Diamonds. We need three Spades,

therefore, and need the trumps to be favourably placed for that to happen. The actual location of the honour cards is irrelevant – it's the fact that we need the suit to split as evenly as possible (three and two) that is important.

The Plan? Well, it is to draw trumps ASAP.

After winning the opening Heart lead on table we immediately play a trump to the Ace and follow with another trump. This clears as many of the opponents' trumps away in the shortest possible time. We note with considerable relief that both East and West follow to both rounds of Spades so the suit is breaking in the best way.

East is left with the master trump, which he decides to cash immediately. The defence cashes two rounds of Clubs and tries a third round, which we trump.

Now it's a case of dotting *is* and crossing *ts*. We knock out the ♦A by leading the ♦Q and we have the rest once West takes his ♦A.

Note that had Spades split 4-1 then there would be nothing we could have done to prevent three trump losers and we would have been defeated in 2♠.


That's just the way it is sometimes. When it happens, live with it.



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VB01 #3 Weakness TO of 1NT Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 2S By: South
Date: 24/03/2016	Board #: 4
Dealer: West	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

	North		
	♠ T753		
	♥ 95		
	♦ KQ74		
	♣ AKQ		
West		East	
♠ AQ		♠ KJ	
♥ AQ743		♥ K862	
♦ 9852		♦ AT	
♣ T9		♣ 86543	
	South		
	♠ 98642		
	♥ JT		
	♦ J63		
	♣ J72		

Counting the opponent's trumps is helpful in determining how many winners or losers you may have in trumps.

The *split* of those trumps (how they divide amongst the enemy) may well prove crucial.

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

Lead: ♣ T

Bidding.

Were you man enough (sorry, ladies!) to bid 2♠ over partner's 1NT opening, even with a poor hand such as this?

We should bid 2♠ and try to look confident. If we were to Pass 1NT, would our Spades be worth anything? We think not.

However, in 2♠, our Spades may be worth one or two (even three!) trump tricks. That's certainly a good enough reason to contract for a level higher as we will get those tricks back (with interest) in return.

Sure, 2♠ will *probably* fail but 1NT is *sure* to fail. This may well be a case of damage limitation (say, 2♠ down one against 1NT down plenty)

Play.

Anyway, having "pulled" 1NT to 2♠ we receive the defence of the ♣10 lead from West. This appears to be from a sequence; we cannot know at the outset that it's from shortage. Notice that West does not lead a Heart away from the ♥A.

We hasten to **Count** and **Plan**. Does this contract have a chance of making? Note that we should count losers as well as winners.

A *count of losers* shows we have to lose two Hearts and the ♦A for three certain losers. Were we to lose three trump tricks (and we are missing the ♠A K Q J!) then we'd be down.

A *count of winners* shows that we have no Hearts, two slow Diamonds and three Clubs. So three Spade winners would be enough to make the contract – is that possible? Yes!

To succeed in this contract we can only afford two Spade losers. Here are the possible divisions of Spades:

4-0 split: This would not be good for us as we'd then lose four trump tricks (one opponent would hold the ♠A K Q J)

3-1 split: This would be better but still not good enough since we'd then lose three Spade tricks.

2-2 split: This would be perfect. Assuming we keep playing trumps we'd be able to draw the enemy's trumps and restrict them to only two Spade winners.

So, after winning the Club opening lead, we turn our attention to the trump suit. At first we might think "My trumps are so weak why do I want to play on them?"

The reason is that we want to force out the enemy's trumps – and quickly. If trumps **do** break 2-2 do we want our opponents to take more than two trump tricks? Certainly not! To prevent any adverse ruffing we must make the opponents play their trumps as fast as we can.

We do not want to give our opponents any chance to ruff a Diamond or a Club. That we they'd make three trump tricks and 2♠ would fail.

So we lead a trump, regain the lead a few moments later and play another trump. Now we enjoy the expressions of anguish on the opponents' faces as the remaining Spade honours "crash" on the same trick.

2♠ is now cold (bridge players' jargon for "easy") with three Spade tricks, three Club tricks and a couple of Diamonds.


Note that East-West can make a lot of tricks in Hearts. Tricky, though, for either of them to bid.



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VB01 #3 Weakness TO of 1NT Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 2S By: South
Date: 24/03/2016	Board #: 5
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

	North	
	♠ A74	
	♥ A92	
	♦ KQJ3	
	♣ T98	
West		East
♠ JT6		♠ KQ
♥ QJT4		♥ K653
♦ A8		♦ 974
♣ KQ62		♣ AJ53
	South	
	♠ 98532	
	♥ 87	
	♦ T652	
	♣ 74	

Not all contracts are destined to make. Sometimes you reach a decent contract and you fail due to an unlucky lie of the adverse cards; does that mean someone bid too much? Of course not.

On this deal, your contract may not be a favourite to make but you can at least take some comfort that you will be in the least bad contract.

Also, there is a very interesting upside...

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

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

On this deal, partner opens 1NT and, with a 5-3-3-2 hand that's just a Ten better than a Yarborough, we pull it to 2♠.

[Editor's note: *A Yarborough is a hand with no card higher than a Nine. Named after the Earl of Yarborough, an 18th-century nobleman, who, tired of hearing his colleagues complain of holding worthless cards, laid 1000-1 odds against holding such a bad hand. He did well, since the true odds are closer to 2000-1].*

"Bid 2♠, even with zero points!?" Yes, even with nothing at all. Make that **especially** with nothing at all. Our hand may be worth one or two tricks in Spades but it is worth nine tenths of sweet Fanny Adams in No-trumps.

Play.

West leads the ♥Q against our 2♠ contract and after counting our losers and winners, we conclude that this contract is probably (make that "certainly") destined to fail.

We have two Spade losers (if we're lucky), one Heart loser, one Diamond loser and two Club losers for a total of six losers. And that's on a good day. If trumps are splitting badly we may be heading for a heavy defeat.

In terms of **winners** we have three Spades (on a good day), one Heart and three Diamonds. Even with a following wind that's one trick short.

We win the opening lead with the ♥A; do we want to draw trumps first or set up our side-suit (Diamonds) first? Well, we probably ought to draw trumps first. The side-suit can wait and, besides, we don't want to open the route to a potential Diamond ruff for the opponents. It seems like drawing trumps is the best way to go about this hand.

After winning the ♥A we cash the ♠A, drawing a trump each from the opponents, and we then continue with another trump, relieved that both East and West follow suit. A simple calculation suggests that there is only one trump left outstanding – and it is a winning trump.

The opponents continue with two more rounds of Hearts so we ruff the third round leaving us with two trumps remaining in our hand. Should we play a further round of trumps – to flush out the master trump – or should we set up our side-suit?

As usual when the opponents have the boss trump we do best to ignore it and set about our business elsewhere – attending to the side-suit in this case. The opponents are entitled to their trump trick whenever they want but there is no need to waste time (and two of our trumps) in flushing it out.

After West takes his ♦A, the best he can do is to draw a round of trumps but luckily we will still have a trump left after that, helping us control the hand. We ruff the next lead (yet another Heart) and cash our remaining Diamond winners.

All in all, we take three Spade tricks, one Heart trick, and three Diamond tricks for one off. 50 points to the enemy.

Unhappy? Don't be! 1NT by North would have gone down more than one trick so stealing the auction in 2♠ and failing by one is a classic example of *damage limitation*. -50 is a mere pinprick.

But there's an even brighter side. With 26 points between them the opponents can make a contract themselves. Unsurprisingly, it's a game contract of 4♥. Played in Hearts East-West would lose just one Spade, one Heart, and one Diamond.


Given that our auction started off with 1NT – (Pass) – 2♠, who, out of East or West, should make a bid? Is it possible for East-West to reach 4♥? Fortunately this is not our problem.



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VB01 #3 Weakness TO of 1NT Part 2 ACOL	Contract: 2S
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ Q7		
	♥ J94		
	♦ AQ3		
	♣ A9642		
West		East	
♠ J4		♠ AT96	
♥ AQ7		♥ KT852	
♦ T984		♦ 6	
♣ KJ87		♣ QT3	
	South		
	♠ K8532		
	♥ 63		
	♦ KJ752		
	♣ 5		

What do you do if you land in the wrong contract? Panic? Blame partner? Start explaining to partner that it wasn't your fault?

Actually, it should be none of the above. Any excuse-making (or partner-blaming) in the post-mortem is considered bad form.

Mistakes happen and we all make our fair share of them.

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

Lead: ♦ T

Bidding.

On this deal we have a 5-5-2-1 hand, which is clearly unsuitable to play in No-trumps. After partner opens 1NT (showing, as ever, 12 to 14 points), we have a choice – should we "pull" to 2♠ or 2♦? Passing 1NT, of course, is out of the question.

Well, it's usually best to lean towards the major suit when presented with a choice and we should rarely neglect our majors regardless of the situation. The difference in suit quality (a suit headed by the King rather than by the King-Jack) is not the issue here.

As it turns out 2♦ is the place to be as we end up in an awkward 5-2 fit rather than a comfortable 5-3 fit. Rats! Essentially, though, it's a pure guess in choosing between Spades and Diamonds but, falling back on general principles, it's usually best to try our major suit. Next time partner will oblige with three Spades and two Diamonds. Maybe...

Play.

West leads the ♦10 against 2♠. This is not, in point of fact, a good lead for his side but it is by far and away the most attractive choice from his perspective. In general, sequence leads are good, safe leads and leads from broken honour holdings are risky.

A **Count** of *losers* shows us two or three Spade losers, two Heart losers, no Diamond loser (if the suit breaks nicely for us) and no Club loser. Not too bad. We appear to have enough *winner*s as well (three Spades, four Diamonds and a Club).

So the **Plan** should be to draw trumps and set about the side-suit (Diamonds). However, there is a fly in the ointment. The problem with a 5-2 trump fit is that the (nasty) opponents have six trumps and this often leads us to run out of trumps. When that happens we may lose control of hands, allowing the opponents to run off their long suits.

At trick one we take the ♦A in dummy. This adheres to the principle of *play the high cards*

from the short suit first. It also, as a minor side issue, keeps West in the dark about the location of the Diamond honours. From his seat he may have made a sagacious opening lead, setting up his partner's ♦K J. Never forget that the opponents are blind!

Next we set about trumps, starting with the ♠Q from the table. East takes his Ace and switches to his side's best suit, Hearts. We trump the third round and play the ♠K. Now what? Well, this is the key point. Should we play another trump or should we do something else?

You can see now, with 20-20 hindsight, what would happen if we led another Spade. East would cash both of his top trumps (the *defence* would draw trumps!) and we would be powerless to prevent East-West from taking a Heart trick or two. Ceding control of the hand in this manner would be poor play.

Instead, we leave the two master trumps at large and play on our side-suit, running off winners. We don't mind (at all) if the opposition trump our master Diamonds as our baby trumps become promoted to winning rank.

As the cards lie, East trumps the ♦Q and plays another Heart, causing us to ruff. Two can play at that game! We play another winning Diamond, forcing East to ruff and setting up our last Spade as the boss trump. We trump another Heart but cash two Diamonds and the ♣A for the contract.

Was this a tricky deal? You bet it was! Still, hands with this theme are not uncommon. Also, it may help to illustrate why in many deals we aim to locate an eight-card trump fit (or better). Playing with only seven trumps between us can be decidedly awkward.

We lose three trump tricks and two Hearts. We win (in a curious fashion), four Spades, three Diamonds and a Club.