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A set of hands to show the difference between a direct 1NT overcall and a 1NT overcall in 4th seat.

VB#12 Y2 The 1NT overcall SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 16/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North
 ♠ AQ74
 ♥ 5
 ♦ 753
 ♣ KJ872

West
 ♠ 9862
 ♥ QT4
 ♦ T962
 ♣ 64



East
 ♠ J
 ♥ A87632
 ♦ QJ8
 ♣ AT5

South
 ♠ KT53
 ♥ KJ9
 ♦ AK4
 ♣ Q93

This set of deals continues the theme of the 1NT overcall.

You should be aware (having played the first set of deals on this theme) that a 1NT overcall in the *direct seat* shows the same as if you'd opened 1NT – a hand of about 15-17 points. However, in the *balancing position*, a 1NT overcall shows far less, about 12-14 points or thereabouts.

(By *balancing position* we mean that the player on your left has opened the bidding and the opening bid has been Passed around to you).

Hand 1 tests your system knowledge.

West	North	East	South
-	P	1♥	1NT
P	2♣	P	2♠
P	4♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ 4

Bidding.

You are South with a 4-3-3-3 hand and 16 points. You are about to open 1NT when East, on your right, opens 1♥. Undeterred, you overcall 1NT instead, showing the same strength as an opening 1NT but guaranteeing useful cards in Hearts.

North now responds 2♣ – what does that mean? Well, a 2♣ response to a 1NT opening bid would be *Stayman* (asking for four-card majors) and there is no reason for it to change than meaning after an overcall.

The phrase some bridge players use in these circumstances is **System On** meaning that nothing has changed in your bidding toolbox, despite the fact that the auction differs somewhat.

Here, by the way, partner can only be interested in Spades. You wouldn't bother to bid 2♥ with four of those (East has Hearts, remember) so your choice would be between 2♦ and 2♠ depending on your holding in Spades. Here, you have four Spades so can bid an easy 2♠. Partner raises to 4♠ and the auction ends rapidly.

Play.

West leads a low Heart (the ♥4) and dummy is just what you want to see – 10 points, four trumps and a decent side-suit (a useful source of tricks).

East takes the ♥A and returns the ♦Q, around to the weakness on the table. Now, it may be tempting to take the ♦K, cash the ♥K and play to ruff Diamond and Heart winners on the table. Tempting but wrong. With a good side-suit available it is best play to make use of it.

If both black suits break 3-2 then there are **eleven** tricks available (four Spades, one Heart, two Diamonds and four Clubs). So you grab the ♦A and play trumps. When East drops the ♠J on the first round you suspect immediately (and correctly) that Spades are breaking 4-1. With that in mind you switch to Plan B and set up Clubs.

A wily East withholds his ♣A for a round and subsequently gives West a Club ruff – but that is the end of the party. When you regain the lead you can pull the remaining trumps and cash the long Clubs.

Ten tricks (rather than eleven) but that is a perfectly acceptable result. Note that 3NT would be a difficult contract after a Heart lead and return. Yes it **can** make but you have to play the hand with X-ray vision...



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VB#12 Y2 The 1NT overcall SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 16/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ AKT9	
	♥ J82	
	♦ 9753	
	♣ QJ	
West		East
♠ 85		♠ Q73
♥ 97643		♥ T
♦ 2		♦ KT864
♣ T9876		♣ AK53
	South	
	♠ J642	
	♥ AKQ5	
	♦ AQJ	
	♣ 42	

On this deal you have to make the most of subtle inferences during the bidding.

If you were to fail to do this you would end up in a vastly inferior contract.

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♦	1NT
P	2♣	P	2♥
P	3NT	P	4♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♦ 2

Bidding.

You are South, holding 17 points and a 4-4-3-2 hand. Your right-hand opponent (East) opens 1♦ and you have to find a bid. You might Double (which would work out fine if partner were to bid a major) but 1NT is a better call as it describes your hand more accurately (15-17 balanced with decent stops in Diamonds) and doesn't preclude you from finding a major-suit fit.

Partner now investigates the most suitable game with a Stayman 2♣ enquiry. You bid 2♥ (normal practice when holding both majors) and North now leaps to 3NT.

It is easy (too easy) to Pass this but the inferences are clear that North must have a four-card major (why fiddle about with 2♣ if he hasn't?). On that basis you should bid 4♠, fully expecting to see four-card Spade support on the table.

Play.

Your faith in partner is justified as dummy duly displays four trumps for you. Thank you, partner! West's lead of the ♦2 is highly suspicious as it bears all the hallmarks of a singleton.

Before we look at the play in too much detail we might ponder the fate of 3NT. That would be simple enough on a Diamond lead (or a major-suit lead for that matter). But if West did the right thing and lead a Club from his sequence East-West would be able to take the first five tricks...

Back to the plot in 4♠. You win the ♦J at trick one (an astute East not bothering to play the ♦K as he can easily read the lead and knows you have the ♦A Q J). Now, you mustn't take the Spade finesse – should you do so East would win and give his partner a Diamond ruff. The ♣A K would complete your ruin.

Best play is to cash the ♠A K and hope for a 3-2 Spade break (dropping ♠Q × would just be icing on the cake). When everyone follows to the two top Spades you can abandon the suit and

switch to Hearts, allowing the defense to take their boss trump when they want it.

As it is, East ruffs in early, cashes the ♣A K and you can then claim the rest (having taken the marked Diamond finesse).


Ten tricks and the contract.



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A set of hands to show the difference between a direct 1NT overcall and a 1NT overcall in 4th seat.

VB#12 Y2 The 1NT overcall SA	Contract: 1N
Date: 16/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ 843	
	♥ A64	
	♦ 742	
	♣ KQJ7	
West		East
♠ QJ		♠ K7652
♥ QJ73		♥ T52
♦ AKQJ5		♦ 9
♣ 54		♣ 8632
	South	
	♠ AT9	
	♥ K98	
	♦ T863	
	♣ AT9	

On some deals you can fall asleep and let the auction die young. However, bridge is a bidders' game and it is often right to fight for the part-score.

Are you worth a bid here?

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

Lead: ♦ A

Bidding.

You are South, dealer, with a 4-3-3-3 hand and 11 points. Naturally enough you Pass and watch as West's opening bid of 1♦ is Passed back to you. Now, you might well Pass and let West stew in his own juice but there are many points up for grabs on these part-score deals and it is generally unwise to give in too easily. Best is to try the effect of a *balancing* 1NT and try to gain a modest plus score for making a part-score your way. Partner cannot take you too seriously (you have Passed already, remember!); he can deduce that you have about 11 points, maybe a poor 12.

You may say that you have no Diamond stopper – and that is true – but the odds are in your favor that your side has something useful in Diamonds. If North has as little as ♦J × × (or even ♦J ×) then East-West cannot run off the suit. So your holding of ♦10 × × × may well come in handy.

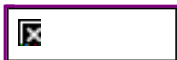
In the event, 1NT gets Passed out (a 2♦ call on the West hand would be unsound) and you await dummy with interest.

Play.

As it happens, North has no help for you in Diamonds. *C'est la vie*. Still, on this deal it doesn't matter. In 3NT it would but in 1NT a stopper is not always needed. You can just allow East-West to run off their suit and then take your tricks in turn.

There is nothing to the play of this hand (the interest is all in the bidding); as soon as you are in, on lead, you can cash seven tricks with ease.

The result (1NT making on the nose) is better for your side than watching East-West make 1♦. This is the point you should take on board here.



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A set of hands to show the difference between a direct 1NT overcall and a 1NT overcall in 4th seat.

VB#12 Y2 The 1NT overcall SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 16/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North		
	♠ 932		
	♥ AQ		
	♦ K9632		
	♣ AT9		
West		East	
♠ K8754		♠ J6	
♥ K		♥ T87653	
♦ Q874		♦ J	
♣ KQ2		♣ 8764	
	South		
	♠ AQT		
	♥ J942		
	♦ AT5		
	♣ J53		

Another deal where careful timing wins the day.

These hands need good planning to make – but where one opponent has bid we can often place a large proportion of the missing high cards.

West	North	East	South
1♠	P	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ 5

Bidding.

West (on your left) opens 1♠ and this floats around to you. With 12 points and a 4-3-3-3 hand you should now know that *balancing* with 1NT is the right action. Passing would be feeble (you can't allow the opponents to snatch the hand at the one-level) and Doubling for take-out is silly with secure Spade stops and a balanced hand. 1NT shows 12-14 (or so) in this position and that is what you have.

You are rather surprised when partner (who Passed over 1♠, remember) raises you to 3NT but there's nothing to do but Pass. When dummy goes down you can see partner's point. No way is that North hand worth a 2♦ overcall over 1♠.

Why not? Well, let's rehearse some of the arguments that we have used in previous editions of V-Blue. Firstly, the main suit is poor (you need a good suit for a two-level overcall). Secondly, the shape is 5-3-3-2 (it is extremely inadvisable to enter the fray at the two-level on essentially balanced hands. To do so is playing with fire). Thirdly, your suit is a minor (why bother? You are probably going to be outbid) and, fourthly, you have three low cards in the suit bid on your right. This is a real no-no for bidding although this point is not one that is known by many players.

Anyway, to overcall 2♦ with the North cards is very dangerous but after East has Passed 1♠ and you, as South, have protected with 1NT the perspective changes and North's raise to 3NT is eminently correct.

Play.

West leads a low Spade and you take East's ♠J with the ♠Q. **Counting your tricks** you can see two Spades, one Heart, two Diamonds and a Club. The Diamonds can surely be set up for four tricks (with a 3-2 break) and the Heart finesse is a strong favorite to succeed after West's opening bid.

You need to set up Diamonds but you don't want East to gain the lead to play a Spade through the ♠A 10. Also, you need to make some tricks with the Hearts. So you decide to

take the Heart finesse first and then play on Diamonds, probably trying to lose the first trick to West. When you play a Heart, West's ♥K pops up – how nice!

Now when you turn your attention to Diamonds East plays the ♦J. Taking stock you realise that your contract is now cold – you must make two Spades, three Hearts, four Diamonds and a Club. You need to *unblock* the Hearts by cashing the ♥Q and then develop the Diamonds by playing one to the ♦10. West takes the ♦Q and, in desperate trouble, tries the ♣K. You can take that with the ♣A, cash the Diamonds and actually make a second overtrick by knocking out the ♣Q.

Careful planning and timing makes the extras on this deal but there are important points in the bidding to take heed of, too.



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VB#12 Y2 The 1NT overcall SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 16/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

North
 ♠ J9643
 ♥ A9
 ♦ KT3
 ♣ 642

West
 ♠ K8
 ♥ KJ
 ♦ QJ62
 ♣ KT873



East
 ♠ 752
 ♥ T8653
 ♦ 874
 ♣ Q9

South
 ♠ AQT
 ♥ Q742
 ♦ A95
 ♣ AJ5

Sometimes you don't appear to have enough tricks for your contract.

Still, in doing the obvious thing (setting up your suit) you may just make the opponents do the hard work for you.

West	North	East	South
1♣	P	P	X
P	1♠	P	1NT
P	2NT	P	3NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♣ 7

Bidding.

West (on your left) opens 1♣ and this gets Passed around to you as South. With 17 points and a 4-3-3-3 hand you would like to overcall 1NT (that's the action you would take if 1NT were opened on your *right*) but partner wouldn't expect anywhere near as good a hand as this.

The best solution is to Double and then bid 1NT on the second round suggesting that you are too good to bid 1NT immediately. As 1NT is 12-14 in the *balancing seat* it follows that a 1NT "rebid" after Doubling is stronger, say 15-17 or thereabouts.

It must be admitted that this part of the game is something of a grey area – but most players would accept that South would be showing a strong No-trump sort of hand. Anyway, you Double 1♣, North replies with 1♠ and you rebid 1NT as planned. Sensing that you have a decent hand North raises to 2NT and you can go on to game.

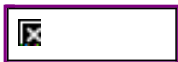
Play.

West leads a low Club and East produces the ♣Q. Given that East-West have just 15 points between them it is inconceivable that East has another honor card in his hand; West must have the ♠K and the ♥K to justify an opening bid. Crossing to dummy to try the Spade finesse is, therefore, a waste of time and effort.

A **count of tricks** shows just five *top winners* (one Spade, one Heart, two Diamonds and one Club) Playing on Spades will increase that because there are four certain Spade tricks once the ♠K has gone. Best is to develop the Spades by playing off the ♠A and ♠Q. (On some sunny days West might have the singleton ♠K – not today, however). West takes the ♠K and is stuck in a deep, deep hole, with nothing good to lead. He decides to set up his Clubs by playing the ♠K and another, giving you the ♣J.

That's your ninth trick (four Spades, one Heart, two Diamonds and two Clubs) so rather than mess about, you cash them for your contract.

As the cards lie you can actually make an overtrick. Do you care? No, not one jot. This was a tricky deal and making your contract is perfectly satisfactory, thank you very much.



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A set of hands to show the difference between a direct 1NT overcall and a 1NT overcall in 4th seat.

VB#12 Y2 The 1NT overcall SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 16/06/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♠	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ 9

Bidding.

The hand on your right (East) opens 1♠ and you (South) have a 4-3-3-3 hand with 17 points. Although not ideal you have little option but to overcall 1NT. You'd prefer to have a second Spade stop (♠K 10 × × would be much better) but unfortunately you weren't dealt it. North raises to 3NT, appreciating that his Clubs should provide you with a useful source of tricks in No-trumps.

Play.

West leads the ♠9 (his partner's suit) and you see that the contract isn't entirely safe. East puts on the ♠10 at trick 1 and you take stock. East's defense is cunning – he is hoping that West has another Spade and an entry somewhere; he doesn't know just how bad his partner's hand is.

Meanwhile you have to be careful. Although it may look certain that East has the ♠K it's not beyond the bounds of possibility that East has opened the bidding on, say

- ♠ A Q J 10 ×
- ♥ K J × × ×
- ♦ × ×
- ♣ ×

Now if you were to take the ♠K and try the Club finesse West would take his hypothetical ♠K and return a Spade and you would be defeated.

To stop these shenanigans you decide not to win the first trick and allow the ♠10 to win. East persists in Spades and you take your ♠K, quite confident that West has no more.

Now you need to develop the Clubs, without allowing East to get on lead. To do this you must make careful use of the two Diamond *entries* in the dummy. You play a low Diamond to the ♦J (playing the ♦K would be fatal) and run the ♣Q. If that lost you would still be secure as West would have no Spade to lead. As the cards are, it wins so you run the ♣J, which also holds. A third Club picks up the ♣K and now all that remains is to cross to the table with the neatly preserved ♦K (by overtaking the ♦Q) to run the Clubs.

North
 ♠ 52
 ♥ Q3
 ♦ KJ8
 ♣ QJT872

West
 ♠ 93
 ♥ 9764
 ♦ T76532
 ♣ 9



East
 ♠ AQJT8
 ♥ KJ82
 ♦ 9
 ♣ K54

South
 ♠ K764
 ♥ AT5
 ♦ AQ4
 ♣ A63

First you have to bid this hand and then you have to play it – the old, old story.

However, you have to be careful with this one and play with a great deal of safety in mind.

This careful play nets two overtricks. As it happens, **not** taking the ♠K at trick 1 made no difference to the outcome. *Let virtue be its own reward.*