

Tip of the month

This month's tip concerns the case for using **transfers in response to 1NT openings** and the opportunity they may give to opponents. The thoughts below were prompted by an 'off-the-cuff' remark made by yours truly some years ago. Within a conversation about whether the hand sitting over the transfer bidder should intervene or not, I observed than more often than not a transfer sequence reflected weakness on the part of the responder. On that basis, this might justify an intervention which others might see as overly aggressive.

Let's rehearse the three basic reasons for choosing to transfer:

1. It is usually preferable for the 1NT opener to become declarer so that any tenaces and unsupported honours are protected from the opening lead.
2. The transfer sequence makes it less obvious to the opponents that the player making the transfer bid is weak (notwithstanding the author's prejudices!)

Here is an example. In a natural sequence:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2H	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Both West and East know that North is weak and can therefore compete with more confidence.

But in the transfer sequence:

South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2D	Pass
2H	Pass	Pass	Pass

Neither East nor West knows how strong North is until he passes the transfer completion at which point East may feel unable to reopen on his own.

3. Some hands, particularly 11 point hands with a five card major, become difficult to bid opposite a 1NT (12-14) opening because:

- (a) a suit bid at the two level would be an underbid;
- (b) a suit bid at the three level would be an overbid; or,
- (c) an immediate 2NT bid, whilst giving an accurate view of point count, would conceal the possession of a five card major.

Consider the following hand:

S J85	S KQ1076
H K743	H AQ8
D A53	D 42
C KJ7	C 984

3NT will, and even 2NT may, fail on a diamond lead, and, without a favourable club position or a 3-3 heart break, 4S will also fail. But using a transfer sequence: 1NT 2H* *transfer to spades

2S	2NT**	** 11/12 pts
3S	Pass	

The 1NT opener can play in the comparative safety of 3S which will only fail if C AQ10 are all offside and there is no end play. If the 1NT opener is strengthened by 2 points (C KQJ instead of KJ7) we want to be in 4S via the same sequence but jumping to 4S on the third round.

Of course I have no problem per se with playing transfers. My point in the opening paragraph above is that when faced with a 1NT – transfer sequence, opponents should view the prospects for successful competitive bids in light of the chances of the transfer being a prelude to a weakness being revealed. During the next few sessions you play, just keep a note of how many transfers (yours and your opponents) lead to revealed weakness and how many show a stronger hand. That will give you rough odds for/against a borderline intervention during a transfer sequence. Being competitive wherever you can is particularly important and taking a calculated risk in that respect on occasion may turn a middle score into a top.

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