# **OPENING 1NT WITH A FIVE-CARD MAJOR.**

By Arthur Bennett.

Today’s topic is opening 1NT with a 5-card major. Many partnerships do this routinely, especially when they play a strong no-trump, but I believe it is equally effective with a weak no-trump.

When you pick up a hand like this, how do you assess it?

♠ A54 ♥KJ873 ♦QJT ♣Q5

Is it balanced or unbalanced? Well it is clearly more balanced than it is unbalanced despite having a 5-card suit and a 2-card suit.

How strong is it? It has 13 HCP and 8 Losers, a very poor opener however you assess it.

If you open 1H, does it have a rebid? Not really. If your partner responds 2C, you can’t really now bid 2NT without misrepresenting your strength. Playing 4-card major Acol, you could just about get away with repeating your hearts to show 5, but is such a suit really worth repeating. If you are playing 5-card majors, then it definitely isn’t worth repeating, because that would show 6.

This is clearly the sort of hand that you would like to bid once on and then go and have a coffee.

If you open 1NT on this hand, you feel the job has been done. Your partner knows you have a balanced hand, and that you have 12-14 HCP, and you don’t have to worry about finding a rebid.

Wouldn’t it be better or safer to be playing in hearts, you might wonder? A trump suit is only useful if you actually have a trump fit with your partner. If that doesn’t exist, you are likely to make the same number of tricks in any suit whether or not you are in a trump or a non-trump contract. This is particularly so when you have a good suit. For instance, a suit such as AKQJ4 is likely to make 5 tricks in either hearts or no-trumps. The heart suit in our sample hand leans a little towards playing in hearts because KJ873 might be difficult to establish in no-trumps, but you might get to ruff a couple of clubs in hearts. Remember though, your shortage in clubs doesn’t guarantee any more tricks in hearts. If you find that your partner has 3 rag hearts and a singleton somewhere, he is likely to get two ruffs in.

So, is there a risk therefore that we miss out on a 5:3 heart fit? Not really, because if partner has enough points to bid, he can use Stayman and he can learn about your hearts. It is even better if you have agreed to use Puppet Stayman. There is another slight advantage in opening 1NT in those cases when they then double you for penalty. You could now bid 2H with at least a chance of not being doubled.

There are certain balanced hands where you should not open 1NT with a 5-card major. This is when you also hold 4 of the other major, because Puppet Stayman cannot elucidate this shape. It is also unwise to open 1NT when the majority of your HCP are all in any two biddable suits. Both of these hands should be opened 1H: ♠QT54 ♥KJ873 ♦KT ♣A5, ♠J4 ♥KQJ86 ♦AK75 ♣95.

Now let’s look at Puppet Stayman. This is a marvellous gadget. It enables you to ask Opener if he has either a 4-card major or a 5-card major. It simultaneously acts as a rangefinder, so that you can discover Opener’s exact strength. It’s a bit tricky and maybe not for the faint-hearted. Here it is in its full glory.

# ***2C\* OVER 1NT (PUPPET STAYMAN AND RANGEFINDER).***

We can use this over ALL our no-trump hands. We can use it over 1NT, 1NT as an Overcall, and whichever sequences we use to show really big balanced hands. 2C\* Puppet Stayman shows an invitational hand or better. It does not promise a 4-card major, but it will be balanced with at least a 3-card major. It will not contain a 5-card major. The responses:

* **2D\*: One or both 4-card major(s). No reference to diamonds! No indication of strength.**
* **2H\*: Minimum hand with 5 hearts.**
* **2S\*: Minimum hand with 5 spades.**
* **2NT\*: Minimum hand with no 4-card major.**
* **3H\*: Maximum hand with 5 hearts.**
* **3S\*: Maximum hand with 5 spades.**
* **3NT\*: Maximum hand with no 4-card major.**

All the responses to 2C\* Puppet Stayman state whether Opener is minimum or maximum, except the response of 2D\*. Responder’s rebids over the sequence 1D\* - 2C\* - 2D\*

* **2H\*: Invitational points with 4 SPADES!**
* **2S\*: Invitational points with 4 HEARTS!**
* **2NT\*: Invitational points and no 4-card major.**
* **3C\*: Invitational points and 4 cards in BOTH majors.**
* **3D\*: Game points and 4 cards in BOTH majors.**
* **3H\*: Game points and 4 SPADES!**
* **3S\*: Game points and 4 HEARTS!**
* **3NT\*: Game points and no 4-card major.**

Because the 2D\* response did not clarify whether Opener was minimum or maximum, it is essential that Responder now show whether he is game-going or merely invitational. Responder must bid 3H\* or 3S\* with a maximum hand and 4 of the OTHER major. Opener MUST NOT assume a long natural suit (Responder would have transferred!)

This is the tricky part of Puppet Stayman. Opener must be conscious that Responder (the Puppeteer) will NEVER bid a natural major. To help you, I am now going to work a bit of hypnotic magic on you. Stare at the image below and notice very carefully that when the Puppeteer shows you a heart, it actually contains a spade, and when he shows you a spade, it actually contains a heart. Whenever you see your partner write 2C in response to your 1NT, you will think Puppet Stayman, and you will think Puppeteer, and it will be impossible for you not to call to mind this image. You will remember the significance of the spade within the heart, and the heart within the spade.

Diagram

Description automatically generated