

SOME BALANCING TRICKS

When an auction has started:

1-any Pass Pass ?

there are a few different 'rules' in place.

The reason for these rules is that the balancing hand is allowed to be up to a King weaker than would be expected for the same bids in the direct seat.

For instance, in this position a double could be 8 or 9 HCP with heart shortage, allowing for partner to have made a "trap pass", i.e. passing and hoping penalise the opening bid. Overcalls can be fairly aggressive too, although a few exceptions apply, which is the reason for this article.

Since our doubles and bids can be weaker, there are an even larger number of potential bids able to be made. This means that a couple of bids change from their 'normal' meaning.

A JUMP BID

In this scenario, a jump bid is NOT weak. It is illogical for it to be weak, given that RHO is known to be very weak in HCP and partner hasn't taken any action. That simply means that your opening bidder has an even bigger hand and is for another chance to bid.

A jump bid is an intermediate bid, showing about 11-14 HCP and a decent 6-card suit. It is designed to allow the partner to judge whether to pass, invite game or bid game (with 3NT often being a consideration, if you think you have 6 winners in the suit).

The South hand is a typical example:

	♠ A 2		
	♥ Q 10 5 4		
	♦ Q 7 6 5		
	♣ Q 5 4		
♠ 3		♠ 10 8 7 4	
♥ A K J 8 7		♥ 9 6	
♦ A J 10 3		♦ 4 2	
♣ K 6 3		♣ J 10 9 7 2	
	♠ K Q J 9 6 5		
	♥ 3 2		
	♦ K 9 8		
	♣ A 8		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♥	Pass	Pass	?

South has a perfect hand for a 2♠ bid, showing his 11-14 HCP and a good 6-card suit. Now it is North's turn to shine. They have the ♠A, so should assume that there are 6 spade tricks. They can allocate about 5-6 HCP in spades to South's hand, so South still has about 6 HCP in other suits. Now, bearing in mind partner's outside values, that collection of Queens, which are not good for 4♠, are probably excellent for 3NT.

North should bid 3NT. It is not a terminal bid; South can correct to 4♠ with a 7-card suit or some extreme shortage in hand, but would pass on this (essentially) balanced hand.

It is easy to make 9 tricks in 3NT, and most unlikely that you will make 10 tricks in spades.

A JUMP TO 2NT

If an auction starts with:

1♠ Pass Pass ?

now a jump to 2NT is not an Unusual 2NT bid. Once again, that would not be a practical use for the bid, because, in all likelihood, that marks the opponents as having one or both majors. You don't want to hear them continue with 3♥, followed by a raise to 4♥.

Many people play that a 1NT bid in this situation is weaker than usual. Many people play it that "King less", i.e. (11) 12-14 HCP. This means that with 15-18 HCP, you have to start with a 'big double' then rebid 1NT. So, that makes things very tricky with better hands again!

[Over time, I have adopted a slightly higher range when 1-Major is passed around to me, because you don't want to hear partner bid 2-minor and then have to rebid 2NT with 16 HCP, so now my balancing 1NT after 1-Major shows 13-16 HCP. That's just my choice; many would disagree.]

Anyway, because of the above structure, the jump to 2NT in the balancing seat traditionally shows about 19-20/21 HCP, with system on (Stayman and transfers).

A typical hand would be something like:

♠ K 5
♥ A Q J
♦ A 10 2
♣ A Q 10 5 4

The 2NT bid here would be a very comfortable way to show this hand. After all, you don't really want to double and have to deal with some higher spade bid from partner.

A friend asked me about the following South hand:

♠ K 5
♥ A K J
♦ A 5
♣ A Q 10 6 4 3

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♦	Pass	Pass	?

What would I bid?

It seems too big for a 2NT bid. Doubling then bidding shows a big hand, but not this big in this position (because we bid on so many hands, it's more like 16+ HCP).

One option would be to double then plan to cue bid the opponent's suit. Personally, I would make the practical bid of 3NT instead.

What happened at the table?

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♦	Pass	Pass	Double
Pass	1♠	2♦	3♣
Pass	?		

North held:

♠ Q 10 8 3 2
♥ 8 2
♦ 9 6 4
♣ K 9 2

South's auction hasn't done justice to the strength of her hand, and one has to have some sympathy for North's pass. Having chosen to double, South would have done better to cue-bid 3♦ but, really, a practical 3NT bid would have been better first-time around or second-time around.

Even a 2NT bid would have been closer to the mark first time round, but I prefer 3NT with the good 6-card suit.

Remember these two quirky bids in the balancing seat. They are designed to ease the pressure on the partnership with all the bidding options that one has when opener's bid is passed around to you, so make use of them (having discussed them with your regular partner/s!).

By the way, despite being able to apply both last week's rule (don't balance if you are really short in an unbid Major) and this week's rules, one of my most disastrous balancing hands occurred on a hand where I held 5-5 in the Majors (so no rules were being broken).

The auction:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South (me)</i>
1♦	Pass	Pass	2♦ (5-5 Majors)
5♣	Pass	5♦	All Pass

When the 5♣ bid landed on the table, I instantly thought, "Whoops!" Mind you, I would always balance with a 5-5 Major hand. Bridge can be so 'imperfect'.

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