

Transfer with a 5-card major?

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Should I Transfer?

Your partner opens 1NT. You hold:

♠J 7 6 4 2
♥10 2
♦Q 3 2
♣J 3 2

Should you transfer to 2♠? Or should you leave it in 1NT?

What about:

♠8 7 6 4 2
♥8 2
♦8 3 2
♣8 3 2

What about all the other lousy hands with a 5-card major?

I used to try to use my judgment. Maybe with the second hand (no outside help), I would have transferred. Perhaps the first hand (with the side queen and jack) was more suitable for notrump, so I would have passed.

Sometimes I guessed right, sometimes not. I'd drive myself crazy.

Now, I have a better solution. I always (as 100%) transfer. Whenever I have a bad hand (no game interest) with a 5-card major, and partner opens 1NT, I transfer to the major. This has been working more than well enough, and I can free my brain to worry about other (more difficult) areas of the game. I no longer have to worry about zigging when I should have zagged.

A few notes:

1. If partner has made a 1NT overcall, that changes things a bit. Now, I don't automatically transfer with all 5-card majors. If I have length in the opponents' suit and/or lots of notrump-looking cards, I might leave it in 1NT. For example, LHO opens 1♥ and partner overcalls 1NT, I'd probably pass with:

♠J 7 6 4 2
♥J 3 2
♦J 3 2
♣3 2

With partner likely having heart length (picture ♥Q1054), we rate to do poorly in spades. Furthermore, partner's 1NT overcall could sometimes be off shape, and might even include a singleton.

He might overcall their 1♥ opening with 1NT holding:

♠K
♥Q 10 5 4
♦A Q 10 3
♣K Q J 3

Opposite such a hand, it would not be fun to play in 2♠.

2. If partner overcalls (typically after an opposing preempt) with a strong and natural 2NT or 3NT, I don't automatically transfer. High-level notrump overcalls, while "natural and balanced," are often off-shape. Especially a 3NT overcall can be based on a running suit. So, when my partner overcalls notrump at a high level, I am not in any rush to transfer to a so-so 5-card major.

Those 2 little notes are minor points. Please don't lose my main lesson, which is to try my theory of always transferring to any 5-card major when partner opens 1NT and you have a bad hand.