

Bridge Bidding When First to Speak has a No-Trump Distribution

There are some very cut-and-dried Standard American (SA) sequences that begin with no-trump distributed hands. This discussion covers the basics. The first to speak player with the no-trump distribution will be called “Player A” or just A. His partner will be “Player B” or B.

Player A Starts

Depending on his point count, here is how player A starts off:

<u>level</u>	<u>point count</u>	<u>first bid</u>	<u>subsequent bidding</u>
-3	0-5	pass	passive
-2	6-9	pass	responsive, helpful
-1	10-12	pass	jump
0	13-14	one of a suit	one notrump
1	15-17	one no-trump	follow partners directions
1.5	18-19	one of a suit	jump in no-trump
2	20-21	two no-trump	follow partner’s directions
2.5	22-23	two clubs	two no-trump, follow partner’s directions
3	24-25	two clubs	three no-trump, follow partner’s directions
3.5	25-26	two clubs	four no-trump, follow partner’s directions
	27 or more	Happens only on April 1 st —enjoy the prank	

Opening three no-trump is based on a long (run-able) suit and is not part of this discussion.

I have added the “level” identifier to simplify the discussion. Notice that a one no-trump opener is the “one level” and a two no-trump opener is the “two level”.

Side Note: The most common SA variation to the above is when level one is “16-18 no-trump”. Now level 0 becomes 13-15 pts and all the higher levels move up one point, e.g. two no-trump opener becomes 21-22, etc. There are some very old SA variations (60 years) that have three point ranges for some of the higher levels.

Player B for Levels 1 and Higher

FUNDAMENTAL FACTOR: Player B knows the joint strength of the partnership. Player A does not. Player B has the responsibility (and the obligation) for placing the contract. Player A needs to cooperate and abide by player B's decisions.

Here are some no-brainer situations:

Situation-1: Player A opens one no-trump (15-17). Player B has zero points. What should B be thinking?

Here are the WRONG answers to that question—

Wow partner sure got himself into trouble.

Maybe I'll get a better hand next time.

My hand is too weak to bid.

I am bored. Where are the appetizers?

Here is what Player B should be thinking:

At one no-trump our side will be down three or four tricks. I know this but my partner does not. I need to do damage control for our side. How can I get us out of no-trump?

Notice that B should be thinking in terms of the partnership—not his/her own hand. That is because B knows the partnership strength and A does not.

Easy Escapes in Situation-1

B holds

spades	xxxxxx
hearts	xxx
diamonds	xxx
clubs	x

B's action: Bid two hearts (transfer), then pass A's two spade response. In two spades B's hand will produce 2-4 tricks and several entries to lead toward A's high cards. You might even make two spades!

B holds

spades	xxxx
hearts	xxxx
diamonds	xxxxx
clubs	--

B's action: Bid two clubs (Stayman), then pass A's response. Most likely the partnership will be playing in an eight-card fit. There will be ruffing entries to dummy. This is way better than one on-trump. Note that A should not be allowed to bid two no-trump as a stayman response.

Another no-brainer situation:

Situation-2: Player A opens one no-trump (15-17). B has a flat 17 points. What should B be thinking?

Here are the WRONG answers to that question—

I better let partner know that I have a good hand.

Sounds like we might have a slam. I better check on aces and kings first.

If partner has a five-card suit I should try to find it.

We can take our time and carefully show each other what our hands are like.

Here is what Player B should be thinking:

Our partnership has 32-34 points. That is enough for a small slam but not enough for a grand slam. Whether we have three aces or four aces we should be in six. I know this but my partner does not. I need to keep this simple. There is no need to help the defense by giving anything away about our hands.

Notice (again) that B should be thinking in terms of the partnership—not his/her own hand. That is because B knows the partnership strength and A does not.

B's correct bid in Situation-2 is six no-trump. One of the most common (amateur) errors is to ask for aces when you don't need to. People who make their living playing bridge manifest simple bidding sequences: one spade, three spades, four spades; one no-trump, three no-trump; etc. In a pairs event, every time that you help the defense you put yourself lower in the field. Asking for aces will inform the defense as to whether they have an ace or not and allows for a lead directing double. Even if the defense does not make a lead directing double that is useful information for them, e.g. they think, "my partner had a risk free chance to double five spades for a lead and he/she did not, therefore spades is not the best suit for me to lead to him/her".

Side Note: When the hand belongs to the opponents, be mindful of opportunities to direct the defense. For example: your right-hand opponent bids two-clubs Stayman and you hold QJ10xx of clubs and trash outside of clubs—you should double. Partner now has a safe lead to make no matter what the final contract is. This bid is risk-free because even if two clubs doubled would be a disaster, the opponents cannot possibly know that—they need to continue on with the Stayman sequence. Suppose instead you have QJ10xx of diamonds. Eventually your partner may be debating between which minor to lead, when you pass two clubs he/she will know that you DO NOT have solid clubs. This is called a "negative inference".

Side Note to the side note: There is no takeout double in front of the huge hand, only behind it. Doubles of artificial bids are almost always lead directing.

Note to Author: Continue on with Stayman and Transfers here.