

The Raptor and Roadrunner 1NT Overcalls

Pete Matthews Jr – <http://3nt.xyz> – © January 30, 2012

The Raptor 1NT overcall has been popular since the early 1980s in Poland and Sweden, although without that name. The convention was re-invented by Ron Sutherland and his son who published it in a Toronto magazine in 1993 as "wRAP around TORonto" style. The Raptor 1NT describes a hand with a major suit and a longer minor, typically 4-5 or 4-6. The high card strength is usually that of a normal opening bid, although some play it weaker when wanting a lead.

The methods Brian Duran and I have been playing, at matchpoints only, are described on the next page. Some of the variations played by others are noted, as well as the standard defense and a second defense recommended by Marvin French. If you choose to play Raptor our way, all you should need is that page.

Raptor intends to prevent losing a major suit fit, as might happen when overcalling in the longer minor suit. My analysis shows that the Raptor 1NT overcall does provide an occasional advantage. On the down-side, 1NT may be too high – and with the standard defense, the opponents will likely know what to do. In addition, you have to accommodate the lack of the natural 1NT overcall. All-in-all, Raptor appears result-neutral, although fun to play.

These conclusions prompted me to design the Roadrunner 1NT overcall, which promises exactly four cards in the highest unbid suit, and five or six cards in another unbid suit. With Roadrunner, you must no longer bid 1NT over a minor suit opening, when your major is hearts. However, you may bid 1NT in that situation when holding four spades and longer hearts. This reduces the frequency of the 1NT overcall, but appears to improve the results slightly.

In evaluating these systems, I used 34 deals appropriate for a Raptor overcall. I then examined all the Flannery deals (4=5 majors) from my article on that topic, and included the six where East would open one of a minor in front of the Flannery hand. (The number of these deals may be out of proportion to the likelihood of the other deals.) I scored Raptor and Roadrunner auctions as Good, Bad, Neutral or N/A against standard bidding on these deals. Deals with Good or Bad results are listed in the table below; read a tilde (~) as "somewhat". The deals themselves, auctions, and analysis are in a [separate file](#). Roadrunner scored slightly better than Raptor. Consider these results as an indication, not as definitive – more deals would be useful. It's worth noting that only about a quarter of the Raptor deals differed materially from standard, while half of the Flannery deals were swings. Of the evaluated deals, there were still more swings for Raptor than for Roadrunner. The styles of the players at the table may be significant as well.

One more conclusion: if a takeout double will serve, it is often preferable to a Raptor or Roadrunner 1NT overcall.

Deal	Standard	Raptor		Roadrunner	
2	2NT/3NT		Bad	2♦	Bad
4	2NTN	3NTS	Bad	N/A	
6	1NTE	2♥W	Good	2♥W	~Good
15	3♣S	2♣N	Good	N/A	
21	2♣S	2♥W	Bad	N/A	
24	6♠N	4♠N	~Bad	6♠N	
29	4♣N	3♣N	~Good	3♣N	~Good
38	2♦E	2♦	~Good	2♦	~Good
39	2♠E	3♠W	Good	N/A	
F7	2NTS	N/A		3♠N	Good
F21	1♥S	N/A		2♠N	Bad
F31	3♣W	N/A		5♣W	Good
Summary		Neutral		Slightly better than neutral	

The Raptor 1NT Overcall

The Raptor 1NT overcall is used in direct or sandwich positions for unbid suits, but not in the balancing seat. It shows exactly four cards in a major suit, and five or six cards in a minor suit (or possibly hearts in sandwich position). It shows a hand that is too good to pass, but inappropriate for a takeout double or two of the minor: about 11-15 HCP.

Definitions: **q** = opener's minor, **m** = raptor's known minor; **Q** = opener's major, **M** = raptor's known major

♣♦	(1♣/1♦) – 1NT: exactly 4 cards in either major, and 5-6 cards in the unbid minor.	
Pass	To play.	
2m	Signoff, very common with a doubleton	
2q	Asks raptor for major: may be weak, but bidding again shows interest in game.	
2♥	Natural, non-forcing (may raise with 4).	
2♠	Natural, non-forcing (may raise with 4).	
2NT	Limit raise or better in raptor's known minor	
	3m	Refusal (signoff)
	3q	Acceptance, help (Qx, Jxx, or better) in opener's minor
	3♥/3♠	Major for 4-3, acceptance, no help in m
	3NT	Natural acceptance, short in m
3m	Preemptive raise	
3q	Splinter	
3♥/3♠	Preemptive	
3NT	All game bids are to play.	

♥♠	(1♥/1♠) – 1NT: exactly 4 cards in the unbid major, and 5-6 cards in either minor.	
Pass	To play.	
2♣	Pass or correct, subsequent suit bid is to play.	
2♦	Natural, non-forcing	
2Q	Bid your minor, at least invitational	
	3♣/3♦	Minimum, natural
	2NT	Maximum, help in opener's major
	Other	Maximum
2M	To play.	
2NT	Limit raise or better for raptor's known major	
3♣/3♦	Preemptive	
3Q	Splinter in support of M	
3M	Preemptive	
3NT	All game bids are to play.	

Sandwich	(1x) – P – (1y) – 1NT: exactly 4 cards in the higher unbid suit, and 5-6 cards in the lower
Pass	To play. Subsequent new suit to play.
2x	Limit raise or better in lower suit
2y	Limit raise or better in higher suit
2other	To play.
2NT	Natural, invitational
3x/3y	Splinter, trump suit TBD
3other	Preemptive
3NT	All game bids are to play.

Competition		
1NT – (X)	XX	Business
	Pass	Asks for unknown suit: XX = lower, 2♣ = higher. Advancer places the contract. (Sandwich: to play.)
	2♣/♦	Natural, to play.
	other	Unchanged
1NT – (bid)	X	All doubles are takeout thru 4♦, when raptor has unknown suit.
	2NT/Q	2NT natural, cue is LR+
Later	X	All doubles are penalty when both raptor's suits are known.

Strong and balanced: With the hand for a natural 1NT overcall, pass or overcall at the 1-level with 15-16, double and bid NT with 17+.

Two of a minor: When playing raptor, a 2♣ or 2♦ overcall would seldom contain a four card major.

Standard defense: X = strong (like a standard redouble), cue bid of raptor's known suit is limit raise or better. All other bids are natural.

Marvin French defense: Double shows a free bid of 1NT; only if raptor's known suit is a minor, promises Qxx or better. A cue bid of raptor's known minor suit is equivalent to a negative double, implying four cards in an unbid major. A cue bid of raptor's known major suit is strong. 2NT is natural, non-forcing, so 3NT is only 13+. Jumps in opener's or new suits are weak. Since 1NT is not forcing, a trap pass is not wise.

Variations: 2NT advance an artificial game force. Cue bid of 2m asks, but promises values; or cue bid shows LR+. Advances in unshown suits are pass/correct. More splinters. Jump in known suit or jump cue LR. Raptor may only be strong enough to want the known suit led.

The Roadrunner 1NT Overcall

The Roadrunner 1NT overcall is used in direct or sandwich positions for unbid suits, but not in the balancing seat. It shows exactly four cards in the highest ranked unbid suit major suit, and five or six cards in a lower unbid suit. The hand is too good to pass, but inappropriate for a takeout double or two of the minor: about 11-15 HCP. Advances:

- Roadrunner's cheaper possible long suit (usually 2♣) is **Pass or Correct** (Pass/Corr).
- The otherwise cheapest suit (usually 2♦) is the **Constructive Minor Ask** (C-ask), with constructive or invitational values. (Natural in competition.)
- The otherwise cheap cue bid of an opponent's suit is the **Limit Raise + Ask** (LR+ask), with 4+ card support and at least game-invitational values.
- 3 of opener's major is a splinter, shortness with 4+ card support for roadrunner's known suit.
- 2NT is a game force without 4-card support for opener's known suit. Roadrunner bids his minor.
- Other actions are natural and as expected.

(1x) – 1NT (RoadRunner): exactly 4 cards in the highest unbid suit, and 5-6 cards in a lower unbid suit.				
	1♣ – 1NT	1♦ – 1NT	1♥ – 1NT	1♠ – 1NT
Pass	To play			
2♣	C-ask	Pass/Corr	Pass/Corr	Pass/Corr
2♦	Pass/Corr	C-ask	C-ask	C-ask
2♥	Natural, non-forcing		LR+ask	To play
2♠	To play	To play	To play	LR+ask
2NT	Game force, 0-3 cards in known suit.			
3♣	LR+ask	Preempt	Preempt	Preempt
3♦	Preempt	LR+ask	Preempt	Preempt
3♥	Preempt	Preempt	Splinter	Preempt
3♠	Preempt	Preempt	Preempt	Splinter
3NT	To play			

Step	Constructive Minor Ask (C-ask) Responses
1	Normal and expected, long suit is cheaper
2	Normal and expected, long suit is dearer
Other	Natural, maximum

Step	Limit Raise + Ask (LR+ask) Responses
1	Refusal, long suit is cheaper
2	Refusal, long suit is dearer
3	Acceptance, long suit is cheaper
4	Acceptance, long suit is dearer

The next of two suits in normal bidding rotation is **cheaper**. The other suit is **dearer**. For example, over 2♦, between hearts and diamonds, hearts is cheaper.

Sandwich	(1x) – P – (1y) – 1NT: exactly 4 cards in the higher unbid suit, and 5-6 cards in the lower
Pass	To play. Subsequent new suit to play.
2x	Limit raise or better in lower suit
2y	Limit raise or better in higher suit
2other	To play.
2NT	Natural, invitational
3x/3y	Splinter, trump suit TBD
3other	Preemptive
3NT	All game bids are to play.

If opener bids over an asking bid: pass is weak.

If responder acts over 1NT: the C-ask is off, the cheaper cue bid is a limit raise or better; other bids are natural, including 2NT. Double (or Pass) asks for roadrunner's long suit:

Competition		
1NT – (X)	XX	Business
	Pass	Asks for unknown suit: XX = lower, 2♣ = higher. Advancer places the contract. (Sandwich: to play.)
	2♣/♦	Natural, to play.
	other	Unchanged
1NT – (bid)	X	All doubles are takeout through 4♦, when roadrunner's long suit is unknown. With interference over an asking bid, pass is weak.
Later	X	All doubles are penalty when both roadrunner's suits are known.

Strong and balanced: With the hand for a natural 1NT overcall, pass or overcall one of a suit with 15-16, double and bid NT with 17+.

Two level overcall: When playing Roadrunner, a 2-level overcall would seldom contain four of the high unbid suit.

Standard defense: Double is strong (like a standard redouble), and the cue bid of roadrunner's known suit is limit raise or better. All other bids are natural.

The name **Roadrunner** is derived from Revised Raptor, Re-Raptor or RR for short.