

24. Responding INT when you shouldn't — “bid a suit to a suit”.

The INT response shows a weak hand, never more than nine points and usually nearer to six points. However, players make the mistake of thinking that, because INT shows a weak hand, they should respond INT whenever they have a weak hand. No.

The INT response is often known as the “dustbin INT” because it is what you do with hands that fit nowhere else (ie they go into the dustbin). It is a last-resort bid. If the responding hand has a suit that can be bid at the One-level, a suit response should always be preferred. You should respond INT only when your suit is lower-ranked and you lack the strength to respond a new suit at the Two-level.

Partner opens 1♦. What do you respond with these?

♠96532	♠Q3	♠Q32
♥K2	♥J742	♥853
♦K6	♦Q42	♦2
♣J852	♣K732	♣KJ7432

With the first, respond 1♠. It would be a major mistake (as in a big mistake not to bid a major) to bypass the spades and respond INT.

With the second, respond 1♥. The INT response denies a higher-ranking four-card suit. While the INT response announces weakness (six-nine points) while the 1♥ response does not (six or more), nonetheless 1♥ is correct. You'll show your weakness next time.

With the third, respond INT. You have no choice as you lack the strength to respond your clubs, crucially at the Two-level.

Dealer: North, Vulnerability: Neither

♠843		♠KJ7									
♥A632		♥Q107									
♦AK643		♦Q1085									
♣A		♣1094									
♠Q1062	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
		N									
W			E								
		S									
♥J9											
♦J9											
♣KQ762											
♠A95											
♥K854											
♦72											
♣J853											

What Happened

S	W	N	E
		1♦	Pass
1NT(1)	Pass	Pass(2)	Pass

- (1) Oops — don't bypass the four-card major.
 (2) Facing 6-9 without a four-card major (or so he thinks), the hand is going nowhere.

Contract: 1NT, Opening Lead: ♣6

What Should Have Happened

S	W	N	E
		1♦	Pass
1♥	Pass	3♥	Pass
4♥(1)	end		

- (1) Marginal but partner's jump shows about 16-17 pts (or an upgrade for shape).

Contract: 4♥, Opening Lead: ♣K

What Happened

INT made exactly — declarer setting up a long heart.

What Should Have Happened

In 4♥, you win ♣K lead with ♣A and cash ♥AK. Turning to diamonds, you cash ♦AK and ruff ♦3, revealing the 4-2 split. Undaunted, you ruff ♣5, ruff ♦4, ruff ♣8 and cross to ♠A. That's the first ten tricks — game made.

andrew.robson@thetimes.co.uk