



*Ken Rexford*

REALLY UNUSUAL  
NOTRUMP  
(R.U.N.T.)

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R.U.N.T.  
"Really Unusual No Trump"

by Kenneth Rexford

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# Foreword

Many years ago, a friend of mine by the name of Dick McCumber (who came up with the name "R.U.N.T." for "Really Unusual No Trump") and I were partners in a Swiss Teams event at a local sectional tournament. The room was small, as is often the case for smaller tournaments in Ohio, and packed with players deep into their own problems of what to bid, what to lead, how to bring in this contract, and what the heck partner is thinking. You could hear the occasional slap of a red double card or a disgusted following of the suit some poor sap's partner elected to lead, but otherwise complete silence enveloped the room.

Dick, however, is not known for having a low voice. I am not one to talk, as I shared equally in the several times that Dick and I were banned to the hallway with whatever set of friend opponents we might reach in a team game. Directors had given up to some degree on quieting us, especially if we had a six-pack with us. Apparently, having fun while playing bridge is frowned upon but not strictly in violation of the rules, yet.

In any event, Dick loved to explain our new conventional takeout structure, and he was often quite loud in his explanations. So, on about the second hand of the match, I overcalled One No Trump after my right-hand opponent opened some one-level suit opening, and Dick alerted. "Alert" is not quite the word, as his alerts hardly could be missed by anyone in the room. Active ethics, and all. Make sure they hear you.

So, inevitably my left-hand opponent abandoned their better judgment and asked for an explanation.

"That's R.U.N.T."

The opponent, not precisely familiar with R.U.N.T., asked for further clarification.

"My partner's 1NT overcall shows me either 5 to 11 HCP with at least three cards in all of the remaining three suits, or he has any hand with 19 to 23 HCP. It is a takeout bid."

The opponent was mystified, but he went on with whatever decisions made sense in light of this new, strange development. I have no recollection of how this fared for them or for us, but I seem to recall being somewhat pleased at the end.

About three boards later, I again ended up immediately left of the opening bidder, who again started with another one-level suit opening. This time, however, I doubled. My left-hand opponent was expecting this to be normal, when out came Dick with a rather enthusiastic: "A-L-E-R-T!!!"

Somewhat trembling, the opponent asked what the double meant.

"That's Son of R.U.N.T."

The opponent, even more mystified than before, responded, "OK, I'll bite."

Dick then explained, again quite loudly:

"Well, my partner might have 0 to 4 HCP with at least three cards in all of the remaining suits. Or, he has 12 to 18 HCP with at least three cards in the other three suits. Or, he has 15 to 18 HCP and balanced. Or, he has 16 to 18 HCP and

any shape. Or, he might have 24 or more high-card points, with any shape."

The immediate reaction came from way across on the opposite side of the room:

"Of course that's what he has, you idiot!"

The entire room, who had equally bent their ears, biting as well, waiting to hear the explanation, erupted in laughter.

This is my favorite story about the early days of the Really Unusual No Trump convention. In the years that have followed, many partners have been afraid to play R.U.N.T., whether because of a fear of it being too complicated (despite the simpler version) or a fear of people finding out that they play R.U.N.T. You see, R.U.N.T. sometimes gets a reaction from some experts who scoff at the idea. It seems silly to many. But, experience for me shows otherwise.

Here's the thing. R.U.N.T. is a conventional style of overcalling that I believe to have roots way back with the old Baron System, an old Baron 1NT overcall showing a weak takeout. The idea has surfaced in many ways since, including a more limited version called "Sandwich 1NT," used only after the opponents have bid two suits. Similarly, the original Michaels convention included a variety of weak three-suited takeout cuebid before it changed to the two-suited version that we have today. Even a Mini-Roman opening has this feel. Weak three-suited takeouts have been part of bridge for years.

However, as the best "proof" that this goes way back, consider that the ACBL General Convention Chart allows 1NT to be used as a weak three-suited takeout. In other words, R.U.N.T. is completely legal in General Convention Chart games. There is no way that this



convention is specifically included in the GCC unless this has a lot of history. "R.U.N.T." is just a more exciting version of an old concept.

In this book, you will be introduced to three versions of Really Unusual No Trump, including the simple version (1NT overcall is a light takeout), the "Multi" Version (1NT is a light takeout or a very strong hand), and the Rexford-McCumber version with R.U.N.T. and "Son of R.U.N.T." You will also learn some tools to deal with strong balanced hands, the one hand pattern that is negatively affected by R.U.N.T. Also, we will discuss 1NT overcalls later in the auction.

But, why play R.U.N.T. at all? Two reasons.

First, as I mentioned earlier, you are still allowed to have fun playing bridge. R.U.N.T. is hysterical. The name itself makes people chuckle. Everyone I know who plays R.U.N.T. finds it so amusing that good results are only a fringe benefit. Well, my wife finds R.U.N.T. occasionally annoying, but as a general rule she was sold by the results, and some humorous ones at that. Eventually, even the most dubious find themselves chuckling at times.

The second reason is actual results. The theory is good. Get in there fast and force the two-level when you have a weak hand. Make takeout doubles sound by eliminating "shapely minimums" from the double. Punish the opponents for playing five-card majors (and yes, R.U.N.T. is in some respects useful as a "defense" to a five-card majors approach). Eliminate for the opponents easy auctions in the same way that preempts cause problems. The impact of R.U.N.T. can be enormous. I have seen KO matches with 22 pushes but two 10-IMP swings on R.U.N.T. hands (to our benefit).

Plus, R.U.N.T. comes up all the time. I hate spending hours learning a new convention and then waiting weeks for it to come up. Usually, partner (or I)

forget in a few weeks, and we get a goose-egg for all of our efforts. Often, it takes several forgets to eventually start remembering. But R.U.N.T., in contrast, comes up constantly. It seems like R.U.N.T. is overcalled as often as minor suits are opened, meaning all the time. Even when R.U.N.T. does not come up, partner's failure to bid R.U.N.T. gives some information as to what is going on.

Sure, the obvious downside is just that. Bidding R.U.N.T., or not bidding R.U.N.T., gives up information to the opponents. They can play the hands better with that information. That said, the benefits seem to outweigh the costs, from years of experience. Besides, if your opponent seems like one who would benefit from the information more than the interference would hurt, you are allowed to pass weak hands.

As a teaser, consider a deal:

Dealer : N ♠Q 10 8 2

Vuln : E-W ♥10 8 7 2

♦10 3

♣A K 8

♠K 5 4

♥K 9

♦J 8 7 5

♣9 7 4 2

♠A 3

♥A Q 6 4 3

♦Q 9 6

♣J 10 3

♠J 9 7 6

♥J 5

♦A K 4 2

♣Q 6 5

South has a great hand for a R.U.N.T. One No Trump overcall of East's One Heart opening, close to a maximum for the range (less than opening strength) with four spades. South might make the same move with even better values, as North will have passed in first seat

such that game will be remote opposite an average light opening strength hand for South.

By overcalling One No Trump, South gets us to Two Spades before West has a chance to show any values. The opponents will be blown out of the auction.

More importantly, North, who would have a fairly promising hand if South were to make a values takeout double, resigns to a mere Two Spades and the final contract.

Give South the Ace of spades instead of the six, and South has a takeout double, which for R.U.N.T. bidders shows sound values:

Dealer : N	♠Q 10 8 2	
Vuln : E-W	♥10 8 7 2	
	♦10 3	
	♣A K 8	
	♠6 5 4	♠K 3
	♥K 9	♥A Q 6 4 3
	♦J 8 7 5	♦Q 9 6
	♣9 7 4 2	♣J 10 3
	♠A J 9 7	
	♥J 5	
	♦A K 4 2	
	♣Q 6 5	

Because a R.U.N.T. One No Trump would handle lighter hands, North would expect sound values and, with his *mere* nine-count (10 with shape) could actually almost blast the game. Ten Dummy Points with lots of body, opposite a sound double, with finesses odds-on to work, usually makes game easily. But, North might, over the double, decide to play it safe with an invite, in which case the game contract should be found anyway.

The point of these deals is that R.U.N.T. not only creates some pressure on the opponents when Overcaller has weak values. It also solidifies the double as a sound call and not the “minimum off-shape double” that is becoming more common these days. The trust that Advancer can place in true values facilitates game tries.

Consider also the following deal:

Dealer : N	♠A 8 6 4 3
Vuln : E-W	♥8 3
	♦J 10 7
	♣K 5 3
♠K 10	♠Q 9
♥A K 7	♥Q J 10 9 5 2
♦A K 6 3 2	♦Q 9
♣Q 10 2	♣A J 7
	♠J 7 5 2
	♥6 4
	♦8 5 4
	♣9 8 6 4

Here, after North passes, East opens One Heart, and then South has a temptation to act. Sure, a 1 HCP hand seems lousy, and the shape is less than pure. But, let us bid this out if South is a lunatic like me and overcalls a R.U.N.T. One No Trump because of the colors being favorable. With favorable vulnerability, the minimum for a R.U.N.T. overcall is 0 HCP, at least for me. To each his own.

West, with a fit and 19 HCP, will be rather annoyed by this intrusion into what would have been a fairly normal slam sequence. With no control in clubs, West will be unable to simply blast past this nuisance to Roman Key Card Blackwood. So, West will start with

whatever East-West has agreed to play here (if they have an agreement to handle this problem).

North, loving this development, may well jack up the auction to Three Spades. This could be destroyed with a 5-trick set, but -1100 beats the -1430 that East-West has available. For that matter, North could obviously, then, blast all the way to Four Spades, which would seriously impact East's view of the Q-9 and West's view of the K-10. This will not be a fun deal for East-West.

As this deal illustrates, a R.U.N.T. weak One No Trump takeout is also useful as a preemptive call. One should not discount the impact that taking away the one-level had on the opposition.

Now, let us explore the world of Really Unusual No Trump. First, we tackle Simplified R.U.N.T., the version I currently play with my wife.

## R.U.N.T. – THE REALLY UNUSUAL NOTRUMP

Master Point Press author Ken Rexford provides the first authoritative description of the R.U.N.T. Convention. R.U.N.T. is actually a two-way overcalling structure to distinguish a very sound takeout double from a weak three-suited takeout by way of an artificial 1NT overcall — preempting and intervening in the auction safely and effectively.

Do you find a 4-3-3-3 hand with three Jacks a reason to sleep, or is this as good a reason to bid as any? You know who you are. Do you secretly enjoy declaring Two Clubs doubled, trying to find a fifth trick before the opponents find their ninth trick, instead of defending a boring 3NT? If you find it amusing to interfere with as many auctions as possible, this book is for you. Rexford introduces you to this effective and proven two-way overcall structure. With more advanced versions of the convention, you can add a very strong option, making the 1NT overcall almost a Multi type of takeout.

After all, bridge is supposed to be fun, right?



**KEN REXFORD** (Ohio) is a bridge player with 30 years of tournament experience. His first book, *Cuebidding at Bridge*, introduced the bridge world to a modern approach to Italian cuebidding. His most recent books for Master Point Press are *Modified Italian Canapé System* and *New Frontiers for Strong Forcing Openings*.

