A hand holding a fan of playing cards against a geometric background. The cards are fanned out, showing various suits and colors. The background features a pattern of overlapping squares and diamonds in shades of blue, grey, and white. A semi-transparent orange banner is overlaid on the top left, containing the title text.

# When to open 1NT – and when not to

**Thomas Rush**  
**ACBL District 16 Lecture Series**  
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# Agenda

- General Principles when opening 1NT
- NT Overcalls
- 4th Seat NT Openings (Advanced)
- Other Considerations
- Questions



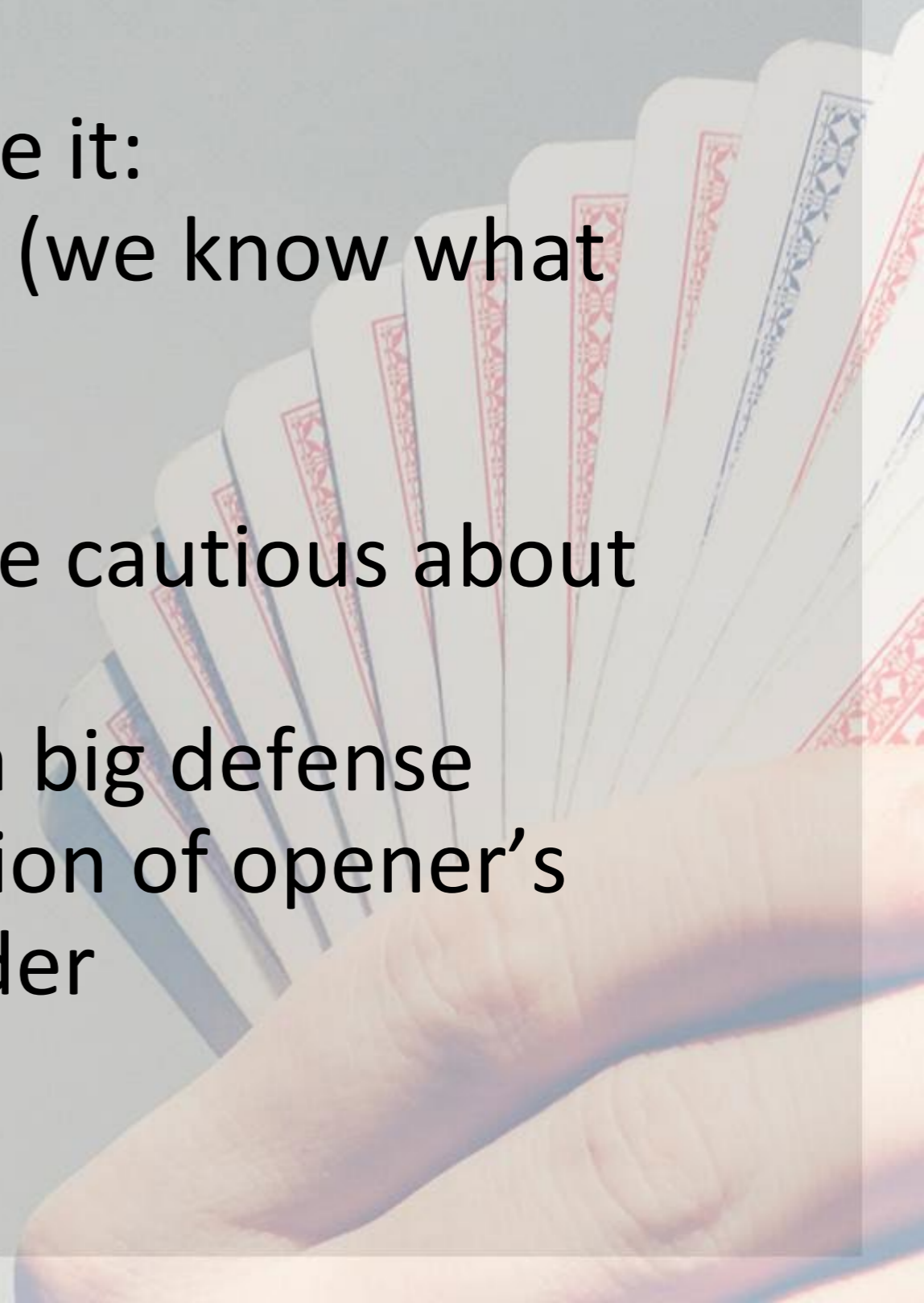
# General Ideas



# Why We Open 1NT

We **love** to open 1NT because it:

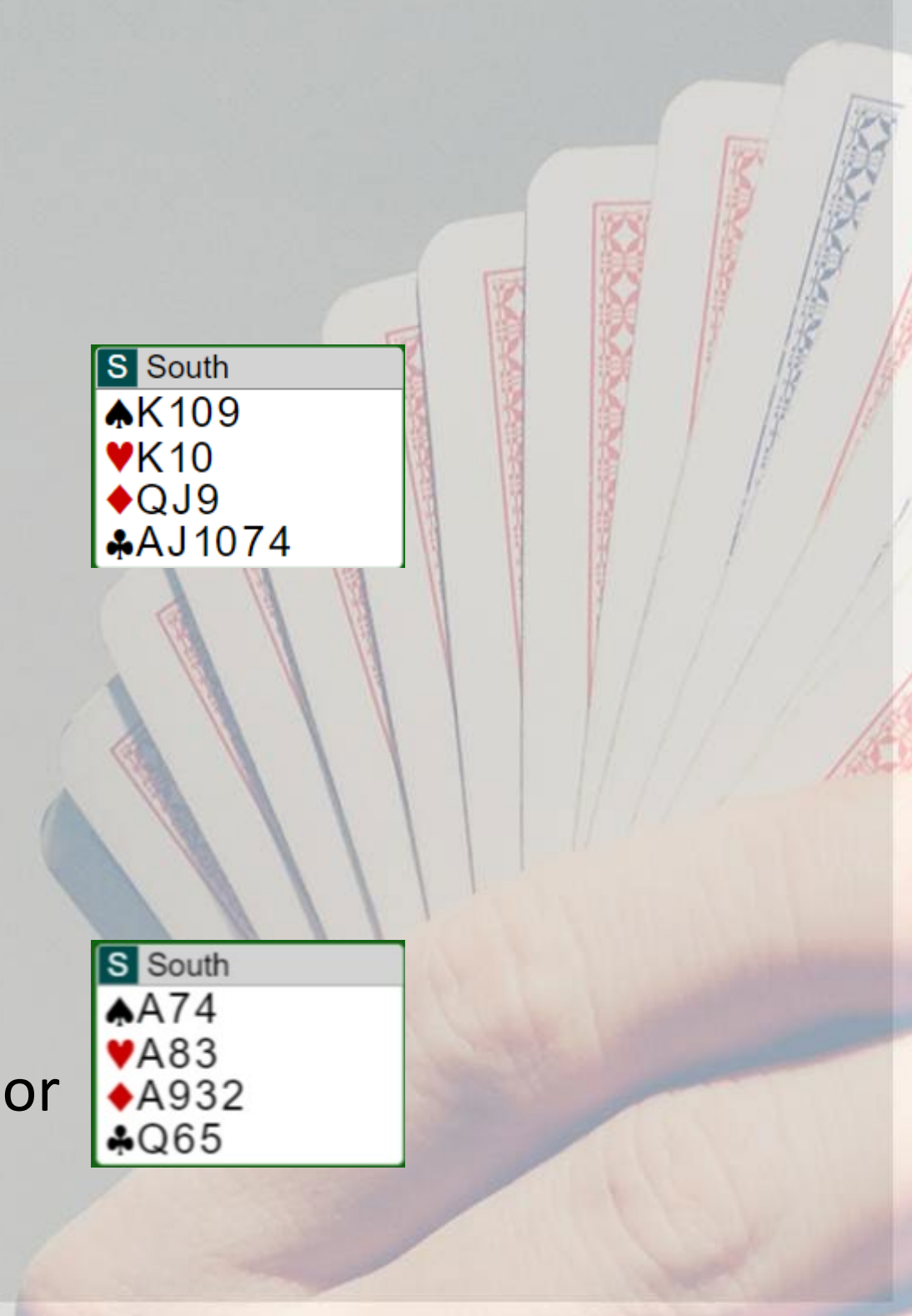
- Gives us accurate auctions (we know what partner has!)
- Pre-empts the opponents
- Makes the opponents more cautious about interfering
- Sometimes sets us up for a big defense
- (Often) Hides the distribution of opener's hand, making defense harder



# Hand Strength Modifiers

## Good (“plusses”)

- A decent 5-card suit
- Lots of aces and kings
- Abundance of tens and nines
- RHO opens the bidding
- Honors combined (KT9, KT, QJ9, AJTxx)



S	South
♠	K109
♥	K10
♦	QJ9
♣	AJ1074

## Bad (“minuses”)

- 4333 shape
- Lots of queens and jacks
- Less than your share of tens and nines
- LHO has opened the bidding
- Doubleton queen or jack, singleton honor
- Honors alone (A74, A843, A32, Q65)

S	South
♠	A74
♥	A83
♦	A932
♣	Q65

## Point Ranges for “NT hands”

12 - 14	Open 1x, rebid 1NT over 1 of a suit
15 - 17	Open 1NT
18 - 19	Open 1x, rebid 2NT over 1 of a suit
20 - 21	Open 2NT
22 - 24	Open 2 ♣ , rebid 2NT
25 - 27	Open 3NT

# No Trump Overcalls



# Requirements for a 1NT Overcall (Direct Seat)

- Example: 1x - 1NT
- 15 - 18 HCP
- Stopper in opponent's major
- Partial stop if minor suit opened and hand is otherwise suitable (TO Double may be a better description)
- A good 14 HCP can be enough, due to the positional value of your honors over opener's honors

What is your bid after:

W Robot
♠AK4
♥A8
♦KQ63
♣9864

1♣? 1♥?  
1♠?  
1♠?

S South - Sit!
♠AQ9
♥1053
♦J982
♣AK4

1♥? 1♠?  
1♦? 1♥?

S South - Sit!
♠K9
♥A1086
♦KQ4
♣KJ64

1♥? 1♠?

S South - Sit!
♠KQ2
♥A94
♦854
♣AK94

1♦?



# Example Hand 1

What is your bid after:

W Robot
♠AK4
♥A8
♦KQ63
♣9864

1 ♣ ? 1NT; lack of a minor-suit stop is not a bar from 1NT overcall

1 ♥ ? Double. We don't like having only three spades, but the hand is too good to pass, and I am short in opener's suit.

1 ♠ ? 1NT. The right point count, the right shape, double spade stopper; anything else but 1NT would be bizarre. (Never Double; you only have two hearts!)

# Example Hand 2

What is your bid after:

S	South - Sit!
♠	AQ9
♥	1053
♦	J982
♣	AK4

1♥? Pass. Yes, we hate to pass 14-point hands, but we have no heart stop so can't bid 1NT, and we have the wrong shape for a takeout double. If partner has some shape or points, we will get a chance to act later.

1♠? 1NT. This is a close choice, but I let the double spade stop with a good 14HCP talk me into action vs. passing. We would hate to find partner with 8 or even 11 points (and no spade stop) and hear it go 1♠ - P - P - P !!!  
A takeout double isn't a good choice with this shape.

# Example Hand 3

What is your bid after:

S South - Sit!	
♠	K9
♥	A1086
♦	KQ4
♣	KJ64

1♦? This hand is as close to a perfect 1NT overcall as you can get. It's got two stoppers in their suit, and you're in great shape if partner raises NT or uses Stayman or Jacoby.

1♠? If RHO opens 1♠, though, I like a takeout double much more than a 1NT overcall. I am short in spades with only one stopper, I have four hearts, and I have adequate shape in the minors. Because of my high cards, I have some strength in reserve, and can raise 2♣ or 2♥ to the three level to invite game.

# Example Hand 4

What is your bid after:



S	South - Sit!
♠	KQ2
♥	A94
♦	854
♣	AK94

1♦? I overcall 1NT with this hand, despite the lack of a diamond stopper. It's very possible that opener has only a 4-card diamond suit, and so I'm not at great risk. In exchange for 1NT without a ♦ stop I get to show my strength and shape in one bid, a real plus! Double is a poor choice with only 3 in each major and 3 diamonds

1♥? I overcall 1H with 1NT also. I'd **like** to have AT9 or even AJT of hearts, but I don't – and this hand is too good to pass. Double is a poor choice with only three spades and this flat shape.

# Requirements for a balancing 1NT Overcall

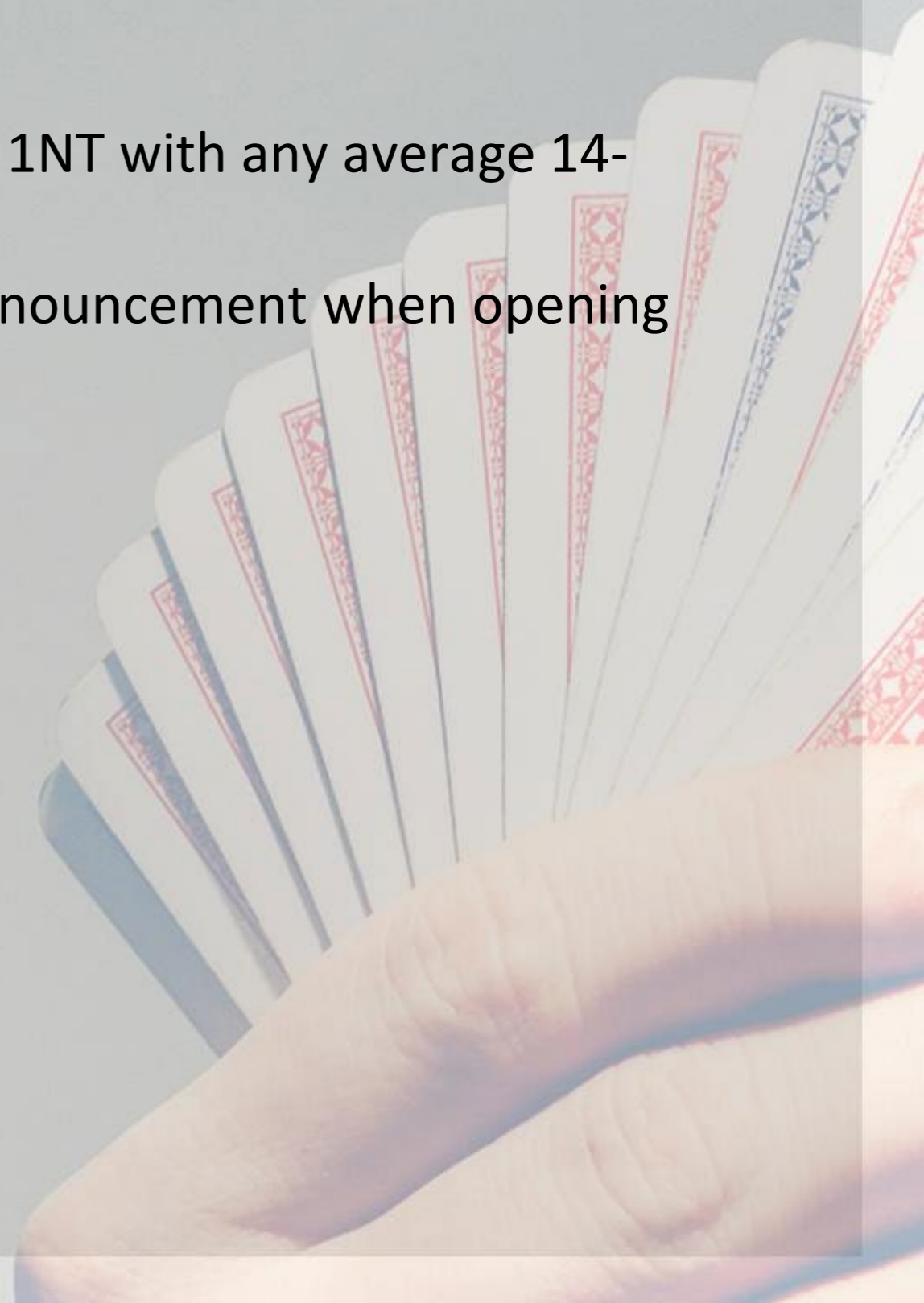
- Ranges:
  - 1x - P - P - 1NT (11-15 HCP)
  - 1x - P - P - X;
  - P - 1y - P - 1NT (16-18 HCP)
  - 1x - P - P - 2NT (19-21 HCP)
- Some play a balancing 1NT as 11-14 range, or play 11 - 17 with “range ask Stayman” (which solves some problems and creates others!)
- I suggest 11-15 HCP (including 15 in the range is especially important when the opening is 1♥ or 1♠)
- You will not have a stopper in every suit – the auction tells you partner has values, and experience says to not worry!

# 4th Seat 1NT Openings (Advanced)



# 4th Seat 1NT Openings

- My experience is that it is a “win” to open 1NT with any average 14-count in 4th seat
- This does require that you change your announcement when opening 1NT in 4th chair (“14 - 17”)



# Rationale Behind 14 - 17 in 4th Chair

- After three passes, the opponents will often be anxious to get into the auction
- 1NT maintains its preemptive value – opps cannot make a 1-level overcall
- The risk of a 2-level overcall is higher when you have shown an above-average, balanced, and limited hand (easier for responder to make a penalty double)
- If partner knows your 1x - 1y; 1NT range is at best 13, he need not raise to 2NT with 11 HCP balanced because there is no game (you can still get to game if responder is unbalanced and prime values)

Note: This suggestion is targeted more toward intermediate/advanced players who have mastered playing 'skinny' NT contracts, and where the partnership has good tools for escaping to a suit contract if needed!



# **Some Other Considerations (Advanced)**



# Things to Think About and Discuss

- You and your partner should agree on what happens after an opponent makes a penalty double of your 1NT opening (how do you get to 2♥ or 2♠? How can you play 2♣?)
- What defense do you use against opponents' 1NT openings? (Simple and effective is DONT; see my recent D16 Webinar on NT defenses)
- What does the “useless” 3♠ bid mean after a 2NT opening?
- After a strong 3NT (or 2♣ - 2♦; 3NT), is 4♣ Gerber or Stayman? Are transfers on?

# Practice Hands



Hand 1: Too strong for 1NT with a good 5-card major; 5422 is not a 'preferred' NT shape, particularly with nine cards in the majors.

Hand 2: In my opinion, the 5th diamond and high card structure make this an 18-count. Open 1♦, jump in NT as your rebid.

Hand 3: Looks a bit strong for a 15-17 NT opening. 1S, then jump in NT.

Hand 4: Too strong for 1NT, not the best shape. Open 1C, jump in NT over 1♦ or 1♥, raise 1♠ to 3♠, or raise 1NT to 2NT as your rebid.

# Questions



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