

Sweet 16 *Notes from a Club Player*

By Dar Webb co-author of *The Quick Reference Deck Series*

*I've spent the last few months digging into one of the richest subjects in the game of bridge: **Guidelines, Adages, and the Numbered Rules.***

*Through my research, I discovered a nifty little rule that I have found truly valuable. It's called the **Rule of 16** and it will help you get to 3NT even when your hand has minimal invitational values.*

How the Rule Works:

The Rule of 16 will help you decide when to pass or when to go directly to 3NT after your partner has opened 1NT (playing a standard 15-17 NT range).

The calculation is simple. First, count your high-card points. Now add a point for every card in your hand that is numbered 8 or higher. If the total is the '**Sweet' 16** or more, go directly to 3NT. If the total is smaller than 16, just pass. Do not even invite.

Some Examples:

♠K109 ♥76 ♦QJ106 ♣Q872

This hand has only 8 high-card points, but it also has 8 cards that have values of 8 or more. The total is 16, so you should bid 3NT.

♠K32 ♥J4 ♦QJ32 ♣Q765

This hand has 9 high-card points, but only 5 cards with values of 8 or more. The total is 14, so you should pass your partner's opening 1NT bid. Do not invite game.

♠QJ2 ♥10 ♦Q10843 ♣K963

Recently, at my home bridge club, North had this hand. His partner, the dealer, opened 1NT. West passed. North looked at his hand, saw 8 points, and decided to invite game by bidding 2NT. His partner, a cautious soul, passed. By using the Rule of 16, North would assess his holdings as 8 HCP and 8 card points, which adds up to 16. North needed to bid 3NT, which was easy to make. Top board for us!

Why The Rule of 16 Works?

Most of us have been trained to use high-card points as the primary means to evaluate the strength of a hand, especially in no trump. With a balanced hand, so the thinking goes, only the top cards matter.

At the same time, we all know the difference between a good no-trump hand and a bad no-trump hand. A good hand has lots of middle cards – 8s, 9s, and 10s – which will produce tricks when combined with an honor or two. Experienced players call a hand with good middle cards a “hand with texture.” Traditional hand valuation completely ignores the middle cards. The Rule of 16 values the middle cards – the hands with texture!

Don't Overuse the Rule:

The Rule of 16 only works with no-trump contracts that do not have other options. In other words, if you have a four- or five-card major, follow the rules for Stayman or Jacoby Transfers. The Rule of 16 is designed to help you with the marginal hands where high-card valuation does not help you get to the 3NT finish line.

Dar Webb is the co-author, along with Bob Vollbracht, of the Quick Reference Deck Series, published by the St. Petersburg Bridge Club, St. Petersburg, Florida. Find full information about the Decks at www.stpetebridge.com. This column originally appeared on baronbarclay.com.