



Ask Jerry

Well-known teacher and player **Jerry Helms** answers your bridge questions.
Send your questions to askjerry@jerryhelms.com.

Dear Jerry: My partner and I had the following auction in our local club game:

OPENER (ME)	RESPONDER (PARTNER)
1♦	1♥
1♠	2NT
3♥	Pass!

I was under the impression that my 3♥ bid was forcing and partner had to bid again. Partner thought that when I raised her original suit to the cheapest level it was simply a preference to play in hearts instead of 2NT. So is my 3♥ rebid forcing or not?

—W. O., Los Angeles, CA

Dear W. O.: For starters, I have long been on record suggesting that you should give meaning to your bids that are forcing to game. What was the meaning behind the 3♥ bid?

I personally agree with you that it should be 100% forcing. Let's take each bid and define its meaning at the time it occurred during the auction, to see if we can come to some reasonable conclusion about whether responder has to bid again.

1♦: Usually four or more diamonds (92.7% of the time—we can discuss that in another article). It shows about 12–21 points and is invitational.

1♥: Four or more hearts, about 6 or more points, and it is forcing.

1♠: Opener's rebid at the one level shows anywhere from the worst 12 points you might hold up to and including 18 points—not quite strong enough for a jump shift. It shows four spades (very rarely five), and is invitational, not forcing.

2NT: Responder's rebid shows about 11–12 points. It's constructive, but only invitational, not forcing. It shows a balanced hand, with either four or five hearts.

At this point, opener has become the captain because responder has made a rebid that limits the hand to a narrow range of strength—about 11–12 points—and to a narrow range of distribution—balanced.

Opener has lots of information about responder's hand, while opener's hand still has a wide range of strength—about 12 to 18 points—and distribution. Opener could be balanced with four diamonds and four spades, or unbalanced with, say, six diamonds and four spades.

Opener's Second Rebid: Forcing or Not?

At this point in the auction, which rebids by opener are forcing and which are not? It's likely the partnership hasn't discussed this except after the fact, after an auction has occurred.

It's important that your partnership knows how opener can stop in partscore at this point. There are two standard ways to do this:

1. Opener can pass. That's the easy way to settle for partscore.
2. Opener can rebid the first suit, diamonds, showing six-plus diamonds, four spades, and a minimum hand.

Opener's forcing bids are:

1. Opener can bid a new suit, clubs in this auction.
2. Opener can support responder's first suit, hearts in this auction.

Let's consider a possible hand for opener in this auction:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♦	1♥
1♠	2NT
?	

♠ A K 7 3
♥ A 5 2
♦ A J 8 7 5
♣ 6

With 16 high-card points and 1 length point for the five-card diamond suit, opener knows the partnership should be in a game contract. But which game?

If responder has five hearts, the partnership belongs in the eight-card fit, 4♥. If responder has only four hearts but good stoppers in clubs, the partnership belongs in 3NT.

The way opener finds out is to bid 3♥, forcing. This shows three-card support for hearts, as opener would have raised immediately with four-card support. It typically shows a hand with five diamonds, four spades, and three hearts, and asks responder to choose between 3NT and 4♥, now that opener has described the hand.

The combined hands might look be something like this:

OPENER	RESPONDER
♠ A K 7 3	♠ 9 4 2
♥ A 5 2	♥ K J 8 7 3
♦ A J 8 7 5	♦ K 4
♣ 6	♣ A 10 3

OPENER	RESPONDER
1♦	1♥
1♠	2NT
3♥	4♥

Responder had to rebid 2NT since the hearts weren't good enough to jump to 3♥. Now the partnership reaches the good 4♥ contract rather than a poor 3NT contract.

Once the partnership agrees that 3♥ is forcing in this type of auction, opener may have to pass 2NT with a weaker hand, such as this. Opener can't afford to show the three-card heart support and force to game. —JH ♠

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