



# Ask Jerry

Jerry Helms

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Dear Jerry,

In the March issue there was an article that described the following sequence as non-invitational:

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♥	2♠	3♥
3♠			

I really enjoyed the article and the solution for competitive situations described. My question is how should I know that in this auction partner is not inviting game?

Tony

Tony,

Although the "Law of Total Tricks" is being questioned in some circles, it is commonly accepted that in part-score competitive auctions, it is usually best to compete to the level equal to the number of trumps held by the partnership. In one of his books about "the law," Larry Cohen offered the following advice: Eight never, nine ever. This twist of an old adage about card play simply means if your side holds eight trumps, avoid competing beyond the two level. With nine trumps, compete to the three level.

In total agreement, I recommend the following Jerry-ism:

**In competition, re-raises by either player are never invitational.**

Auctions with available bidding space are easier to understand than in your example cited above. Consider this:

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♣	2♠	3♣
?			

Spades are clearly agreed as trump. If West wished to invite, the options include 3♦ and 3♥, both of which are available as "help suit" tries for game. (My Nov. 2003 column discusses help suit game tries. You may access this and other past articles on my web site at [www.jerryhelms.com](http://www.jerryhelms.com).)

Holding

♠A Q 8 7 4 3 ♥9 ♦K J 4 2 ♣A 8,

West should bid 3♦ over South's 3♣. This identifies interest in game and lets responder know that high-card strength in the diamond suit would be particularly useful. If, however, West held minimum values such as

♠K J 8 7 3 2 ♥J 5 ♦A Q 4 ♣J 4,

West, knowing that his side has at least nine trumps, could safely follow the "law" by bidding a non-invitational 3♠.

With space available, game tries are no problem. In the following auction, however, 3♦ is the only option available, so it may be considered a "random" game try, *i.e.*, completely artificial, with no reference to opener's holding in diamonds:

West	North	East	South
1♥	2♣	2♥	3♣
3♦			

A re-raise to 3♥ would simply be competitive.

The problem in your example is that the opponents have bid and raised a suit that is adjacent, leaving no space for a game try. In any auction like this, where zero space is available, double may be used as a game try. Conventionally, this agreement is referred to as a "maximal double." □