



Ask Jerry

Jerry Helms

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Dear Jerry,

I opened the bidding 1♦ and partner responded 3♠. I thought this meant long spades and a weak hand. With my minimum balanced hand, I opted to pass, which turned out to be a disaster because partner had a singleton spade! Partner criticized me for passing, but I defended myself by asking why she would make such an unusual bid. We agreed to allow you to be the judge and assess blame.

Frannie

Hi Frannie,

Here comes the judgment ... but before we consider the meaning of 3♠, let me offer advice in the form of an acronym (a Jerry-ism) that I devised for my students and partners many years ago:

**ASBAF —
All Strange Bids
Are Forcing**

Since you acknowledged that you did not know the meaning of 3♠, I would never suggest pass. My experience has been that partners are happier when we are a level or two higher in the right denomination than a level or two lower in the wrong denomination. Basically, when you hear a bid with a meaning that is not clear to you, bid something! From this standpoint, you were wrong to pass.

As with most issues in bridge, however, partnership agreement is the most important factor. For years in “Standard American” bidding (whatever that means), a jump to 3♠ would be preemptive. A typical hand:

♠KJ108754 ♥9 ♦74 ♣832.

While this is still a possible agreement, some players have opted to play this auction as a “splinter raise” of diamonds, showing a game-forcing hand with diamond support and shortness in the jump suit — spades in this case. A typical hand might be:

♠2 ♥A74 ♦KJ863 ♣KJ75.

With long spades and a weak hand, I would respond 2♠ if we played weak jump shifts, or quietly bid 1♠, intending to rebid the suit as many times as necessary, or if really weak, pass, intending to bid later.

My personal preference is that

all unusual jump shifts are splinter raises. In fact, I suggest any bid that sounds like it might be a splinter raise is a splinter raise.

Despite this, I would not jump to 3♠ over 1♦ with any partner unless I had a firm understanding of how we define the bid. From this standpoint, your partner was wrong to bid 3♠.

Now that I have righteously blamed both of you, perhaps the two of you can get together and decide the meanings of your bids before they happen. Communication is a good thing. □