



Ask Jerry

Jerry Helms

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Dear Jerry,

My partner and I come from two different bidding schools. She learned "college" bridge 40 years ago (maybe Goren style), while I have been learning the "modern" methods of hand evaluation.

My partner's books say that both opener and responder should add points for short suits. This is not the way I was taught, but when I asked several other players they all agreed with her. I believe you once addressed this issue at a mini-lesson that I attended. Can you elaborate?

Distributionally Disturbed

Dear DD,

Can I elaborate? A good friend, Jerry Cartright, once compared me to CNN ... once you get me started, I just go on and on and on.

First, a little background: Charlie Goren and I have been at odds over hand evaluation for years. Most, if not all, of his literature suggests that opener should add 3 points for any void held, 2 points for a singleton, and 1 point for a doubleton. I respectfully but vehemently disagree!

Consider this hand:

♠A873 ♥— ♦AK862 ♣QJ75.

Per Mr. Goren: 14 HCP plus 3 distribution points (for the void), creating a 17-point, medium-strength opening bid. Per Jerry: What re-

sponse is most likely when holding this hand? Wouldn't it be shocking if partner's longest suit was hearts? If the bidding were to conclude with any number of hearts as the final contract, would it ever occur to you to table dummy, proudly proclaiming 17 support points? Similarly, if the bidding ever ground to a halt at any level of notrump, is this hand really worth 17 points? Methinks not!

Hand evaluation might better be called "guesstimation." Using some type of guideline, you attempt to guess the probability of the cards you hold to help you take tricks on both offense and defense. Quality of points matters, concentration of points matters, 10s and 9s matter, long suits matter and short suits may or may not matter. Aces and kings are slightly undervalued by traditional point-count systems, queens and jacks, slightly overvalued. Connected honors are more valuable than scattered honors. A good long suit is better than a bad long suit. Sometimes, in a suit contract, shortness merely stops a loser, but other times it both stops a loser and creates a winner.

I would consider the example hand to be worth a hefty 15 points or so: three quick tricks, plus connected honors in a five-card suit. After opening 1♦, if partner were to shockingly reply 1♠, my emotions would skyrocket, perhaps resembling the classic James Brown song, "I Feel Good"! From my perspective, spades are now established as trump, making the heart void clearly valuable. In fact, I would reevaluate this hand and add a full 5 points for the void, bringing the total from a sound minimum, past medium and into a maximum 19- to

20-point hand with which I would insist on game opposite what could be a meager 5 to 6 points.

Why 5 points for the void? If the ♥A were led, dummy's void is worth more than that particular ace! Enough about basic evaluation.

Perhaps the crux of your question is this: Is shortness equally valuable in both dummy and declarer's hand? Usually not. Compare these two seemingly similar yet very different six-card layouts where spades are trump:

<i>Declarer</i>	<i>Dummy</i>
♠ A K Q J 10	♠ 9 8 7
♥ 7	♥ 8 3 2

Exactly five tricks are available. If the opening lead is ♥A followed by ♥K, declarer can ruff to prevent a loser, but declarer cannot create a winner.

<i>Declarer</i>	<i>Dummy</i>
♠ A K Q J 10	♠ 9 8 7
♥ 8 3 2	♥ 7

On this layout, seven tricks are available (or six if the opponents lead trumps) since by ruffing in the short hand, losers are prevented and winners are created.

Except for something called a "dummy reversal," ruffing in the hand with the most trump stops losers, but doesn't create winners. Ruffing in the short hand, stops losers and creates winners. For this reason, I think it is a mistake to automatically add full value to short suits in the hand with the longer of the two trump holdings. □