Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

As a newbie to bridge, I recently read *Standard Bidding with SAYC* by Ned Downey. I enjoyed the book and felt particularly enlightened by the concept of responding to a 1NT opener holding 4=4=4=1 distribution with far less than invitational values. In a recent club game, partner opened 1NT and I held the following:

♠9 7 5 4 ♥J 6 5 2 ♦J 6 3 2 ♣8.

Recalling what I read, I responded 2♣ then passed when partner bid 2♠. One of my opponents, who incidentally is a local bridge teacher, glared at me when I put down the dummy. After the play (partner made 2♠), the "teacher" loudly informed me that I could not bid like that. I tried to explain my thinking, but left the table feeling totally mortified. My confidence is shaken, and I am unsure if I would make this or any other "new" bid again. I would appreciate your opinion.

Ned and Jerry Reader

Dear Reader,

For starters, I am appalled that anyone, especially a "teacher," would react in the manner you described above. Compounding this aberrant behavior is the fact that you are a self-described "newbie." If a strong director had been summoned, a Zero Tolerance penalty would surely have been assessed. Unfortunately, most new players are not aware of their rights and are often driven from the game by arrogant behavior such as this. A Jerry-ism which I strongly believe in comes into play here.

> **It is okay to be wrong, but not okay to be wrong loud!**

Your action was the one I would choose at the table, and the one I would expect most experienced players to choose. The criticism you received was probably fueled by the good result your action generated, combined with poor manners and a general lack of theoretical knowledge.

With your 2 high-card points opposite a 15- to 17-point 1NT opening bid, it is clear the opponents have more high-card strength than you do. When specifically short in clubs, with at least three or four cards in the other three suits, your action had more upside than downside. Any time your partner held four or more cards in a major suit, your support plus the singleton club almost guarantees a superior contract. If partner had responded 2♦, denying a four-card major, passing by you often works out. True, your partner could hold 3=3=2=5 shape with very strong clubs and notrump could be superior, but in most cases he will hold at least three diamonds, often four, sometimes five. Bridge is a game of odds. Choosing the correct action, which I feel you did, does not guarantee a favorable result, but it certainly enhances the possibilities.

The advice you cited and followed was correct. When you bid Stayman, you usually have at least game invitational values with the notable exception being the hand pattern described above. Virtually any time you hold a singleton or void in clubs with a weak hand, some action is called for. This action is not a partnership agreement, simply bridge. I would choose Stayman on each of the following:

♠Q J 7 ♥9 7 6 3 ♦J 8 7 4 2 ♣10

♠A 8 6 5 ♥9 8 2 ♦7 6 5 4 3 ♣3

♠8 6 4 2 ♥9 7 6 3 ♦9 8 7 3 2 ♣ —

Rearrange your shortness to, say, 4=4=1=4, and a 2♦ response could be embarrassing depending on your partnership agreements.

Back to the real issue that got me all worked up: Free lessons are usually worth exactly what you pay for them. When an opponent chooses an action that you do not approve of, you have no right to make any unsolicited comment whatsoever. If you feel "fixed," simply smile and get over it. In my brother's kitchen there is a plaque I gave him years ago. Great advice: "A closed mouth gathers no foot." ❐