



Ask Jerry

Jerry Helms

www.jerryhelms.com

Dear Jerry,

Am I being too old-fashioned? I don't like to open a hand like this in first or second position:

♠K98 ♥QJ3 ♦K54 ♣K987.

It's only 12 HCP, without an ace, without a five-card suit, and with values completely scattered. My partner insists I should open it. What are the pros and cons?

Stuck in Yesteryear?

Dear SIY,

If it is old-fashioned to pass completely balanced aceless 12-counts, with no 10s, and 1½ quick tricks, methinks that many real bridge players in the world must also be old-fashioned. Playing in an announced light-opening system, I would open this non-opening bid. Playing a weak 1NT range, I would open 1NT. Playing any form of Standard or Two Over One, however, I would pass in a flash in first or second seat.

There are multiple issues here. For starters, the more balanced you are, the more conservative you should be. I have written articles in the past touting the virtues of the "Suggestion of 22." With all students, I suggest they

simply follow this easy guideline. On any hand where the decision to open or pass is close, use the following:

1. Count your high-card points. In this case, there are 12.
2. Add to your high-card points the length of your two longest suits, in this case, seven.
3. If these add up to at least 20, you should open the bidding in first or second seat, provided you have at least two quick tricks.

The hand above fails miserably to fulfill these simple requirements.

I am fully prepared for the rebuttals that are sure to flood my inbox resulting from stating my opinion so firmly. In my defense, I've never had a partner or teammate who has considered me to be the slightest bit conservative in the bidding. In my early youth, if someone asked my style of opening the bidding, I would have been puzzled about what they meant. In my current youth, my reply is easy. "I open the bidding when I have an opening bid, and I pass when I don't."

Dear Jerry,

Playing Standard, my partner opened 1♥. I had four spades, two hearts, two diamonds, five clubs and 10 points. What should I respond? Half the people I asked about this responded 1♠ to show a major at the one level. The other half responded 2♣ to show the longest suit and at least 10 points.

What do you practice?

Gail

Dear Gail,

Primarily, I preach and practice the virtues of the 2/1 game force system as opposed to Standard American. Larry Cohen, a co-conspirator on cruises and seminars, has convinced me we are doing a disservice by not teaching new players the premise that it requires an opening bid to introduce a new suit at the two level.

You are, however, playing Standard American, so it's important to recognize that a response at the two level with 10 points often leaves the partnership in no man's land. At this point, Old Mo' often rears his ugly head (Old Mo' standing for "momentum"). When a 2/1 response suggests 10 or more points, with opener ostensibly having 13 or more points, it is often difficult to untangle that we hold only 23 points instead of the requisite 25 or so usually thought of for game-level contracts. Sheer momentum often carries you too high. When I taught Standard American, which I no longer do, I advised that a 2/1 response should promise closer to 11 points as a minimum rather than the previously recommended 10.

I guess I could have given a simple answer to your question (actually, my assistant just reminded me a simple answer from me is not possible). With the values and shape in your example hand, I would respond 1♠.

If instead you held the same shape with opening values, I would clearly start by bidding 2♣, followed by bidding spades on my next bid. I hope none of this will be relevant for very much longer in your future as you will come to appreciate the virtues of learning and playing 2/1 game force instead. □