

Ask Jerry



Jerry Helms

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Dear Jerry,

I had problems with the following hand. I was dealer, playing 2/1.

♠K8765 ♥AQJ1064 ♦10 ♣5

I decided to open 1♥, but after partner responded 1NT forcing, I didn't know how to show my real distributional shape. I did think I had enough points to reverse. What should I have done?

MM

Dear MM,

First, I applaud your decision to open the bidding 1♥, which seems clear to me. Prior to doing this, I would like to remind you of one of the sermons that I continually deliver:

Always plan a second bid before you choose a first.

If responder bid 1NT, as he did, my assumption would be that he held three or fewer spades and could have as few as 6 points. Although I would love to mention my five-card spade suit, the values to do so just aren't there. A simple rebid of 2♥, showing a six-card or longer suit with a minimum opening bid seems the logical continuation. Even if your partner held three spades along with a singleton heart, the quality of your first bid suit strongly suggests that a heart contract is likely to be equal to or superior to a spade contract on most occasions.

Now that we have looked at the 1NT response you faced at the table, let's consider some of the other potentially more exciting possibilities.

Playing 2/1 game forcing, if partner instead had responded 2♣ or 2♦, I would plan to "pattern out," bidding 2♠, intending to follow with 3♠ to describe my 6-5 distribution. I am firmly in the camp that says in a game-forcing auction such as that, 2♠ is not necessarily an extra-value-showing reverse. There are theorists who preach a different sermon, so partnership agreement is important, making this a 2/1 auction that needs discussion.

The only other problematical response would be a surprising 1♠ from partner. I am not sure what the total value of your hand would be ... but really strong comes to mind! Envision your partner's hand being as weak as:

♠QJ43 ♥52 ♦Q86 ♣J974

Although game is not a certainty, you are essentially on a 50-50 heart finesse for 10 tricks. If this woeful collection stands a chance to produce a game, what if your partner actually held a real hand? This brings to mind another of my theories expressed as a Jerry-ism:

Always raise to game in the most descriptive fashion possible.

Let's review. After the 1♠ reply, we will not settle for playing less than game. Apply the aforementioned Jerry-ism: Is there an action that would describe game-forcing intent, four-card or longer trump support, along with at most one club? Yes: A splinter raise to 4♣ would be the most descriptive bid I could imagine!

An interesting hand. Depending on how the auction develops, you have somewhere between a dead minimum opening bid, and a game force with slam interest! □