

Ask Jerry



Jerry Helms

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Have a question for Jerry?
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Hi, Jerry,

I'm wondering if you could answer a question for me. My hand was:

♠A74 ♥AKQJ63 ♦— ♣KQ52.

There were three passes to me and out of fear that partner might pass, I decided to open 4♥. Partner tabled:

♠5 ♥8752 ♦AQJ4 ♣A876.

Suits broke normally, so 13 tricks were easy. A big discussion ensued. Do you think I should have opened 2♣ as many in my club suggested?

Harry

Hi, Harry,

Of course I can answer a question. In reality, I may often offer advice in conflict with other players' thoughts, but I am never without an opinion!

There are several issues involved here. For starters, one reason to open with a strong, artificial 2♣ is to announce virtual game-forcing strength with a fear that a non-forcing one-level bid may allow partner to pass and a good game be missed. It is true that you hold 19 HCP and would be a favorite to make a game if partner held as little as:

♠653 ♥5 ♦98765 ♣J876.

From purely a strength standpoint, you have the resources to open 2♣. In reality, since you are missing 21 HCP and nine spades, the chances of a 1♥ opening bid being passed out is somewhere near zero.

A second point: While the artificial 2♣ opening does well at announcing strength, it does so at the expense of expressing a sense of direction. With

your hand, the best contract could conceivably be in spades, hearts, clubs or perhaps notrump. What if partner held:

♠653 ♥— ♦A865 ♣A98763?

6NT is cold, and 7♣ is an extremely good contract. A 6-1 heart break, albeit unlikely, might actually defeat 4♥!

At the table, I would open 1♥ ... 100% of the time. Provided that anyone (partner or an opponent) makes a call, you can always get to at least a game and sometimes do a better job of probing for potential slams.

My thought process would be as follows: If partner bids a new suit, I would make a game-forcing jump shift in clubs. If an opponent bids, I would probably cuebid their suit and then try 4♥. On the actual layout, my partner, depending on available methods, will show heart support and a near-opening bid via some form of Drury, an underbid of 3♥, if that shows a limit raise, or a misdescriptive bid of 4♥. Over any action that showed values and heart support, it is clear to at least probe for a slam, and it's reasonable to simply leap to 6♥.

Incidentally, I would have been tempted to open your partner's hand in second seat. As a matter of fact, if he held four spades and a singleton heart, I *would* have opened his hand. This may be a good topic for another column. □