

Ask Jerry

BY JERRY HELMS

Dear Jerry,

One of my mentors wants to start playing something called fourth-suit forcing. When he described it to me, it seemed too complicated to be worth the effort. In one of your recent articles, you listed this convention as being useful. Could you try to explain in a manner that a newer-to-duplicate player, like me, might understand?

SH

Dear SH,

I don't know if I can explain, but I can certainly try. For starters, we need to establish an important premise for our partnership's bidding:

All second-round jumps by responder are non-forcing, but strongly invitational.

Some examples are in the following auctions. In each case, responder suggests less than the values required to open the bidding, somewhere around the 11- to 12-point range.

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♥
1♠	?

♠87 ♥AQ92 ♦K7432 ♣Q5

Bid 3♦, invitational.

♠A653 ♥KQ842 ♦J3 ♣102

Bid 3♠, invitational.

♠6 ♥AQJ543 ♦Q94 ♣J82

Bid 3♥.

These actions seem relatively straightforward. The problem occurs when responder holds game-forcing values with no clear sense of direction. After the same auction above, what would you bid as responder with:

♠K85 ♥AK432 ♦K86 ♣74?

With clear-cut opening values opposite partner's opening bid, it becomes a form of "the one who knows, goes." The problem is not whether we should reach game, but rather which game should we reach. With game-forcing values, there are only two options: Bid game if you know what game to bid. Otherwise, bid a new suit.

With these cards, leaping to 3NT with two low cards in the only unbid suit seems a poor choice. A 4♥ rebid, when partner could be void in hearts, seems equally poor. A jump to 4♠ on a 4-3 fit? A leap to 5♦ with only three-card support?

Of the two options (game or new suit), the bid of a new suit is clearly the only one that makes sense. On this hand, the advice to a new player is to rebid 2♣! Simplistically, any new-suit bid by a responder is forcing. In this case, 2♣ is the "fourth suit" and is forcing in any standard system.

The conventional treatment, called fourth-suit forcing, is merely an extension. The agreement is that the introduction of the fourth suit in the auction by responder creates an unconditional force to game.

Now let's consider what opener (with the example hand above) should do after responder bids 2♣.

Opener	Responder
1♦	1♥
1♠	2♣
?	

With:

♠A762 ♥Q85 ♦AQ92 ♣Q5,

opener bids 2♥. Having denied four-card heart support, the delayed heart raise shows three, just what partner needed to know.

With:

♠Q762 ♥J8 ♦AJ72 ♣AQ5,

2NT is best. With a double stopper in the artificially bid club suit, 2NT seems intelligent.

Holding:

♠AJ72 ♥J10 ♦AQJ72 ♣J5,

opener bids 2♦. A rebid of the five-card diamond suit, denying three-card heart support or a stopper in clubs, seems dead on.

Holding:

♠AQ62 ♥8 ♦AQJ9752 ♣Q,

3♦ is descriptive. A jump rebid in diamonds seems like a bid that actually resembles the cards held.

How should responder proceed? Using the additional information provided, do the best you can. There's more, but there's limited column space. Just remember, the fourth suit is artificial and game forcing, requiring opener to continue to describe the shape and values of his hand. ■