



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

The other day as East I held:

♠ A J 10 3 ♥ Q 10 7 ♦ K 9 6 5 4 ♣ 8.

The auction:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♥
1♠	2♥	?	

I wasn't sure what to do. If I jump to 3♠, does that invite game and show my values? Or is it a weak, blocking bid? If I bid 3♥, is that a Western Cue Bid, inviting notrump, or does it show this type of hand? What would I do with a near-opening bid with strength in both minors, looking for notrump? Help!

A.F.

Hi, A.F.,

Technically, this depends on your partnership agreements, but let's consider the alternatives that a partnership may choose to define their actions. I prefer that all jump raises in competition be defined as weak/preemptive. The requirements for this type action would be at least four-card support and less than the values for a simple raise. This somewhat follows the idea behind The Law of Total Tricks, where in a competitive auction you typically want to compete to the level equal to the number of trumps held.

With this as a start, there is a need to have some bid that shows support for

partner's suit and issues a game invitation. Having passed previously, cuebidding an opponent's suit can and should be used to show exactly this type hand. A cuebid, by the way, is a bid made in a suit where your intent cannot possibly be to make that suit trump. In this scenario, with the opponents suggesting eight or more hearts, 3♥ by you must be (by agreement) fit showing and game invitational.

Revisiting the auction:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♥
1♠	2♥	Dbl?	

When choosing among the various meanings that are possible for any given action, there are two major considerations: frequency of occurrence and the probability of gain or loss attributable to your decision.

Without any prior agreement, this double could easily be construed as penalty. But how often, when the opponents bid and raise a suit and your partner makes a simple overcall (which could be on as few as 9 or 10 points), will you hold the appropriate hand to suggest penalizing the opponents in an eight-trick contract? It is true, you might hold that perfect hand once in every eight or nine years. Granted, on that one time, you might lose a lucrative penalty, but there may be a hand type that gains – and does so more frequently – with a different definition.

What if you held the following:

♠ 9 3 ♥ 10 7 ♦ K Q 6 5 4 ♣ A J 8 2?

Clearly you have the values to compete, but in a standard setting, what should you bid? Supporting with a low doubleton seems wrong. 3♦ could work out poorly on a number of constructions. Many modern players play a double in this sequence as “responsive,” showing values to compete, with at least four cards in both unbid suits. With this agreement, you truly have the ability to make a call that actually resembles the cards held.

What are the requirements to make a responsive double? Any time the opponents bid and raise the same suit, sandwiching either an overcall or a double by partner, your double guarantees two places to play with appropriate values (and usually tolerance for overcaller's suit). This is a very good partnership option.

You mentioned something called the Western Cue Bid, I do not play any geographical cuebids: western, northern, southern or eastern. Depending on the auction, a cuebid of the opponents' suit by agreement can mean a lot of different things. Most of them can be lumped into one broad category called DSI – Do Something Intelligent! ■

Send your questions to
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