



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

The other day, my partner and I had the following auction:

Partner	Me
1 ♦	1 ♥
4 ♥	Pass

Holding 13 points, as responder, I passed and we made six. I insisted that my partner, who held a very good hand, should have gone slower rather than making a close-out bid. Thus far, the only thing we have done is to agree to disagree. Please help.

Carol

Hi, Carol,

As you may be aware, I do many seminars each year. At the close of the formal program, I offer a 30-minute “Ask Jerry” session for questions not covered in the main lesson. Your auction, and an auction that sounds similar but which is, in fact, very different, are topics I’m frequently asked to address.

Let’s start with this premise:

You can never “close out” a hand whose values have yet to be limited.

The entire matter of “close-out bids” is frequently misunderstood. When your partner opens 1NT, showing a balanced 15–17 points, you can raise to 3NT holding balanced game-going

values, secure in the knowledge that you’re not missing a slam. 3NT is a close-out bid because partner’s values are narrowly defined. When your partner opens 2NT, depending on your methods, you can place the final contract by making a close-out bid because once again, partner’s values and shape are well defined.

Your auction is quite different. Could your 1 ♥ response have been based on 6 points and four lousy hearts? Could you have held 11 points and five reasonable hearts? Could you have held six hearts and 14 points? The answer to all of these questions is yes.

When your partner raised you from 1 ♥ to 4 ♥, she was saying that even if you held that bare 6 points with four lousy hearts, the partnership belonged in game. If she thinks the partnership has game values when you may have only 6 points, how many points is she suggesting? Because a major-suit game typically requires 25–26 points, partner is likely to hold 19–20 points (or compensating distribution). This auction creates yet another example of “the one who knows goes.”

Holding considerably more than the minimum 6 points, you are now the one who knows the partnership is in the slam zone (typically 31–32 points for a six-of-a-suit contract). At that point, depending on your hand, either Blackwood or a control bid should be the correct move towards a possible slam.

Your suggestion that your partner

should go slower doesn’t really work. By raising your suit immediately, she identifies four-card support and limits her values, thereby transferring the captaincy of the auction to you.

Each of the sequences below accomplishes this purpose:

Partner	Me
1 ♦	1 ♥
2 ♥	
3 ♥	
4 ♥	

2 ♥ = roughly 12–15 points – a minimum to sound opening.

3 ♥ = roughly 16–18 – an invitational hand.

4 ♥ = an excellent hand just short of a 2 ♣ opening.

Your confusion is probably based on this similar-sounding, but vastly different auction:

Partner	Me
1 ♥	4 ♥

Although this bidding reflects the same premise – you cannot close out a hand whose values have not yet been limited – this time it is opener’s hand that may have undisclosed extras. From responder’s perspective, 4 ♥ is primarily an obstructive action intended to end the auction.

We’ll continue our discussion of this topic in next month’s article. ■