



Ask Jerry

BY JERRY HELMS  jerryhelms.com

Dear Jerry,

As a bridge teacher, I find my students have a hard time deciding whether to invite game when holding an 8-point hand after partner opens 1NT. Most teacher manuals tell them to invite with 8 or 9 points, but I would like my students to be a bit more discerning. Your thoughts?

Maggie

Hi, Maggie,

I have thoughts ... lots of them!

Several years ago, I was playing in a sectional with a new student who has since become a frequent tournament partner. She opened 1NT (15–17) and I passed holding a 4–3–3–3, 8-point hand. When I tabled dummy, I noticed a slight flutter I recognized as concern. Partner no doubt held a full 17 and we had a 4–4 major-suit fit.

The defense was friendly, and she took eight tricks for an excellent matchpoint result. When going over the hands later, she asked if I had passed based on her relative lack of experience. I told her truthfully, I would have passed that hand playing with Paul Soloway!

Here's a fact: When a partnership holds two balanced hands, point count is an incredibly accurate predictor of the number of tricks likely to be available.

Without at least 25 high-card points, taking nine tricks in notrump is unlikely. With fewer than 33 HCP, you're not a favorite to take 12 tricks in notrump.

I do recognize the value of 10s and 9s and that not all HCP are created equal. Using 4–3–2–1 point-count evaluation, aces and kings are slightly undervalued while queens and jacks are slightly overvalued.

When holding exactly 4–3–3–3 distribution with exactly 8 HCP, I rou-

tinely pass over partner's 15–17 1NT opening. Partner will accept a game invitation with all 17s, many 16s, and maybe, on occasion, even a "great 15." This translates to 25 as the most points we can ever have. The odds greatly favor staying low.

Jerry-ism: Just as in real life, the better your shape, the more you get by with.

The worst possible distribution for taking tricks is 4–3–3–3. With this holding, you have only one suit that might produce four tricks. A 4–4–3–2 hand is better. Now you have two suits that might produce four winners, and if at least one of your four-card suits is a major, should you find a fit, you now have a ruffing value to increase the trick-taking potential of your hand. A 5–3–3–2 hand with 8 points, although still balanced, is even better because of the potential offered by the five-card suit.

The more balanced you are, the more conservative you should be. This extends, too, to preempts. 7–2–2–2 is the worst shape for an opening three-bid. 7–3–2–1 is better and 7–4–1–1 even better.

In response to your question, Maggie, I confess: I am a simple soul. Deal me a 4–3–3–3 hand with 8 HCP opposite partner's 1NT opening, and I pass!

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