



## Ask Jerry

BY JERRY HELMS [jerryhelms.com](http://jerryhelms.com)

Dear Jerry,

At our local duplicate game, my regular partner and I had a friendly disagreement over how to bid the following hands. In first seat, I opened 1♦ holding:

♠96 ♥AQ73 ♦AKQ742 ♣10.

With no intervening bid, partner bid 3NT with:

♠A8 ♥854 ♦1083 ♣AKQJ7,

which ended the auction. We play this shows 13–15 points with balanced distribution. We missed slam. I thought he should first bid 2♣, while he thought 3NT perfectly described his hand. Plus, he thought I should bid again. What do you think?

Jack

Hi, Jack,

For starters, let's make sure everyone reading this column is on the same page (pun intended). Many partnerships have adopted the use of limited, non-forcing notrump responses to minor suit openings. Under this agreement,

1♣/1♦ – 1NT = 6–10  
2NT = 11–12  
3NT = 13–15

Each of these responses tends to deny a four-card major. Having established this, I have problems with you and your partner's actions in the auction. Regular readers of this column have heard this before:

### GO SLOW TILL YOU KNOW WHERE TO GO.

While it is clear that responder holds game values, what's the hurry? If 3NT needs to be the final contract, you could arrive there utilizing another of my -isms ... actually, it's more of an Eddie-ism.

### BID WHERE YOU LIVE.

Holding an opening bid with five virtually solid clubs, what could possibly be wrong with bidding them? Give opener a chance to describe his hand.

I cannot under any circumstance imagine eating up 13 steps of bidding to suggest a notrump contract with such an attractive 2♣ alternative available. On a related note, it is usually wrong to rush to the declaration of notrump when holding aces. If possible, the notrump declarer should be the player holding secondary honors like K–x–(x) or Q–x–(x), where the positional aspect of playing last on a lead could be important.

Playing 3NT as 13–15 is acceptable, but it should be done so on the right type of hand. Not only should this bid tend to deny a four-card major, I think it should tend to deny a good five-card holding in the other minor. In addition, you should try to have some scattered values in the unbid suits before making such a strong declaration of notrump intent. So 3NT is the first sin.

I think passing 3NT with your hand is unduly conservative and with that,

I am being kind. In seminars on slam bidding, I emphasize three issues:

- **Power**
- **Fit**
- **Controls**

Despite holding “only” 15 high-card points opposite what could be as few as 13, I think the power for a potential slam should be evident. You are 100% sure of having at least an eight-card diamond fit and on the auction, they rate to be nearly solid. The ♥AQ combination is more powerful than holding an ace in one suit and a queen in another, and you have second-round control of clubs. Hmmm ... your pass seems to be the last sin. Here's how I see the continuation:

You	Partner
1♦	3NT
4♦ <sup>(1)</sup>	4♠ <sup>(2)</sup>
4NT <sup>(3)</sup>	5♥ <sup>(4)</sup>
5NT <sup>(5)</sup>	?

- (1) Slam try.
- (2) Control bid.
- (3) Blackwood.
- (4) Two aces or key cards (no ♦Q), depending on what you play.
- (5) Confirms all the aces/key cards.

At this point, responder, holding an undisclosed source of tricks, should bid a grand slam. The reason I left the question mark is to account for experience levels and partnership agreements, but in any partnership, stopping in 3NT seems really wrong. ■