



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

My question concerns 2/1. Why do you have to have five hearts to respond to opener's 1♠ opener? You need only three or four in the suit when responding 2♣ or 2♦. What makes hearts special?

GV

Hi, GV,

This is a great question, but not because it's a 2/1 issue.

Because of the bias accorded major suits, the goal of identifying at least an eight-card fit in either hearts or spades is a priority in bidding.

A major shift (pun?) in bidding theory occurred as a result of the publication of "Bridge is a Partnership Game" in the mid-1950s. In this book, Alvin Roth introduced five-card majors in first or second position. This streamlined bidding by allowing responder to raise immediately when holding three-card support, confident of an eight-card fit. Once the merits became obvious, the new approach supplanted what many refer to as Goren, which was based, in part, on four-card major-suit openings.

Say partner opens 1♠ and you hold one of these hands:

♠ 8 5 ♥ A K J 6 ♦ A 7 3 ♣ J 9 8 4
♠ A Q 4 ♥ K Q 6 5 ♦ A 8 6 4 ♣ 9 8

2♥ would be an incorrect response on both hands.

On the first example, if hearts are available as a trump suit, you will easily find out by responding 2♣. If

opener started with five spades and four hearts, he would bid 2♥. In most cases, if opener does not bid 2♥, hearts are unlikely to become trump.

A benefit of playing 2/1 is that responder's 2♣ establishes a game force. A 4-4 heart fit can still be found when opener, holding six spades and four hearts, rebids 2♠. In the game-forcing auction on the first example, responder would bid 2NT over 2♠. Opener has room now to bid 3♥ to show a four-card heart suit.

While I advocate supporting with support, you can only do so when there is an action that both identifies your support and brackets your values. The second example typifies how, in most systems, there is no immediate raise available to show game-forcing values with exactly three-card support. Responding 2♦ with this particular hand is a temporizing action, yielding all of the benefits of the auction above.

Perhaps the real benefit of the five-heart requirement for responder belongs to the opening bidder. Holding a hand such as:

♠ A 10 8 3 2 ♥ 9 7 6 ♦ 9 6 3 ♣ A K,

an immediate raise of 2♥ to 3♥ would be in order. Note the rebid problem if responder can bid 2♥ holding only four.

The ability to raise immediately with three-card support applies equally to Standard American and 2/1 auctions. Some of these issues are more easily handled playing 2/1, but the premise applies to both systems. ■