



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

My partner opened an artificial strong 2♣ and right-hand opponent overcalled 2♠. Holding:

♠Q 10 7 5 4 ♥5 ♦A 7 3 ♣9 6 4 2,

I doubled for penalties. Partner interpreted this as a negative double. A disaster ensued as we stumbled to a 6♥ contract. What should I have done?

Flummoxed

Dear Flummoxed,

It has been a long time since I have heard the word flummoxed, so I was compelled to look it up. Apparently its first known usage was by Charles Dickens in the 1837 novel "The Pickwick Papers," and its meaning – *perplexed* or *bewildered* – hasn't changed. What an awesome choice of words!

As always, partnership agreement, or the lack thereof, rears its ugly head. I suspect many people are flummoxed by interference in their 2♣ auctions. It has been my experience that less experienced players tend to pass automatically after the strong opening when, in fact, they should be looking for reasons to bid ... hmm, seems I've said this before.

This is one of the reasons I encourage sensible interference over artificial 2♣ opening bids. Let me expound before I get back to your specific question.

Your RHO opens 2♣. Holding:

♠K Q J 9 8 ♥6 ♦8 5 4 ♣8 7 5 3,

I can't imagine *not* overcalling 2♠.

Even if I'm in deep trouble, it can be difficult at this stage of the auction for the opponents to accurately judge that 2♠ doubled is their best possible result. Frequently, responder's actions – as in your case – are undiscussed. Even when discussed, opener often holds an unbalanced hand with a long suit and feels the necessity to bid, no matter what responder seems to think.

Take this information as encouragement to participate more actively in 2♣ auctions than you have perhaps done in the past.

Finally, back to your question. In my regular partnerships, we have the following agreements for dealing with interference to a 2♣ opener:

- Pass = neutral and game forcing.
- New suit = natural, a reasonable five-card or longer suit, game-forcing. The rigid requirements I suggest for introducing a new suit after 2♣ in an uncontested auction, i.e., five or more cards with two of the top three honors, do not apply in competition.
- Double = an immediate negative response. If opener bids his suit, you are required to bid at least one time. If opener bids 2NT, which defines his limits, you can pass, bid Stayman, or make a transfer.

If 2♣ is doubled by your RHO, the above guidelines still apply except that redouble is used as the immediate negative.

These agreements may or may not have prevented your disaster. Holding your cards, I would have passed, showing game-going values but no clear sense of direction that I could express. If partner bid the probable 3♥, 3NT would seem logical. If he bid either clubs or diamonds, I would raise. On a good day, he might have a three-suited hand short in spades and reopen with a double for takeout. I don't think you would be perplexed or bewildered by what to do if this opportunity presented itself! ■