



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

In a recent duplicate game, I held:
 ♠A Q 9 7 5 ♥7 ♦A K 6 3 ♣8 6 4.

I opened 1♠ and partner jumped to 4♠. I passed and we easily took 12 tricks. He held:

♠K 8 4 3 2 ♥A 5 4 ♦Q J 7 5 ♣9

I felt his hand was too strong for his bid. His comment was that with five-plus trumps, a singleton and 10 high-card points or less, the raise was “automatic.”

Sarah

Hi, Sarah,

Let me hit you with one of my long-standing and closely held Jerry-isms:

“Any time you intend to raise partner to the level of game, you should do so in the most descriptive fashion possible.”

The logic should be easy to follow. Holding responder’s hand, you would certainly want to be in at least a spade game, but why be in a hurry, precluding the possibilities of slam?

To me, the auction 1♠–(Pass)–4♠ should be viewed as constructively obstructive, suggesting offense, but lacking in defense. I agree that it tends to show five or more trumps, along with a singleton or void somewhere, but outside aces and kings should be rare.

For instance, responder, holding:

♠10 8 7 6 4 ♥9 8 6 ♦9 8 5 4 ♣7,

should happily leap to 4♠! It is true that the fate of 4♠ is to be down at least one.

Oh no! Don’t throw me into that briar patch! Consider how well the opponents would do in a heart contract. On defense, we will take at most one spade and two diamonds. The obstructive effects of our leap to game has helped create potentially our best possible result. If they double, down one is better than the game bonus that was available. If down two, it depends on the vulnerability. If they bid to the five level, they might go down.

Granted, this zero-point hand is pushing the envelope, but it’s indicative of the type of hand designed for the jump to four of a major. The emphasis should be a trick-taking hand if our side declares, and minimal tricks if we defend.

On your partner’s actual hand, I would prefer a splinter raise of 4♣. To my way of thinking, this would show at least 13 support points, four-card or longer trump support and a singleton or void in clubs.

After the 4♣ splinter helps reveal that all the values in both hands are working together, slam might be reached as follows:

| West | East |
|------|------|
| 1♠ | 4♣ |
| 4♦ | 4♥ |
| 4NT | 5♠ |
| 6♠ | Pass |

4♦ and 4♥ are control-showing bids, cooperating for a possible spade slam. After 4♥, you (opener) bid Blackwood. Playing Roman key card Blackwood, your partner’s 5♠ shows two key cards and the trump queen! Assured of at least a 10-card trump fit, responder should answer as if he has the queen. Because you hold the queen, you realize that partner has five-card (or longer) support.

I know this was a perfect layout for slam, but even opening 1♠ with:

♠Q J 9 7 5 ♥K J 7 ♦K 6 4 ♣K 3,

the splinter raise stops you in a reasonable game.

Obviously, vulnerable versus non-vulnerable is a bit different from non-vulnerable versus vulnerable, but the premise never changes: offense versus defense. ■