



Ask Jerry

BY JERRY HELMS ✉ askjerry@jerryhelms.com 🌐 jerryhelms.com

Dear Jerry,

After partner opens 1♣, the correct response, holding four diamonds and four hearts and a minimum hand – say 8 points – is 1♥. Why is that? Why skip over diamonds?

I know we are searching for a “golden fit,” preferably a major, but it could be diamonds. If we are destined to find a heart fit, opener will rebid 1♥ after my 1♦ response and the fit is found, with the stronger hand as declarer.

If my original response is 1♥ and opener raises, then we have found our golden fit, but I am declarer with the stronger opening hand exposed as the dummy.

What logic am I missing? Thanks.

Larry

Hi, Larry,

It is of note that this is the second question about this issue that I have addressed this week. Seems like it might be a good idea to publish something.

The search for a golden fit, i.e., an eight-card or longer combined *major-suit* holding, is a bidding priority. With five-card majors as the dominant bidding system in North America, a minor-suit opening could be made with as few as three cards. This generally leaves the responsibility for initiating the search for a potential golden fit in the hands of responder.

For many years, it was standard to respond 1♦ to a 1♣ opening when holding a hand such as:

♠ 9 8 4 ♥ K J 7 6 ♦ K J 7 3 ♣ J 10.

In theory, 1♦ leaves room for opener to bid 1♥ if he holds four hearts. This works very well, provided the opponents remain silent. In reality, the enemy often intrudes in the auction and disturbs our plan. How would you feel if the auction went as follows:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♦
2♠	Pass	Pass	?

Holding 9 HCP opposite an opening bid, the need to be competitive – to either play this hand or push the opponents to a higher level – seems evident. After this start, however, pass seems the only alternative, but it just feels wrong.

If we held a secondary fit after the 1♣ opening, I suspect there is a much higher chance it would be in hearts rather than diamonds. If opener held four diamonds and four clubs, he would generally open 1♦. Even holding five clubs and four diamonds, with something like:

♠ A J 8 ♥ 6 ♦ A Q 10 5 ♣ Q 9 8 6 4,

many players would open 1♦, to prepare for a 2♣ possible rebid. The point in all of this is to consider potential interference, and to think and then bid, not bid and then think! Discovering the

possible, and more probable, fit in the heart suit should be the priority.

Your point about the weaker hand declaring a heart contract in an untested auction is valid. Equally valid is that you cannot cover all possible contingencies.

With a much stronger hand, something like:

♠ 7 6 ♥ A Q 9 7 ♦ A Q 8 6 ♣ Q 8 4,

it is reasonable to “bid up the line.”

Holding these cards, it would be acceptable to respond 1♦ to a 1♣ opening because your game-going strength makes it possible for you to show both suits. Also, interference by the opponents is less likely to be a problem. If the auction were to go:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♦
2♠	Pass	Pass	?

you have at least two options. You could now introduce hearts, which would be 100% forcing, or perhaps reopen the bidding with a DSI (Do Something Intelligent) double. I confess, I would have responded 1♥ on this hand to begin with! Change the hand a little and give me game-going values with five or more diamonds and four hearts, then 1♦ would be my choice.

I don't think you were necessarily missing any logic, just perhaps a little bidding theory. ■