



Ask Jerry

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Jerry,

I am looking for clarification on one part of your Ask Jerry column in the June 2017 Bridge Bulletin (pg. 47). In the following auctions, it seems you are saying that opener is showing a balanced 18–19 point hand:

(a)

| | | | |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 1♣ | 1♥ | Pass | Pass |
| 1NT | | | |

(b)

| | | | |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 1♦ | Pass | Pass | 1♠ |
| 1NT | | | |

I thought when opener rebid 1NT, it showed a balanced 12–14 points. Can you explain?

Peter

Hi, Peter,

It has long been my contention that the single most important bid in most auctions is opener's first rebid. This action is often the first to define and bracket values to a manageable range. An opening bid in a suit typically shows 12 points or so, up to any hand not worthy of a forcing two-bid – usually fewer than 21.

This bracketing is true in the two auctions you cited above, but it is vastly different from this sequence:

(c)

| | | | |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 1♣ | Pass | 1♠ | Pass |
| 1NT | | | |

In all the examples, the opener has begun the auction with a wide-ranging one-bid, reflecting somewhere between 12 and 21 points. In example (c), where responder has voluntarily made a forcing 1♠ call, the expectations are that he holds 6 or more points.

Opener's 1NT rebid implies balanced shape with values good enough to open the bidding, yet not enough to open a strong 15–17 1NT, ergo 12–14 points. Based on responder's bid, the partnership rates to have at least 50 percent of the total values available.

In your auctions, where responder has passed the opening bid or overcall, it is possible that he holds zero points. If opener chooses to compete by bidding 1NT on his own, it shows the hand that he would have jumped to 2NT with had partner freely responded. The logic? Despite responder's pass, opener knows the partnership has at least 18–19 points because he is looking at them!

Your confusion on these auctions is not unusual, and the cloudiness of this issue often leads to poor results. One such instance is when opener mistakenly jumps to 2NT with 18 points, and finds partner holding the zero points he could have. A more common situation is where responder fails to act appropriately after opener has correctly rebid 1NT with 18–19 points.

You hold:

♠ x x x ♥ K x x ♦ K J x x x ♣ J x.

The auction proceeds:

| | | | |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 1♣ | 1♠ | Pass | Pass |
| 1NT | Pass | ? | |

After the overcall, you have nothing to say. But remember, *the one who knows ... goes!* When opener backs into the auction with 1NT, showing 18–19 points, you have a clear obligation, as the one who knows, to go to 3NT!

Now you hold:

♠ x x x ♥ J x x x x x ♦ x ♣ J x x.

Same auction: Your hand has little value in a notrump contract. It should play better in the likely eight-card or longer heart fit. You should bid 2♥. After passing originally, all of your bids are natural. Stayman and transfers do not apply. ■

Dear Readers,

I answer 100 percent of the questions sent to me at askjerry@jerryhelms.com. If you desire a reply, please be sure your spam blocker will allow me direct access to your inbox.

Jerry