



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

Recently, one of my opponents opened with a preempt in third seat on a mediocre six-card suit. It had a devastating effect on our auction. Is aggressive bidding like this a modern trend that I'm missing out on?

Melanie

Hi Melanie,

I have a teaching deal that I often use, which may help you understand my feelings on this issue.

Dlr: West ♠ Q 8 7 5 4
 Vul: None ♥ Q 3
 ♦ Q 10 8 7
 ♣ A 10

♠ A J 10 9 ♠ 3 2
 ♥ K 7 6 5 ♥ 9 4 2
 ♦ 9 5 4 3 ♦ 6 2
 ♣ J ♣ K Q 9 8 6 5

♠ K 6
 ♥ A J 10 8
 ♦ A K J
 ♣ 7 4 3 2

I ask my students to bid and play whatever contract they arrive at. Here's the auction at most tables:

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1NT
Pass	2♥	Pass	2♠
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

A simple auction. South opens a standard 15–17 1NT, North transfers to spades, and then offers South a

choice of games by bidding 3NT. On any lead, there are nine tricks available in notrump: one spade, three hearts, four diamonds and a club. What's the problem?

The problem? How could East possibly pass in third seat? One of my Jerry-isms:

Good players integrate what they can see with what they have heard and seen.

Seeing 5 high-card points and hearing his partner pass (which tends to show 10 or 11 points at most) should lead East to an epiphany ... the opponents rate to possess at least 24–25 points.

Here, East has two options: 1. Pass. "I have exactly 13 cards with nothing I wish to say at this time"; 2. 3♣. "I have a long, reasonable club suit with less than opening-bid values." Clearly option 2 is far more descriptive than option 1. Now consider how the auction might be affected:

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	3♣	?

What is poor South supposed to do? Make a takeout double with only two spades? Overcall 3NT with 16 HCP and four small clubs in the face of the club preempt? Overcall a four-card heart suit? What should South do? Well, emotionally, I would feel like slapping my right-hand opponent because

there is not an option available that describes what I have.

If South does double, North would likely jump to 4♠, which has no play. If South passes in tempo, which I doubt, North might well balance with 3♠. South may now raise to the unmakeable game, or may pass ... who knows? The point is that once East opens 3♣, he has created a situation for East–West to receive their best possible result. If 3♣ becomes the final contract, they will certainly take at least seven tricks and maybe eight, to go down one or two – a much better result than defending a making game. It doesn't look likely that the opponents could ever effectively engineer a penalty double of 3♣.

But wait! East has only a six-card club suit! Doesn't a three-level preempt show a seven-card suit? If I were East, I would explain that I almost had a seven-card suit, and really wish that I did have a seven-card suit. But alas, I had to deal with what I was dealt (pun intended).

Although I believe this Jerry-ism applies in all seats, I think it's especially important in third seat:

Look for a reason to bid before settling for an excuse to pass.

I guess I could have just answered your question with a simple yes. ■