



## Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

Recently we missed a game on a bidding misunderstanding. This was our auction:

Me	Partner
1♣	1♥
1♠	2NT
3♥	Pass

Our agreement is that 2NT shows 11–12 points, and invites game. I had enough strength to accept the invitation, but I wanted partner to know about my three-card heart support. I was very surprised when she passed. Should I have just raised to 3NT?

Anne

Hi Anne,

From a practical standpoint, if 3NT was the best final contract, clearly you should have just raised – even though I think your 3♥ bid was accepting the invitation. I have a philosophy of bidding that applies to this situation:

*Define your bids primarily to reach the best game or slam, rather than trying to stop in a perfect partscore.*

In this auction, your partner knows you do not hold four hearts. Unfortunately, you cannot be sure whether your partner holds four or five hearts. Responder's 2NT rebid could easily include a five-card heart suit. Examples:

♠Q5 ♥KJ864 ♦AJ10 ♣865  
♠852 ♥AQ864 ♦KQ7 ♣65

In your auction, opener has made a non-forcing third-suit rebid. Her values range from the worst 12-point hand she has ever opened, up to not quite enough strength for a game-forcing jump shift. With each of the two examples above, responder knows there might be a game, but maybe not.

Rebidding to show five hearts is not really an option: Bidding 2♥ would show 6–10 points, and typically a longer suit. A jump to 3♥ is best played as invitational, but should guarantee a reasonable six-card or longer suit. A bid of 2♦ by responder would certainly be forcing, and, for many players, it would be fourth-suit forcing, which is a conventional tool to artificially create a game force. With all of these unappealing options, a jump to 2NT to invite game and indicate that the unbid suit is stopped for notrump purposes seems the perfect solution.

As opener in these auctions, with minimum values, the best alternative is usually pass. The only reason to now raise the heart suit is not to seek a better partscore, but to help us get to the best game. Responder will know that opener has exactly three hearts, and will be able to look at her own hand to know whether she has five! The opening bidder might hold either of the following two hands:

♠AJ76 ♥AQ5 ♦4 ♣A9732  
♠AK76 ♥K95 ♦A4 ♣9732

With each of these, opener wants to get to a game, and bidding 3♥ makes sure we can identify a 5–3 fit if one

exists. Any time responder hears this delayed raise, and he holds only a four-card heart suit, 3NT is the only option.

The rebuttal I sometimes face: “What if opener has a weak hand with three hearts and a singleton?” Easy answer! ... Pass!

Without getting too deep, a couple of somewhat similar auctions:

West	East
1♣	1♥
3♣	3♥

3♥ is absolutely forcing. If responder holds a poor hand, a lousy club fit, and long hearts, he should just give up and pass.

1♦	1♥
1♠	1NT
2♥	

The 2♥ bid is not forcing, but is game invitational. It shows the values for partner to rebid 2NT if he holds only four hearts and minimum values. A typical hand:

♠QJ65 ♥AK3 ♦6 ♣AQJ63.

Notice that opener is strong enough to have simply issued a 2NT invitation, but does so by “patterning out.” If it sounds like opener has clubs, spades, hearts and a good hand, that's exactly what he has. Opener should not show three-card heart support with minimum values even with a singleton.

To summarize: Looking for the perfect partscore is less important than reaching the best game. Make sure you define your bids to help reach this goal.