



Ask Jerry

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Weak two-bid woes

Hi Jerry,

My partner and I got into a discussion concerning the following situation.

RHO opens a weak 2♠. Holding:

♠3 ♥74 ♦KJ874 ♣A10752,

what is the best bid? Pard used the unusual 2NT. Doesn't 2NT have a different meaning in this context?

David

Hi David,

Yes! There is a principle that applies in this situation and other similar ones. It is illogical to define actions as preemptive by members of opposing sides on the same deal. Another way to say this: When their bids show weakness, we need our bids to show strength.

In the auction in question, 2♠ suggests 5–11 points, with a good six-card suit – a weak bid. The unusual notrump, a tool to show at least 5–5 distribution in the two lower unbid suits, is usually based more on shape than strength – also a weak bid.

Over a weak 2♠, an immediate 2NT overcall shows 15–18 points with at least one stopper in their suit, just like 1NT would, over a 1♠ opener. After this strength-showing action, all notrump systems, like Stayman and transfers, should be “on.”

The same principle of “strength after weakness, weakness over strength” would apply in these auctions:

RHO	You
1♦	2♠

Because the 1♦ opening suggests strength, it is perfectly reasonable as a partnership agreement to use 2♠ as a weak jump overcall. However, after:

RHO	You
2♥	3♠

2♥ is a weak bid. Therefore, the 3♠ jump overcall is *not* weak! It suggests a very good six-card or longer suit with around 17–18 points. Not forcing, but highly invitational.

You asked what your partner should have bid. Simple: Pass.

The following is an editorial comment, which you did not request. Although it is perfectly “standard” to play an opening bid of 1NT as 15–17, notrump overcalls should be 15–18. On occasion, you may open 1NT, catch a near worthless dummy, with remaining high cards evenly divided, and escape undoubled down one or two. In contrast, If RHO opens, and you overcall 1NT, it is much easier for LHO, looking at 10 or more points, to know you're in trouble and double! With 18 balanced points as opener, it's reasonable to open, planning to jump in notrump *if* partner responds. After they open, and you hold a balanced 18, just get it off your chest immediately with a notrump overcall.

Dear Jerry,

My partner and I were on a different wavelength on this auction:

Me	LHO	Partner
2♠	3♦	Dbl

Partner insisted this was a negative double. I was not so sure. What's your take?

Tom

Hi Tom,

When your partner opens the bidding at the one level with any suit, he is often interested in exploring alternative contracts. In an auction like:

Opener	Opp.	Responder
1♣	1♠	Dbl

the opening 1♣ bid could easily be on a three-card suit while holding a strong four-card heart suit. After the spade overcall, using double by responder as takeout, rather than penalty, allows for the exploration of a major-suit fit, or perhaps notrump, or perhaps a rebid of your original suit. In an auction like yours, the 2♠ preempt is strongly suggestive of a single-suited type hand not looking for a secondary fit in one of the other suits. In your auction, the double of 3♦ should be 100% penalty! Any time your partner makes any form of a preempt, and RHO takes action, double is never takeout, optional, responsive, or anything other than a desire to inflict serious damage over perhaps an unwise entry into the auction.

Holding:

♠6 ♥AK5 ♦Q10954 ♣A864,
stand tall and announce your opinion! ■