



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

My partner and I are relatively newer players, using strong notrumps (15–17), and Jacoby transfers. He opened 1NT, and I held:

♠ 7 4 2 ♥ 4 ♦ J 8 7 6 4 2 ♣ 8 6 5.

I only had one point, so I passed. Despite a full 17-count, partner went down two, vulnerable. Should I have bid, and if so, what should I bid?

Jack

Hi Jack,

Before we decide what to bid, let's decide why to bid. In 1NT, depending on opener's diamond holding, your hand might produce zero tricks. However, even if opener holds a low doubleton diamond, as long as the five missing diamonds divide 3–2, as is probable, your hand can expect to take three tricks in a diamond contract. So the answer to your first question is yes. With a six-card or longer minor suit and a weak hand, responder should get us to a minor suit contract at the lowest possible level as quickly as possible. From this point, partnership agreement becomes the key issue.

Your decisions to play Stayman and Jacoby transfers eliminates the possibility of playing either 2♣ or 2♦ as a final contract after 1NT, but somehow the three level should be achievable. As always, partnership agreement is the key to issues like this.

In the mid-1950s, Alvin Roth and Tobias Stone were arguably the best bridge partnership in the world. In Roth's 1958 book, "Bridge is a Partnership Game," one stated purpose of their system was "to have no idle bids." In your current system, if responder holds five or more spades, and intends to "show them," he would always start with a 2♥ transfer to the spade suit. This makes an immediate 2♠ response an "idle bid."

For simplicity's sake, I recommend using 2♠ as a relay to force opener to bid 3♣, irrespective of his minor-suit holding or values. Responder, with a

long club suit and a weak hand, passes. With a long diamond suit and a weak hand, he converts to 3♦. Neither of these two decisions solicits input from opener. The hand you cite would be a classic 2♠ response, intending to convert the forced 3♣ to 3♦. If your minor-suit holdings were reversed, you could simply pass the 3♣ bid.

On each of the following, I recommend using 2♠ to reach a minor-suit contract:

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

After the forced 3♣, you would pass or correct. By the way, do not ever transfer to a minor suit using these methods with less than a six-card suit. The potential 5–2 fit at the three level with a weak hand is unlikely to be your best spot.

Holding either of the following:

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

don't even think about introducing your minor suit. Bid 3NT and first show partner your long suit when you table it as dummy.

There are better methods – actually, much better – but as always, these options require more memory work. Some of the possible conventional agreements include, four-suit transfers, 2♠ for size, and Walsh relays. When you're ready to augment your system, consider one of these. ■

