



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

Sitting in the second position, vulnerable against nonvulnerable, my partner held:

♠KQ ♥Qx ♦AK9x ♣10xxxx.

His RHO opened 1♥ and, after some he thought, he bid an unusual 2NT.

Holding four clubs headed by the king and queen, with only one other high-card point, I bid 3♣, which ended the auction, and we made it for a good score.

I thought the 2NT was a nice outside-the-box bid, but I commented that with a simple 2♣ overcall, we would have ended up in the same place (or setting 3♥). He said he'd never overcall such a bad suit, and implored me not to in the future (odd this hasn't come up after five years of playing together). And so, Your Jerry-ness, what do you think?

Jon

Hi Jon,

It is often best when I can be equally critical of all of the options presented for my opinion! For starters, I strongly believe that any action which shows shape should contain the shape promised. Both the unusual notrump and the Michaels cuebid should guarantee a minimum of 5-5 in their respective suits. Both of these actions are more often preemptive in nature than they are constructive. With 5-4 distribution in the minors and 2½

quick tricks, the unusual notrump would not be a choice I would consider. With ♣KQxx, despite not specifically knowing the rest of your holding, opposite a normal (5-5) unusual notrump bid, I would have jumped to at least 4♣!

As much as I dislike the 2NT bid, it would share the stage of shame with a 2♣ overcall on such a lousy suit. When I am teaching competitive bidding, I often use the following comment:

If you are the dealer and hold opening values, pass is not an option. If an opponent opens in front of you, pass says one of two things about your hand:

- ① You have nothing to say.
- ② There is nothing you can say that says what you have.

The hand in question to me falls clearly under No. 2.

Thanks Jerry, but I do have one lingering question, i.e., what one does when there seems to be conflicting Jerry-isms? Doesn't passing with these values in the direct seat contradict the adage about "finding a reason to bid" rather than "settling for an excuse to pass"? When do we apply which principle, or rather, which principle trumps another, and when?

An attempt to clarify, citing another Jerry-ism: A good bid is one that most closely resembles the cards actually held.

The options here are:

- ① 2NT. 5-5 or better distribution in the minors with more offensive potential than defensive.
- ② 2♣. A two-level overcall, showing a good five-card or longer suit. Typically lead directive.
- ③ Pass. Either nothing to say, or nothing you can say that says what you have. Exactly what you have at this point in the auction.

Bridge is a wonderful game that ultimately requires the application of judgment, which is usually gained as a result of making multiple mistakes over a long period of time, and finally noticing that you perhaps should do things differently in the future.

The distinction between a reason and an excuse in this context to me: An action taken without full consideration of available options is an excuse. An action taken that examines available options and opts for the one that is least bad is a reason.

By the way, if the auction on the above had begun:

1♥	Pass	2♥	Pass
Pass	2NT!		

in the balancing position with your partner's cards, you would now have a reason to bid, and an action that resembles your cards.

By the way, you are now my first ever published "double play"! Thank you. ■