



Ask Jerry

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Hi Jerry,

I came across this sequence the other day at our club.

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	1♥	1♠
2♠			

The one thing I was sure of was that I was not sure what the 2♠ bid meant. Help? Thanks,

Jerome

Hi Jerome,

In the world of bridge, there are many actions that can have dramatically different meanings in various sequences.

Sometimes a bid of the opponent's suit – often called a “cuebid” – suggests support for partner's suit with values that range from a limit invitation up to a game force.

1♥	1♠	2♠	Pass
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In this sequence, most players have adopted the 2♠ bid to show a limit raise or better in opener's suit. Perhaps:

♠ x x x ♥ K Q x x ♦ A x x x ♣ x x, a normal limit raise, inviting game. But it could be:

♠ A x x ♥ K Q x x ♦ K J x x ♣ x x, a game-forcing raise. Neither time is responder's spade holding relevant.

Sometimes a bid of an opponent's suit suggests control of that suit for slam purposes.

1♠	Pass	2♥	3♣
4♣			

A typical hand for opener:

♠ A K x x x ♥ A x x x ♦ K J x ♣ x.

A strong hand with great heart support, and the singleton club to limit club losers.

On other occasions, the bid of an opponent's suit might carry a conventional meaning. In these auctions:

Opener	Overcall
1♣	2♣
1♦	2♦
1♥	2♥
1♠	2♠

if RHO opens at the one level, and we bid that suit directly, it is most often a Michaels cuebid, showing 5–5 distribution. This cuebid of a minor suit guarantees both majors, while the cuebid of a major suit shows at least five cards in the unbid major plus five or more cards in one of the minors.

There are more, but let's focus on your auction.

I actually encountered this exact auction playing with a somewhat experienced partner who explained that my bid of 2♠ showed a limit raise or better in hearts. Methinks not! When you don't know what a bid means, before you go out on a limb, try to decide what it can't mean. If, as opener, I held four-card support for partner's suit with minimum values, I would bid 2♥. With the same support, and medium values, 3♥. With the same support and maximum values, 4♥. I don't see how the cuebid fits any of these ranges. Let's take a look at some hands opener

might have for your auction.

1. ♠ 7 5 2 ♥ A K ♦ A K ♣ A J 10 7 6 3
2. ♠ J ♥ 8 6 4 ♦ A K Q ♣ A K Q 7 6 3
3. ♠ 7 6 5 2 ♥ A Q ♦ K J 4 ♣ A K J 10

On each of these hands, after hearing partner's unforced initial response, game values are established. The big problem is that while you wish to reach a game, you have no earthly idea of which game, or even potentially which slam, to consider.

On hand 1 or 2, a jump to 3♣ might be tempting for some, but since a jump rebid is merely invitational, it would be a distinct underbid, holding 19 HCP, especially given that partner could pass.

On hand 3, if the opponents were silent, opener should jump to 2NT over a 1♥ response by partner. However, once the opponents have bid spades, something about suggesting notrump, holding four low cards in their suit, does not appeal.

The short answer to your question: Any time opener bids the opponent's suit after his partner's one-level response, it is 100% forcing to game and typically suggests a lack of a clear sense of direction.

As responder, what are you supposed to do? The best you can, and don't quit bidding until at least a game contract has been reached. Perhaps this is a good time to review my ASBAF convention: All Strange Bids Are Forcing! Applicable here and, in my opinion, all situations where you don't know whether you can pass or must bid. ■