



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

In a recent ACBL game, sitting South, holding:

♠ 10 8 3 ♥ J 9 3 ♦ A J 9 7 5 ♣ 7 4,

the bidding proceeded:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♦
Pass	1♥	Pass	?

What should I do?

Thanks, Ynnaws

Hi Ynnaws,

One of my favorite “isms,” amended now because of the use of bidding boxes:

Good players integrate what they can see with what they have seen.

Let’s apply my “ism” to this auction.

You see your partner has placed the 1♣ card on the table, letting you know that he has three or more clubs, and between 12 and 20 points or so. He could be completely balanced, with a 4-3-3-3 pattern, or wildly unbalanced, with something like 0-0-6-7! At this point, you have very little to go on. Your RHO has placed a green pass card on the table, suggesting either he has nothing to say, or there is nothing he can say that says what he has. You are looking at 6 HCP, with a five-card diamond suit, and properly place the 1♦ card on the table. Your LHO chooses the same action as your RHO for exactly the same reasons.

Your partner now chooses the 1♥ card. What do you now know?

Your partner has chosen a third-suit rebid at the one level, giving you a better clue of his values and a little more about his shape. In addition to holding clubs, he typically holds exactly four hearts, although it is possible he could have six clubs and five hearts. In terms of values, facing your forcing new-suit response, he is now marked somewhere between the worst 12-point hand he has ever opted to open, up to a hand not quite worthy of a game-forcing jump shift, which caps his values to, at most, a “bad” 18. Your RHO now passes a second time.

The silence of the opponents along with my meager values leads me to believe that my partner holds a very good hand, but one not quite good enough to force me to speak again. I suspect he is eagerly awaiting my next action and preparing to bid a lot!

We are in a tolerable spot opposite partner’s expected four-card heart suit, and the prospects of game opposite his non-jump shift and my massive 6 high-card points, are almost certainly nil. Therefore ... I pass!

In a way, the more unhappy my partner looks at my pass card, the better I feel, because it confirms that his next action was quite likely going to be in the stratosphere.

If you had held as many as 8 or 9 points, although you would not be forced to bid again in this auction, you should bid again, to protect against the possibilities that your partner could

hold the near jump shift. In addition, if you could not tolerate, as a trump suit, your partner’s bid, you would need to do something despite meager values. For instance, if your hand, on a similar auction had been:

♠ 10 8 3 ♥ J ♦ A J 9 7 5 ♣ 9 7 4 3,

passing 1♥ would obviously be wrong. On this holding, going back to 2♣ seems the only reasonable thing to do.

An important lesson in bridge is to learn the difference between auctions where you must speak again, as opposed to those where you may speak again. Opener’s jump shift, or a reverse at the two level, are the only forcing actions available.

By the way, although my columns are based on real questions from real players, I often change the names of the questioners to protect either the guilty or the innocent. I’ll bet you know who you are after seeing the above! ■

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