



Ask Jerry

BY JERRY HELMS ✉ askjerry@jerryhelms.com 🌐 jerryhelms.com

Dear Jerry,

My partner and I have had two very similar auctions with very similar poor results. The first was:

1♥	1♠
2♣	2♥
Pass	

Making five. Responder held:

♠A K 4 3 ♥8 6 3 ♦6 4 ♣9 7 6 5.

The second auction:

1♥	1♠
2♦	2♥
3♦	3♥
Pass	

Making five! Responder held:

♠A J 9 5 2 ♥J 8 4 3 ♦7 2 ♣J 3.

Each time I thought partner was simply taking a preference with a doubleton. He insists that mentioning spades first was clearly the right thing to do. We disagree. Can you settle our dispute?

DT

Hi DT,

Of all the many questions that I've received over the years, your question focuses on one of my strongest bidding theories. I will start with a brief Jerry-ism, modeled after an earlier Roth-Stone-ism:

Support with support!

To expand this "-ism," I firmly believe that in any auction where a major-suit fit of eight or more cards

can be confirmed while simultaneously defining one's values to a specific range, there is no better action available than to "support with support."

On the first example, I understand the temptation your partner faced to mention the suit where 100% of this high-card strength was concentrated. As I've always said, having temptation has never been a real problem. The real problem is when you yield to temptation as your partner did. A direct and immediate raise to 2♥ would show his exact values and designate the most likely trump suit. Facing trump support, and simple raise values, opener is often well placed to pass, invite game or bid game. The probability that responder is merely taking a preference with a doubleton trump often inhibits game tries. In a way, your partner got lucky. What if the auction had proceeded:

1♥	Pass	1♠	3♦
Pass	Pass	?	

Surely there would be a need to compete. Somehow if my partner first mentioned spades, and then showed support at the three level, I would be inclined to play them to hold more than a balanced 7-point hand!

The second auction is an even greater violation, unless your partner intended to treat his hand as a limit raise in hearts by first bidding spades, planning to jump-support hearts on his next bid, which would be a gross overbid instead of the gross underbid actually chosen. Fans of Bergen

raises, which I am not, would have an easy time with this hand. They would respond 3♣, showing four-(plus)-card trump support along with simple raise values – in this case, a bid that totally resembles the cards actually held.

Lacking these methods, a simple raise to 2♥, planning to accept virtually any game try, would be my preference. In his actual auction, what would he have bid holding:

♠A J 9 5 2 ♥7 2 ♦J 3 ♣J 8 4 3?

Methinks he would have bid 1♠, and then taken a preference back to hearts on his small doubleton after your 2♦ bid! This would be what I would expect – never would I expect four-card heart support on the action that was perpetrated.

Just to be clear, you can only support with support if you have the ability to define values *and* clarify a trump fit. After a 1♥ opening bid, holding:

♠A 7 6 4 2 ♥K Q 8 ♦6 5 ♣A 5 4,

it would be proper to temporize and respond 1♠, since there is no immediate raise of hearts available to show three trumps along with opening bid values. Responder's plan would be to follow his first action by continuing with a 4♥ rebid over any minimum rebid opener chose.

I did note each time that I did not get a look at your hand, but it was actually irrelevant to the bidding theory involved. Sorry to have been so tough on your partner, but you may get an idea that this issue always touches a nerve with me. ■