



Ask Jerry

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Hi Jerry,

Recently at our local duplicate, I held the following:

♠A 10 5 ♥A Q 10 ♦A K 6 5 ♣K 5 4.

Our auction:

2NT	3♥
3♠	3NT
All Pass	

I thought that because I was 3=3=4=3, perhaps notrump would play as well as spades and, of course, 3NT making four is better than 4♠ making four, so I passed. You can guess what happened. 4♠ making four; 3NT making three. Partner was irked that I didn't correct to spades.

Question: Should you always correct to the major on a transfer/notrump when you have three of the transferred suit? If not, when would you not?

Thanks, FW

Hi FW,

In my teaching, I stress that bridge should be more of a "we" game than a "me" game. I completely concede that your perfectly balanced, 3=3=4=3 shape screams notrump. Unfortunately, your partner's actions do not in any way suggest he has similar shape. After your 2NT opening bid, both of the following would be a hand that partner would transfer to spades and follow with 3NT, offering a choice of games:

♠K 8 7 6 3 ♥K 5 3 ♦Q 7 2 ♣6 2
♠Q 8 7 6 3 ♥J 5 3 ♦Q J 7 2 ♣2

Assuming a club lead on these examples:

On the first, provided spades are 3-2, you rate to take 11 tricks in a spade contract. In a notrump contract, you have nine tricks, and 10 if diamonds are 3-3. Best to play spades.

On the second example, in a spade contract, you have a club loser, at least one spade loser, and a possible heart loser. To take 10 tricks, if you lose two spades, you need a successful heart finesse. If you hold your spade losers to one, the heart finesse would be for an overtrick. In notrump, on the same club lead, the heart finesse must work to score nine tricks. If the heart finesse loses, just hope clubs are 5-4 to minimize your undertricks.

In both of these, I admittedly created examples to emphasize a point. In a sequence where responder describes a five-card major suit and then offers a choice of games, he does not necessarily hold balanced distribution. This is true over both 2NT and 1NT openings. If your partner opened 1NT, how would you bid the following:

♠4 ♥K Q 6 4 2 ♦Q J 5 ♣J 10 8 5?

Certainly your hand is worth a game invitation, but not a game force. The auction would likely be:

1NT	2♦
2♥	2NT
?	

As responder, you should cross your fingers and hope opener chooses a heart contract.

Holding:

♠4 ♥K Q 6 4 2 ♦Q 7 5 ♣A 10 8 5,

you now have game-forcing values. This would be a reasonable auction:

1NT	2♦
2♥	3♣
?	

This would show at least five hearts, at least four clubs, game-forcing values, and suggest either a reluctance for notrump or ambitions for a slam.

For these reasons, to intentionally reject a known 5-3 major-suit fit and choose notrump instead, opener should try to have a double stopper in the three unbid suits. This advice is not cast in stone, and occasionally at matchpoints, a little "coloring outside the lines" with imperfect hands to reject the suit fit and play notrump is a risk sometimes worth taking.

As for your original example, perhaps a good decision to pass 3NT might look more like:

♠Q J x ♥A Q 10 ♦A K x x ♣A J 10.

Now, all suits are well stopped, and your fit in spades should easily allow you to establish that suit before anything truly awful happens!

If you have read many of my previous columns, you probably already have a clue to my response to any question, including yours, involving the word, "always."

My answer is almost "always," there is no such thing as "always" in the game of bridge!