



## Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

Please provide an opinion on the following dilemma I faced. Partner passed, and right-hand opponent opened 1♥. I held:

♠A4 ♥852 ♦AJ74 ♣KQJ5.

I decided to overcall 1NT with my 15 points. I guess I got lucky when it went all pass and the opponents could only take six tricks. My partner thought I was crazy.

Stan

Hi Stan,

Because I really don't know you, I'm not well placed to make judgments about your sanity – or your partner's. I do, however, have a strong bridge opinion – shocking, I know!

One Jerry-ism I frequently cite: Look for reasons to bid before settling for an excuse to pass. Despite this, sometimes there are reasons to pass that take priority over an excuse to bid.

If you were the dealer on these cards, you would have a clear-cut 15–17 strong 1NT opening bid. After RHO opens 1♥, you are in an entirely different position. When facing a decision as dealer or after RHO passes, if you have an opening bid, you must open the bidding, otherwise you deny the values to do so. The same does not apply if an opponent opens in front of you.

In the situation you faced, my choice would be pass. In a competitive auction, a pass does not necessarily deny values. After an opening bid on your right, what pass actually means is that you have one of two types of holdings:

- 1) You have nothing worth saying, or
- 2) As the case is here, there is nothing you can say that says what you have. Consider your options.

- 1) 1NT, your choice. The next time your partner raises to 3NT with his 10 HCP, and the opponents take the first five or six heart tricks, you will have some explaining to do. Your overcall says you have a stopper, or at least something that you hope will become a stopper. Perhaps Q-x-x, or J-x-x-x or, in a pinch, you might even step out there with 10-9-x-x, and hope partner produces at least the jack or queen.
- 2) Double. You certainly have the values for a takeout double, but

your partner will strain to advance in the spade suit, the unbid major. If he does so at any level, he may not be amused with your two-card support.

- 3) An overcall? Which four-card minor should you bid at the two level to show a five-card or longer suit?
- 4) Pass. A clear example of a hand where there is nothing you can say that says what you have.

Just because you pass originally does not mean you are barred from taking further action. If, without any encouragement from you, your partner chooses to enter the auction, depending on what suit he chooses, you may be well placed to offer some type of strong encouragement by cuebidding the opponent's suit.

If the auction happened to go:

	Partner		You
	Pass	1♥	Pass
2♥	Pass	Pass	?

2NT by you in this case would be a balancing action, asking partner to choose a minor suit.

It appears that the action that you opted for at the table worked out just fine, but that's not the point. The game of bridge is about making decisions that rate to be right most of the time. I know players who live for the opportunity to hit a home run occasionally more than the desire to be a consistent winner. In summation, I do not think you were crazy, just perhaps a little misguided and awfully lucky!