



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

My partner and I are embroiled in a “discussion” about raising responder’s major with only three-card support. Our auction:

1♣	1♠
2♣	Pass

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

Spades broke poorly, and this was not a pretty contract. Notrump would have been much better. He said, “I did not want to bid notrump without a heart stopper.” I thought he should rebid 1NT. What say you, Jerry?

Max

Hi Max,

On this layout, it is 100% clear to me your partner should have rebid 1NT. Unfortunately, at the table, looking at only 13 cards, I am not nearly as unerring as when I can see 26 cards.

Despite this, I have a very firm opinion on auctions such as this. Let’s start with a question. Holding:

♠ 8 7 2 ♥ 7 5 2 ♦ A K Q 5 ♣ K Q J,

what would your opening bid be? Would you shy away from 1NT just because of your major-suit holdings? Hopefully not, because if so, there’s an entirely different lesson that needs to be addressed. A strong notrump opening bid shows 15–17 HCP, with at least two cards in every suit, and says nothing about stoppers.

Back to your auction:

1♣	1♠
?	

A 1NT rebid here shows 12–14 HCP, denies four-card spade support, tending to show at least two cards in every suit, but does not guarantee, or even imply, stoppers in the unbid suits. With this information, I suspect you can guess that I would routinely rebid 1NT with your partner’s hand. My general premise is, if you have a notrump family hand, keep it in the notrump family. In my regular partnerships, we go out of our way not to raise immediately on three-card support. That doesn’t mean we don’t do it, we just try not to. One of my “-isms” I often cite: The best avail-

able bid is often simply the least bad alternative. Example:

♠ A Q 7 ♥ 4 ♦ J 4 3 2 ♣ A Q 8 6 3.

After opening 1♣ (surely no one would open 1♦ on this hand.), suppose you get a 1♠ response. What will you rebid?

A 2♣ rebid strongly suggests a six-card or longer suit. A raise to 2♠ suggests four-card support. Neither call is perfect, but the ♠ A Q 7 looks closer to four-card support than ♣ A Q 8 6 3 looks like a six-card suit. Ergo, here I would advocate a raise to 2♠. As a matter of personal preference, if I give partner a raise on three cards, I will always have a five-card minor that I opened originally – because I keep notrump family hands in the notrump family.

In a similar vein, you hold:

♠ 9 4 2 ♥ A Q 3 ♦ A K 3 ♣ A Q 7 4.

Open 1♣ and if partner responds 1♥, complete the description of your balanced 19 HCP by jumping to 2NT! If we play notrump, it is partner’s job to have the spades stopped! If we play notrump without a stopper, hopefully the opponents will not lead spades, or, if they do, they will be divided 4–4 or they will block the suit. In addition, the 2NT rebid often allows responder to find a home with his long heart suit. And alas, sometimes in this auction, partner raises to 3NT, the opponents take the first five spades, and we go down. Oh well! There’s always the next deal. ■