



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

My partner insists that in this auction:

1♣ 1♦ ?

if he responds in either major suit, it shows five; otherwise, he would make a negative double. I don't think that's right. What do you say?

Beatrice

Dear Jerry,

We recently had this auction:

1♦ 2♣ 2♥ Pass
3♥ Pass 4♥ All Pass

I assumed partner held at least five hearts, so with minimum values, I raised with three-card support and he bid game. His hand:

♠AQ7 ♥Q942 ♦AJ874 ♣A2.

Both 3NT and 5♦ had more play than 4♥. Partner insisted he could not make a negative double unless holding both majors, and his 2♥ bid in this auction showed four or more hearts. Is this true?

TT

Dear Beatrice and TT,

The two of you have posed somewhat similar sounding but totally different bidding scenarios, which are confusing to many people. For this column, I will assume my readers have at least a basic knowledge of negative doubles.

First your auction, Beatrice.

The 1♦ overcall does not really get in responder's way. Holding 6 or more

points and four or more hearts or spades, responder simply makes the same bid he would have made if RHO had passed. A major-suit bid here does not promise or even imply more than a four-card suit. What the 1♦ overcall does do, is give an option that was not available following a pass!

1♣ 1♦ Dbl

This double guarantees exactly four cards in each major suit. Perhaps your partner's confusion was based on this auction:

1♣/1♦ 1♥ 1♠

The standard interpretation of the 1♠ bid in this auction is to guarantee five or more spades, as a negative double would show exactly four.

Next, TT:

The opponent's interference in your auction poses an entirely different problem.

The values and shape required to introduce a new suit at the two level are different from the ones needed at the one level. This is an auction where the negative double pays great dividends.

1♦ 2♣ 2♥/2♠

When responder mentions a major suit at the two level on his first opportunity to speak, he guarantees a five-card or longer suit.

1♦ 2♣ Dbl

The negative double here *implies* four cards in both hearts and spades,

and the opening bidder is to rebid based on that premise at the level appropriate for his values. The key here is that the negative doubler guarantees a *home* somewhere but does *not* guarantee both majors!

Because you opened the bidding 1♦, his five-card support for that suit guarantees a place to play. Here's how the auction might have progressed if responder makes a negative double.

1♦ 2♣ Dbl Pass
2♥ Pass 4♥

If opener bids hearts, you have found your 4-4 fit.

1♦ 2♣ Dbl Pass
2♠ Pass ?

Clearly spades are not the right trump suit. But responder knows there are game values and there are numerous ways to proceed. Simply taking a preference to opener's diamond suit at the three level would be non-forcing, and a clear underbid. Perhaps a jump to 3NT, perhaps a 3♣ cuebid to set up a game force: I need to either bid game or make a forcing bid to ensure we ultimately reach some game.

Another possible auction:

1♦ 2♣ Dbl Pass
2NT Pass 3NT

Bottom line: Responder can make a negative double on any holding where he feels comfortable that he can handle the auction when opener rebids as if responder holds both unbid suits. ■