

# Ask Jerry



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**Dear Jerry,**  
**We recently had problems on the following deal:**

Me	Pard
♠ J	♠ A K 8 3
♥ A 10 7 6 2	♥ 5 3
♦ A K 6 4	♦ Q 10 5 2
♣ A J 10	♣ 8 7 2
1 ♥	1 ♠
2 ♦	Pass

**Partner chastized me for not finding a stronger bid. Most of the field reached 3NT making, and a few actually got to 5 ♦! Where did we, or as my partner thought, I, go wrong?**

**Chip**

Hi Chip,  
Of all the areas in bidding theory, the auction you conducted is one that I think is most misunderstood by many players. Let me start with some basics. Good auctions are rarely accomplished until someone limits and defines his values and shape. This is why an opening notrump bid often leads to reasonable conclusions, because responder knows the values expressed by opener within a narrow range, and can expect at least two cards in all suits. On the contrary, suit-opening bids are often more difficult to handle. Your auction began 1 ♥ – 1 ♠.

Consider the information provided by each player.

Opener: Five or more hearts, 12–19(+) points.

Responder: Four or more spades, typically 6 or more points.

At this point, neither player can be comfortable with either the final level or final denomination. In most

auctions, the opening bidder's first rebid is the most important and most defining action. Any time opener rebids his own suit, rebids notrump, or raises his partner's suit, he provides definitive information as to whether his hand was minimum, medium, or maximum strength. Unfortunately, your auction involved none of these, but in fact, was a "third-suit rebid."

A third-suit rebid defines values somewhere between the worst hand ever opened, up to values not quite strong enough to force game opposite a minimum response. Put in more definitive terms, something like 12–18 points, and it is *not* forcing. With a stronger hand, to insist responder continue bidding, opener must make a jumpshift to a new suit, which creates a game force.

An important lesson in bidding is understanding the difference between actions which *require* your partner to speak again, as opposed to those which *allow* him to speak again.

Anytime responder hears his partner make a third-suit rebid, he should be aware that the values held could be just under those needed for a game-forcing jumpshift. For this reason, any time responder holds 9 or more points, he should look for a reason to find another bid, just in case opener held the near jumpshift. On your auction above, your

partner should raise 2 ♦ to 3 ♦, which you will now take a shot at 3NT. If you held a minimum hand you would pass, and with half the deck and a fit, try to make 3 ♦.

Is there a time when responder should pass the third-suit rebid? Absolutely. Holding:

♠ K 7 3   ♥ J 6 4 3 2   ♦ Q 4   ♣ 9 7 6.

If the auction started:

1 ♦	1 ♥
1 ♠	?

I would pass as quickly as I could hit the pass button (online bridge ... I used to say, "put a green card out") – or at least as quickly as is ethically permitted. The silence of the opponents, considering the woeful nature of my hand, makes me suspect partner does hold a very good hand. Just not a great hand. I suspect if I found a second call, we might rocket to a level unlikely to succeed. Note that my pass was because there was tolerance for the contract that I am abandoning partner to. If I held only two spades, I would have to bid something, no matter how distasteful the action was, because a 4–2 fit is usually not in our best interest.

I officially declare you blameless! You had a good hand, but not a great hand. ☺