



BY **JERRY HELMS**  
askjerry@jerryhelms.com  
jerryhelms.com

Newer Players

# Ask Jerry

**Dear Jerry,**  
**As an avid reader of your column, I know your opinion on this issue, but I strongly prefer not to open 1NT with a five-card major. Recently, playing with a good player, he opened 1NT, and I had:**

♠7 2 ♥K J 3 ♦A 8 7 5 ♣Q 5 3 2.

**I bid 3NT. His hand was:**

♠Q 5 ♥Q 10 8 6 4 ♦K Q 4 ♣A K 10.

**The opponents took the first five spade tricks, plus the ♥A, for down two. This would never have happened if he opened 1♥ as I would have. Now this partner wants me to learn puppet Stayman over 1NT. Seems an unnecessary tax on my memory when an opening 1NT denies a five-card major. Perhaps you can explain the error of my logic.**

**Anthony**

Hi Anthony,

From your initial comment, I gather you are aware that I think you should open 1NT any time it is the right bid! A 1♥ opening bid here would have led rapidly to the normal heart game. The problem is it may or may not have led to the best conclusion on many deals. A major goal for the opening bidder is to choose an action or plan a series of actions that best describes the values and shape of his hand. Never opening 1NT with a five-card major creates more problems than it solves, obviously in my opinion. How would you suggest opener plan his bids holding:

♠Q 5 ♥K Q J 6 4 ♦A J 4 ♣K 10 6?

Alvin Roth said it best, "Always plan a second bid before you choose a first." If you choose to open 1♥, my

question is, how do you plan to rebid over a 1♠ response? The answer is, there is no answer. 2NT would show 18–19 on your 16. I suppose, playing 2/1, you would rebid 2♣ ... then what? Here is my brief take. On most 15–17 point hands, where your shape includes a five-card major, two three-card suits, and a doubleton, I open 1NT in anticipation of a potential rebid problem.

To avoid missing 5–3 major suit fits when opening 1NT, I advocate a form of puppet Stayman (probably best called "five-card major Stayman") to cover the bases. Any time you add a conventional treatment to your methods, surrendering the natural meaning, consider gain versus loss of the new method and frequency of occurrence of either the natural or artificial meaning.

In your partnerships, what agreement do you have for 1NT–3♣? Of the many possible meanings, when is the last time whatever you play actually came up? Not very often, would be my guess. I prefer 3♣ over 1NT to ask partner if he has a five-card major. This should be utilized when responder holds game-going values, with exactly three cards in one of the majors. He could hold a four-card major in addition. If you're going to play this, you should play it the right way!

- 3♦: No five-card major, may or may not have one or both four-card majors.
- 3♥/3♠: A five-card major.

I encounter players who still use 3♦ to deny a five-card major, but to guarantee at least one four-card major. This is wrong on all accounts. Why would the soon-to-be declarer want to reveal anything about his

shape to the opponents? If responder holds something like:

♠A 3 2 ♥Q 10 7 3 ♦7 5 ♣A 5 3 2,

he responds 3♣ and raises either major if partner has five. If opener bids 3♦, responder bids the major he does not have, in this case spades, to search for a possible heart fit. The bonus is that if opener now bids 3NT, the defenders do not know whether or not opener holds four spades.

Several caveats: If responder is 4–4 in the majors, with game invitational, or better, values, he should use 2♣ Stayman. If responder is 4–3–3–3, don't bid any form of Stayman, just raise notrump. Whatever previous meaning you used for an immediate 3♣ response can easily be replaced. If you choose to play puppet Stayman over 2NT, which I detest, your responses are necessarily different.

And yes, I do think this is worth what you call a possible memory drain. ☹

## CHALLENGE OF THE MONTH

Dlr: South ♠ A K J 10 8

Vul: Both ♥ A 4 3 2

IMPs ♦ 3

♣ 7 6 5

♠ 9 2

♥ Q J 10

♦ A K Q J 10 7

♣ A J

As South, you arrive in 6♦ against silent opponents. West leads the ♣K. Can you guarantee your contract?

*Challenge Answer on page 57*