



BY JERRY HELMS

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Ask Jerry

Dear Jerry,

My partner and I enjoy your column and read it regularly. We recently had (another) disagreement. Please give your advice on the matter. I suspect that you will have an opinion.

As dealer, I held the following hand as West:

♠Q 8 7 2 ♥K Q ♦Q 8 ♣A J 7 4 3.

The bidding proceeded as follows:

West	North	East	South
1♣	2♦	Dbl	3♦
3♠	Pass	4♠	All Pass

Partner's negative double showed both majors, so it seemed perfectly reasonable to me to bid 3♠. ("Support with support.")

Partner, with 10 HCP, raised to 4♠, and we went down. Partner (as so often is the case) was not happy. Personally, I think that he was the one who was guilty of overbidding.

Here was partner's hand:

♠K J 5 4 ♥J 10 5 2 ♦7 3 ♣K Q 6.

I don't think that I can be faulted for my decision to "support with support."

Please give your opinion.

Thomas, Charlotte NC

Hi Thomas,

Before I address your specific question, I need to clear up an apparent misconception.

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♦	1♥/1♠	Pass
?			

A response in either major would simply show four or more cards in the suit and 6 or more points.

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♦	Dbl	Pass
?			

Responder's double guarantees 4-4 in the majors.

In this auction:

West	North	East	South
1♣	2♦	Dbl	Pass
?			

Responder's negative double *does not* guarantee both majors. If responder bids 2♥ or 2♠, here it shows a five-card or longer suit and 10 or more points. At this level, responder can use a negative double *implying* both majors any time he can handle any rebid by opener based on this premise. Typically, holding only one major, responder will hold four or more cards in opener's originally bid suit, providing a fallback place to play if opener bids the "wrong" major. Occasionally, responder will hold only one major and a stopper in the opponent's suit for a possible retreat to a notrump contract.

Bottom line: After a negative double, opener should bid *as if* responder holds both unbid suits. He should "raise" an implied suit, or rebid his suit, or bid notrump, to a level that expresses his values. Responder's obligation is to either hold both unbid suits, or have that fallback place to play mentioned earlier.

Now your auction:

West	North	East	South
1♣	2♦	Dbl	3♦
?			

On this auction, your ♦Q seems clearly a wasted value, reducing you to an effective 12-point hand. Your partner's negative double suggests at least 7 or 8 points with no upper limit. Do you really want to get to the three level or possibly the four level when responder holds a minimum negative double? I would pass. Bidding immediately should suggest more than a minimum opening bid, justifying partner's decision to bid game. Pass does not deny a major, it just confirms your minimum holding. With your partner's hand, made up of 10 working HCP and tolerance for everything (the opponents' auction suggests opener likely has at most two or three diamonds, therefore either a four-card major, or a five-card or longer club suit), he should reopen with a second negative double. You could now bid 3♠ and compete for the partscore.

You actually found your partner with a good-fitting hand and you're still down one at the four level.

As opener, if your actual hand was:

♠A 10 7 2 ♥K 6 4 ♦8 ♣A J 7 4 3, you would have 15 "support points" for partner's implied spade suit, justifying an immediate 3♠ "raise." Even with this hand, game is no guarantee, but at least you have play. ☺