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Newer Players

Ask Jerry

Balancing – part 2

Dear Jerry,
A friend recently returned from a seminar you did in Jacksonville. Of particular interest to me were a pair of hands where you suggested opening the bidding in third seat on hands I would never have considered anything but pass. In both cases, the auction began:

Pass Pass ?

① ♠83 ♥653 ♦92 ♣KQ9862

② ♠A76 ♥KQ102 ♦J92 ♣865

You advocated opening both of these hands. I need help!

Frequent Passer

Hi FP,

For starters, I would rather be known as a frequent bidder than a frequent passer! It is absolutely a bidder's game, and in my experience, players who bid too much in the long run are more successful than those who do not bid enough.

A few Jerry-isms: "Look for reasons to bid before finding excuses to pass."

"Strong players integrate what they see in their hand with what the auction has told them."

"A good bid is one that most closely resembles the cards actually held."

On the first hand, your partner passed and RHO passed. It is reasonable to assume partner has at most 10 or 11 HCP. You have exactly 5 HCP. Using math skills that are truly dazzling, I suspect the auction has revealed to you that the opponents rate to have game values of 25 or more points. I cannot imagine allowing the opponents a free ride of uninterrupted

ed bidding to establish values and determine their best fit. Holding this hand, I think you have two options.

Option 1. Pass. This announces possession of 13 cards lacking an option to enter the auction in an intelligent fashion.

Option 2. 3♣. I have less than an opening bid with a long, relatively strong, club suit.

Clearly, Option 2 more closely resembles the cards you actually hold.

Yes, I am aware that a three-level preempt suggests a seven-card suit, and you nearly have a seven-card suit! By opening 3♣, you have removed 11 possible bids from the opponents, and you have provided your partner with a reasonable opening lead against any final enemy contract. Yes, vulnerability does come into play, and yes, it is possible after opening 3♣ you could get doubled and get a poor score. Then again, I've been doubled and gone for 800 after some perfectly reasonable bidding. The game absolutely rewards bidders more often than passers.

I would very much like to be in the auction on hand 2. After two passes, it is still possible that my side holds its share of values. However, it is clear that the opponents rate to have an equal share. Charles Goren once said that in third position it was acceptable to open "a queen light." To me that sounds like some sort of energy drink, but what he meant was, in his era, you opened 13- or 14-point hands, 11 or 12 might be acceptable. Today, perhaps 10 HCP or so might be acceptable in third seat. As a caveat, when opening light in third seat, providing partner with a reasonable suggestion for a lead is important.

Hand 2 is a perfect example of the type I would open 1♥. I play five-card majors, but I also play bridge! If the opponents end up playing this hand, I have provided partner with a good suggestion for an opening lead. If partner holds 9 or 10 points, then we may well be able to compete for a partscore. Just like a good Boy Scout, be prepared when opening light in third seat. If partner responds 1♠, 1NT, 2♥, I pass. If playing no gadgets, like Drury, and he responds 2♣ or 2♦, I pass. If he jumps to 2NT, with his 11 or 12, I pass! The real fear would be if partner had good heart support and a maximum pass. The Drury convention is an excellent one to help handle this possibility. I strongly recommend Drury for any serious duplicate player.

Please get back to me with any success stories using the advice I provided. When things go awry, using the same advice, write to one of the other columnists! ☺

