



BY JERRY HELMS
askjerry@jerryhelms.com
jerryhelms.com

Newer Players

Ask Jerry

Balancing – part 2

Dear Jerry,
In a recent online game, we had the following sequence:

1♦	1♥
1♠	1NT
2♥	Pass

As responder, I held 9 HCP and, assuming partner had a minimum hand, I passed. I took 10 tricks on the 4-3 heart fit and could have taken 10 tricks in notrump. I was surprised when partner tabled a 17-point dummy. I thought he had an unbalanced minimum with three-card support and was worried about notrump. I would have jumped to 3NT with his hand. He insisted I was ... well let's just keep it on the up and up and say ... wrong! Please settle our dispute.

At Odds

Hi A.O.,

To get the bad news out of the way first, your partner was correct and you were ... wrong! The good news is that I think this is a very good question about sequences that are often misunderstood. Let's look at your bidding bid-by-bid.

1♦: Usually four or more diamonds, somewhere between 12-21 points.

1♥: Four or more hearts, 6 or more points.

1♠: Usually exactly four spades, fewer than four hearts, with values ranging from the worst hand he has ever opened up to not quite enough to make a game-forcing jumpshift. Your heart response was forcing. Partner could not pass even if tempted. An important point, 1♠ by opener was *not forcing*. Responder, with spade

tolerance and a poor hand, would be at liberty to pass.

1NT: 6-10 points, could contain a five-card heart suit if 1NT seems best.

2♥: Three-card heart support with a medium strength *unbalanced* hand. Strong enough to survive the two level even if you held a dead minimum, but strong enough to invite game if you held the top end of your notrump rebid. Like a reverse, a raise without a certain fit must logically contain extra values.

Opener's hand could have looked like any of the following:

♠Q J 6 4 ♥A Q 7 ♦A K 7 5 4 ♣6

♠A J 6 4 ♥A 8 7 ♦A K J 10 4 ♣6

♠K 8 6 4 ♥A K 7 ♦K Q J 10 4 ♣J

Note the central characteristic of club shortness. Opener has bid out his pattern. Diamonds, spades, hearts, so not much room left for clubs. At what juncture would you think a jump would be appropriate? Clearly bidding 1♠ over 1♥ is best; 2♠ would force game and any heart raise could miss a 4-4 spade fit. After 1NT, which could be on a poor 6- or 7-point hand, what jump would you suggest opener to make? 3NT? After the opponents run the club suit and take another trick or two, perhaps 3NT was an overbid. Jump to 3♥ to show your three-card support? This could punish a partner who has properly responded with minimal values and a four-card suit.

In keeping with my bidding theory, using actions to reach the best game or slam is better than trying to land in the perfect partscore. With most minimum hands, opener should simply pass 1NT. By taking a third bid, showing delayed support for hearts,

his values should resemble those of the upper end of a strong notrump, but obviously unbalanced or he would have opened 1NT, or raise to 2NT. From opener's perspective, you could have held any of the following:

① ♠K 3 ♥K 10 8 5 ♦9 7 3 ♣K J 10 5

② ♠K 3 ♥K J 8 5 3 ♦Q 9 ♣J 7 5 2

③ ♠8 3 2 ♥Q J 10 5 ♦9 3 ♣A 7 5 2

④ ♠Q 3 ♥J 10 8 5 ♦9 3 ♣A 10 9 5 2

With the first two, I would accept the invitation, bidding 3NT on the first, 4♥ on the second. With the third, I would pass and play the 4-3 heart fit. With the fourth, I would sign off in 2NT.

Two analogous auctions:

1♦	1♥
1♠	2♦
2♥	

Once again, this should not be a minimum delayed unbalanced raise. It is a movement towards game, perhaps:

♠A 8 7 4 ♥A 7 3 ♦A Q J 6 4 ♣8.

With this hand, opener would be comfortable raising hearts, knowing responder could always retreat to 3♦, or perhaps bid a heart game!

1♣	1♥
1NT	2NT
3♥	

Opener is accepting the game invitation by responder and offers a choice of games.

Forget perfect partscores and try to find your games! 🎯