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Ask Jerry

Dear Jerry,

From a recent club game:

♠A 7 2 ♥6 ♦A Q 10 7 ♣A Q J 9 6.

I opened 1♣ and the auction continued:

| | |
|----|-------|
| 1♣ | 1♠ |
| 2♦ | Pass! |

With both minor-suit kings onside and 2-2 spades, we could make 4♠. How should we bid this?

Greta

Hi Greta,

As always, the first and foremost issue is partnership agreement. Your sequence of opening 1♣ followed by bidding 2♦ was a classic “reverse.” Quoting from the Official Encyclopedia of Bridge, a reverse is “an unforced rebid at the level of two in a higher-ranking suit than the suit bid originally ... in most cases reverses imply the first bid suit consist of at least five cards, and the second suit is shorter.” A reverse after a one-level response is a strong bid with values of 17 or more points, two strong suits, virtually always with unbalanced distribution ... exactly what you had. Hint: With a balanced hand, opener would either start with 1NT, or make a jump rebid to 2NT, depending on total values.

Continuing from the Encyclopedia, “virtually all experts now treat reverses as forcing.” Obviously your partner was not on the same page. One of two things likely went through his mind: 1) He did not think your bid was forcing; or 2) Having a shaded response with only 5 HCP, he panicked and did not

wish to bid again because he was in a playable spot. A point here: I think it is OK to take a position in the bidding like he did to respond with less than full values; however, once you have done so, you cannot take a second position on the same hand by passing a forcing bid!

I strongly believe that a reverse should be 100% forcing for one round. My preference is to play that responder's first obligation after a reverse is to rebid the five-card or longer major suit that he initially responded in, which is also forcing for one round. A reasonable agreement is to play that a reverse is forcing to at least 2NT or three of opener's minor.

Using this agreement, your partner should have rebid 2♠. Once you know he has at least a five-card suit, you could jump to 4♠. At this point, your partner would likely be regretting his initial decision to respond; however, when the smoke had cleared and 10 tricks were in the bag, there would be great joy in Mudville.

Addendum:

Never reverse with equal length suits! Recently I witnessed a very reasonable intermediate player make the following bids. Holding:

♠4 ♥J 5 ♦A K Q 7 4 ♣A K Q 6 5,

he opened 1♣ and over a spade response, he “reversed” into 2♦, then followed by bidding 3♦. This sequence should show six clubs and five diamonds. With this hand, the appropriate bids would be to open 1♦ and then make a game-forcing jumpshift to 3♣. I say this because I've so often seen improper reverses on equal length suits.

Reverses show two good suits!

♠K ♥K Q J ♦K 5 3 2 ♣A J 8 6 2

Appropriate shape for a reverse, appropriate values for a reverse, but sorely lacking suit quality. My preference would be to open 1NT. ☺

Let me ask you how would you play this hand?

On today's deal, you, playing as South, become declarer in 6♥, after West, on the left, leads ♣Q.

What is the best line of play?

♠ A 9 3 2
♥ 7 2
♦ A K Q 10 8 5
♣ 7

N
W E
S

♠ 5
♥ A K 8 6 5 3
♦ J 7
♣ A 6 5 3



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