



BY JERRY HELMS

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Ask Jerry

Dear Jerry,
One of my partners insists that when holding four diamonds and five clubs, along with minimum values, he always opens 1♦ to prepare a rebid. On the other hand, I usually open my longest suit. Can you provide some guidance?

Minor Quandary

Hi Minor,

I agree this is not an area of a major quandary. There is a clue to me in the wording of your question. Two things stick out, “always” and “usually.”

From my perspective, any comment about bidding that contains the word “always” brings up an immediate red flag.

There are a number of catchy one-liners that provide insight into this issue. From Alvin Roth, “Always plan a second bid before you choose a first.” From Yours Truly, “A good bid is one that most closely resembles the cards that you hold.” From a friend of mine, Sarge, “Bid where you live.” Let’s apply these to a few opening bid choices.

♠4 ♥K 7 3 ♦A K J 10 ♣Q 9 7 5 3

With this hand, I would open 1♦ preparing to rebid 2♣ over the anticipated 1♠ reply. I’m sure your partner would endorse this. Alvin Roth would approve, as would I.

♠4 ♥K 7 3 ♦Q 9 7 5 ♣A K J 10 3

With this hand, I would open 1♣, prepared to rebid 2♣ over the anticipated 1♠ reply. With such a concentration of club strength, this is not a two-suited minor suit hand. I strongly prefer to plan on rebidding the club suit, suggesting a six-card holding compared to potentially giving

partner a choice between clubs and diamonds as a contract. In addition, I have a strong preference for a club lead if the opponents should buy the contract and partner is on opening lead. Once again, Alvin Roth and I would approve, as would Sarge, since you obviously live in clubs!

From the examples above, it should be clear there is no hard, fast rule to follow when holding this distribution.

Although you didn’t ask, there are similar issues when holding 4–5 in the minors with medium strength hands.

♠Q 5 ♥K 2 ♦K J 6 2 ♣A Q J 5 3

Some players are shackled by something they read or have been taught that says you cannot open 1NT with two doubletons. I say, *poppycock!* To those who would choose to open either 1♦ or 1♣, I question the rebid you are planning, to describe a medium strength opening bid, lacking any singletons or voids. If by your standards, this qualifies as a reverse, planning to open 1♣ then rebid 2♦, you need to revisit the strength and implications of a reverse. If you plan to open 1♦ and rebid 2♣, this seems a bit misguided. This hand to me is a clear 1NT opening bid: 15–17 HCP, tending to have no singletons or voids. Not a perfect bid, but better than the alternatives.

If, however, you held:

♠9 5 ♥7 2 ♦A K Q 10 ♣A K J 10 3,

The concentration of values in the minor suit would cause me to open 1♣ and rebid 2♦ as a reverse, showing 17+ HCP with virtually always a singleton or void somewhere. The two doubletons are not exactly shortness, but I can’t see any real alternative to

a strength-showing reverse. Perhaps the appropriate Jerry-ism: “The best available bid is often the least bad alternative.”

Continuing in this vein, holding:

♠4 ♥A K J 2 ♦J 6 5 4 3 ♣A 5 2,

the reflex mistake would be to open 1♦. After 1♠, a strong candidate for a reply from partner, what rebid would you have planned? 2♦ suggesting a six-card or longer suit, when actually holding a moth-eaten five-card suit? 1NT, suggesting at least two spades, holding a singleton small spade, not a singleton ace, king or queen? Despite having five-card majors marked on my convention card, I would open 1♥ with this holding in any seat, at any vulnerability. Over the potential 1♠ response, I would rebid 2♦, accurately describing nine red-suit cards, just not exactly in the order implied by my bidding. Yes, this could result in a final contract of a 4–2 heart fit, in which case I would play it to the best of my ability. At this point in my life, it’s a little too late to suggest I had a diamond mixed in my hearts, but I might try it anyway. ☺