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## Newer Players

# Ask Jerry

**Dear Jerry,**  
Recently I caught the tail end of one of your lectures on competitive bidding. You were emphasizing something you called the balance of power. I'm interested in hearing more.

## Late As Usual

Hi Late,

I guess in this case “better late than never” actually applies. In regards to competitive bidding, my reference to the balance of power is as follows:

On every deal there are 40 HCP plus some additional values assigned for either short or long suits. When the auction suggests that your side is in possession of at least 50% of these values and a viable trump suit seems likely, it is important to be competitive.

Your basic goal is fairly simple. Strive for the maximum possible plus score, or when a plus score is not likely, adjust your sights to the lowest possible minus score. In most competitive situations, it is best to compete at least to the two level or drive the opponents to a higher level where you have a chance of defeating them. Several of my favorite -isms are applicable.

Out of respect for the fact that bidding boxes are in wide use, I have amended one of my old favorites: Good players integrate what they see in their hand with what they saw in the auction. (Previously it stated: what they see in their hand with what they've *heard* in the auction.)

	<i>Partner</i>		<i>You</i>
1♥	Dbl	2♥	?

You hold:

♠QJ75   ♥864   ♦A42   ♣762.

Your RHO's decision to raise hearts has taken you off the hook so to speak. Should you act, or pass? The excuse to pass would be that you only have 7 HCP and only a four-card spade suit. What if partner only has three spades for his double, which is clearly possible? The reasons to bid? Your partner's takeout double suggests a minimum of 13 dummy points for play in either of the unbid suits. With your 7 points, you are the one who knows we have at least half the total values on this deal. It's another example of, "The one who knows, goes!"

The actual layout might have been:

♠ K92  
♥ 105  
♦ KJ85  
♣ AQ83

♠ A4  
♥ AQJ73  
♦ Q107  
♣ 954

N  
W—+—E  
S

♠ 10863  
♥ K92  
♦ 963  
♣ KJ10

♠ QJ75  
♥ 864  
♦ A42  
♣ 762

As the cards lie, both sides can take at least eight tricks in their major suit fit. If you fail to bid 2♠ immediately, the auction will surely die, because your partner cannot possibly continue to contest the auction without a little help from his friend and partner. Either we play 2♠ and go plus, or they compete to 3♥ and we still go plus. Take note your partner held only three spades which turned out to be enough!

Next case:

<i>Partner</i>		<i>You</i>
1♣	1♠	?

♠753   ♥AK3   ♦J86   ♣9642

Do you bid or pass?

With this holding, I would raise to 2♣ 100% of the time, knowing partner had at least three clubs. While the 1♣ opening only promises three clubs, partner will have more than that 83% of the time. You have 8 HCP, and partner opened the bidding. You need to be competitive. An example:

♠ A2  
 ♥ 9874  
 ♦ Q4  
 ♣ AK1053

♠ Q96  
 ♥ QJ102  
 ♦ K1052  
 ♣ J8

♠ KJ1084  
 ♥ 65  
 ♦ A973  
 ♣ Q7

♠ 753  
 ♥ AK3  
 ♦ J86  
 ♣ 9642

N  
 W — E  
 S

If South fails to raise clubs, the auction is likely to continue as follows:

	<i>Partner</i>		<i>You</i>
	1♣	1♠	Pass
2♠	All Pass		

Surely the opening bidder, with a balanced 13-count would not consider taking action opposite a silent partner. East/West should scramble home with eight tricks. If South raises clubs, North can easily compete to the three level with his five-card suit where nine tricks are available. So let me see ... if you pass, you are minus 110. If you bid, you are either plus 110, or plus whatever the vulnerability if the opponents bid on to 3♠.

Remember: Look for reasons to bid before settling for the excuses to pass. ♠