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Newer Players

Ask Jerry

Dear Jerry,
I was surfing through your website and came across a very short, old Ask Jerry article about offensive versus defensive values. Would you mind adding more to this subject?

Andrew

Hi Andrew,

Wow – this article is almost 20 years old! How is that possible? At that point, was I still living at home with my parents? Guess not!

I define offensive values as those types of holdings where, if declaring a contract, you expect to take tricks because of suit length and suit texture. Defensive values are those where you expect tricks on offense if need be and on defense also. A look at a couple of types of hands might help.

RHO opens 1NT. Do you take action?

① ♠Q J 10 9 6 5 ♥3 ♦Q J 10 9 ♣8 3

Despite a total of 6 HCP, you have a lot of offense, and very little defense. If your partner produced but one useful card, e.g., ♠A or ♠K, ♦A or ♦K, or ♥A or ♣A, you are a strong favorite to win at least seven tricks in a spade contract. A clear-cut overcall of a strong notrump. Hopefully you could bid 2♠ immediately and not be saddled with some conventional agreement where you have to bid something else to identify a one-suited hand. One of my many pet peeves. When you own the spade suit, you need to identify it immediately. Oh yeah, that wasn't your question!

② ♠A K 7 6 3 ♥9 2 ♦A 7 4 ♣Q 4 2

This time, with 13 HCP, three quick tricks and a clear 1♠ opening bid if

you are the dealer, I would pass. This hand has far more defensive potential than offensive. If you choose to overcall in the spade suit, you best hope that partner holds at least two or three spades, or otherwise you are likely in deep trouble. If the opponents end up playing any contract, you have defense.

Another type of offense versus defense. Frequently you hear that you should not open a weak two-bid with four-card support for the other major. That advice is a bit dated. You should however, use a little judgment.

③ ♠K Q J 10 5 2 ♥7 6 4 3 ♦6 5 ♣7

This is a weak two-bid at any vulnerability and any form of scoring. If your partner held a singleton spade and even five hearts, the solidity of your spade suit suggests your hand would play as well or better with spades as trumps as it might in hearts. No, this is not always true, but it is important to get involved in the auction when there is a clear path to get involved.

④ ♠A J 8 6 5 2 ♥7 6 4 3 ♦6 5 ♣7

You do have 5–11 HCP and a “good enough” spade suit, the basic requirements suggested for a weak two-bid. Although this is a matter for partnership agreement, and overall style, this is by no means clearly a 2♠ opening bid. Using the same parameters as above, if your partner held a singleton spade and four or five hearts, the heart suit would certainly rate to be a better trump suit. Your ♠A J 8 6 5 2 offers more defense than offense.

One more example:

In first seat, partner opens 2♠. You hold:

♠9 8 4 3 ♥6 ♦9 6 3 2 ♣8 5 4 2.

Despite the absence of high-card strength, I would look at the vulnerability and strongly consider an immediate jump to 4♠. The opponents clearly have a game somewhere and are likely to have a play for slam. Give your partner:

♠K Q x x x x ♥x x x ♦x x ♣x x.

On this layout, you rate to be able to win five spades in hand and ruff two hearts in dummy for down three at the four level. Throw me into that briar patch, because the opponents have 13 tricks in any number of contracts. Even if your partner has a weak two with an outside feature, you are unlikely to take more than one trick on defense, while your four-card support and singleton will help create offensive tricks. This is a responding hand with lots of offense and not a shred of defense. Is there a downside? Of course. If partner has a less than ideal weak two, the opponents may well just double the 4♠ contract on general principle and get an all-time top. For me, it's about frequency and putting maximum pressure on the opponents.

You wanted more? Here it is. ■



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August 2023 | Bridge Bulletin | 51