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Newer Players

Ask Jerry

Dear Jerry,
In a recent BBO matchpoint game, I held:

♠K J 4 ♥A Q J ♦K Q 8 7 ♣A 10 3.

Our auction:

2NT	3♥
3♠	3NT
All Pass	

Because I was 3=3=4=3 with no ruffing values, I decided to forgo the eight-card spade fit and play in notrump, hoping for a better matchpoint result. On a club lead, I was fortunate to take nine tricks in notrump while 11 tricks were readily available in a spade contract. To say the least, partner was not very happy. Was my reasoning that far off?

Arthur

Hi Arthur,
Your thoughts of producing a better matchpoint score looking at your own hand is understandable, but there are clearly other considerations. Think about the type of hand your partner may have held for his bids. After your 2NT opening bid, what auction would you suggest bidding if you were responder, holding:

♠A Q 9 7 3 ♥K 5 2 ♦9 6 3 ♣7 2?

On a club lead with the opening leader holding a five-card suit and ♦A, nine tricks in notrump are the limit. In a spade contract, with the ♦A onside, 11 tricks are easy.

How about:

♠Q 10 8 7 3 ♥K 5 2 ♦J 6 3 ♣7 2?

Opposite the opening 2NT, your combined resources suggest a game contract. If you reach a spade contract,

you would expect to make 10 tricks. On a club lead, your prospects in notrump are dismal, and that may be kind.

In both examples, I engineered layouts to emphasize a point. After any notrump opening bid where responder transfers and then offers a choice of games and/or level, he will not necessarily hold balanced distribution. As a matter of fact in each of the above, responder was actually balanced, but notrump was an inferior contract. It could have been worse. Let's look at some more notrump openings where responder offers the opener choices.

Partner opens 1NT. You hold:

♠6 ♥K Q 9 8 4 ♦J 8 6 4 ♣Q J 3.

With game invitational values, the most likely auction would be a transfer to hearts followed by 2NT. I suspect you would be far happier if opener chooses a heart contract at any level, but would certainly be forced to respect his decision to play any level of notrump.

With a stronger hand,

♠6 ♥K Q 9 8 4 ♦Q 6 4 ♣A 10 7 3,

you have an option to produce a much better auction:

1NT	2♦
2♥	3♣

This auction fits one of my "Jerry-isms" – *strive for a sequence of bids that actually describes the cards you hold*: at least five hearts, at least four clubs, game-forcing values and often a little reluctance to play notrump. Opener should be well placed to make a final decision.

None of this is meant to imply that you should always choose the known 5-3 fit rather than to play in notrump. A good clue in this sentence is the

"A-word" (always), which I studiously attempt to "always" avoid! Choosing to intentionally ignore a known major suit fit more often works out with double stoppers in all of the unbid suits.

♠Q J 5 ♥A Q 5 ♦K Q 10 4 ♣A Q 3

Holding the above makes choosing to play notrump after a transfer to either major suit, followed by notrump, look like a winning position.

Clearly there are other hand types that may lead you to take anti-field positions in a matchpoint event. Sometimes you want to play to win, and occasionally coloring "outside the lines" may be just the ticket. Just be sure to pick the right crayons at the right time – and hope for an understanding partner when you are wrong. ■

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