



BY JERRY HELMS

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Newer Players

Ask Jerry

Dear Jerry,

Partner and I play 2/1. We seem to disagree on several points about when to confirm support for partner's major suit: Raise immediately or do so on a delayed basis? This includes when he opens 1♥ and I have three-card support but also hold four spades. How about some help?

Marvin

Hi Marvin,

My feelings about "support with support" are well documented by the over 20 years of articles I have written. As with most things, there is no hard and fast rule, you just need to "think and then bid" or perhaps "always plan a second bid before you choose a first."

In first seat, your partner opens 1♥ and you face the following decisions:

① ♠A K 8 3 ♥7 5 2 ♦9 6 2 ♣8 5 3

I would raise to 2♥ immediately.

The naysayers prefer to bid 1♠ for a couple of reasons. First, it is where 100% of their high-card strength is located and sometimes by bidding 1♠ you discover a 4-4 fit that might play better. To negate the first point, a response of 1♠ would show four or more spades with no reference to quality of suit whatsoever. If opener has interest in game after your simple raise, and also happens to have four spades, he can bid them as a game try. Opposite any minimum opening bid, your immediate raise has identified a home.

And the big point! If the auction went:

1♥	Pass	1♠	3♣
Pass	Pass	?	

If you now bid 3♥, showing your support for the first time at the three level, I think your partner should expect more than a flat 7-point hand with three lousy trumps!

I really hate it when the opponents get into my auctions, but my emotional distress does not seem to deter them from doing so. With simple raise values I am big on "support with support" immediately.

② ♠A K 8 3 ♥K 5 2 ♦9 2 ♣8 6 5 3

With this hand, I don't greatly fear interference by the opponents. I would respond 1♠, planning to bid 3♥ on my next bid to show a limit raise with three trump. I would do this in a contested auction or an uncontested auction.

③ ♠A J 8 3 ♥K Q 5 ♦9 2 ♣A J 5 3

Although a case can be made for responding 1♠, I would prefer to set up the game force by starting with 2♣ followed by confirming hearts as trump. The problem with an initial spade bid is how to reflect both your values and primary support for hearts over most rebids by opener.

Example:

1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♦	Pass	?	

3♥ would be invitational, and jumping to 4♥ seems premature with this many controls and strong heart support. Methinks starting with 2♣ tends to make the auction proceed more efficiently.

As a matter of style, I am in the camp that:

1♥	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♠			

is merely shape-showing, and may or may not contain extra values. This is clearly a matter for partnership discussion, but it is the method used in all of my regular partnerships. With this agreement, the 2♣ initial bid does not preclude finding a 4-4 spade fit, if one exists.

④ ♠7 4 ♥A 8 4 2 ♦A K Q 5 4 ♣6 2

The temptation here is to respond 2♦ followed by supporting hearts in a game-forcing auction. The idea is to suggest the location of your values. The problem with this is that a 2/1 in diamonds doesn't necessarily show a strong suit. As a matter of partnership agreement, I prefer that a 2/1 bid followed by support for opener's major guarantee exactly three-card support. If you hold four-card or longer support, along with game-forcing values, there are only two options: Jacoby 2NT or a splinter raise.

With example 4, I would choose Jacoby 2NT to confirm my values and four-card support. Partnership agreement for sure, but one I feel very strongly about. ■