

# Book REVIEWS

## The Best of ASK JERRY

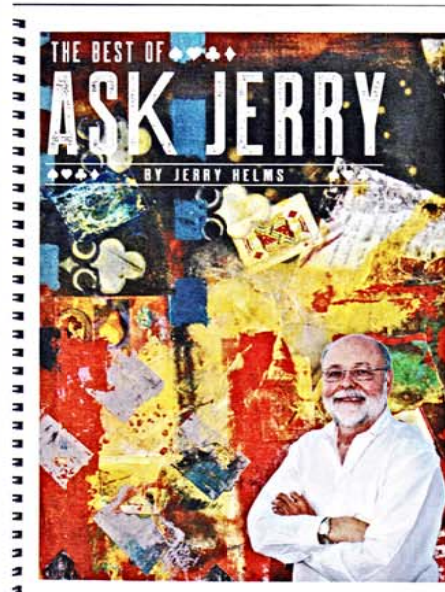
By Jerry Helms

Reviewed by Brent Manley

Spiral bound, 82 pages

\$17.99

Rating: A



Jerry Helms has been writing the Ask Jerry column in the ACBL Bridge Bulletin for more than a decade, and he remains one of the magazine's most popular and valuable contributors. Helms does an outstanding job as an arbiter of disputes between partners, but the column has value that far exceeds argument settling.

There is some real teaching going on in this monthly column, and it's good stuff, which is to be expected from an expert player and sought-after bridge teacher.

Fortunately for players who want to improve, many of Helms' columns — almost all about bidding — have been collected in this new book. That said, the book is a gold mine of information every aspiring player should work hard to absorb.

It's an easy read. Helms has a smooth writing style, never condescending, and respectful and encouraging in the right spots. Here is a sample (shortened in spots) that touches on one of my pet peeves: off-shape takeout doubles.

Dear Jerry:

Please give me your opinion on how you would have handled the following situation. My partner, North, was dealer and passed. East opened 1♠. Sitting South, I held

♠ 9 7 3  
♥ A K  
♦ K J 8 2  
♣ K J 7 6

What should I have done? If I doubled, partner would surely bid hearts. If I passed, the opposition may have stolen the contract, especially if West raised spades?

I decided to overcall 1NT, expecting to lose the first five spade tricks, and then scrambling to make seven out of the next eight tricks. As it turned out,

that's exactly what happened. Perhaps I was just lucky, but do you think I chose the best bid?

— Mario

Dear Mario:

There is an important distinction between actions as dealer and actions after RHO has opened the bidding. In competition, the word "pass" does not necessarily deny values: it may simply deny the ability to describe those values. With your hand, I would certainly open 1NT, but I would choose a different direction after a 1♠ opener on my right.

I often teach, "When you do not know what to do, first decide what you are sure you should not do. Here's my analysis:

Takeout double: You have plenty of values, but double is not an attractive option holding two-card support for the suit your partner (advancer) is likely to bid.

Suit overcall: (2♣ or 2♦). Overcalling in a suit is not an option because a two-level overcalls guarantees a good five-card or longer suit.

1NT overcall: Not an option. You have minimum acceptable values but no spade stopper.

Pass: The default option I would choose. Your fear that the opponents might steal the hand is premature. If the auction goes 1♠ - Pass - 2♠ - Pass; Pass to you, you could balance with 2NT to show the minors. If partner held extreme heart length, he could bid the suit.

I commend your decision to question this auction despite the success you achieved on this particular deal. You seem headed in the right direction.

If you are looking to avoid bidding accidents and improve your results, you can't go wrong with this book.