

Ask Jerry



Well-known teacher and player **Jerry Helms** answers your bridge questions. Send your questions to "Ask Jerry," c/o Jerry Helms, 5000 Montclair Avenue, Charlotte, NC 28211.

Dear Jerry: I was playing on the Internet with a new partner and was dealt this hand. We'd ♠ Q 9 3 agreed to play five-card majors but after ♥ A Q 10 4 two passes, I decided ♦ Q 6 4 to open 1♥ in third position. Partner ♣ Q 5 2 jumped to 4♥ and we got a poor result. Partner sent the following message: "Do you play four-card majors???" Four question marks! I didn't like partner's 4♥ response, but do you agree with my opening bid?

—V. Barnett
Tarrytown, NY

Dear V.B.: Most players concede that it's permissible to open in third chair with fewer values than required in

first or second position. One reason is to suggest an opening lead to partner if the opponents win the auction. Another reason is that there is some safety from getting too high because you can pass partner's response.

Opening 1♥ with this hand, you rightly expected to be well-placed for whatever occurred. Your shape would allow you to pass a 1♠, 1NT 2♣, or 2♦ response. You also bid the suit you wanted partner to lead. If you passed or opened 1♣ or 1♦, your side might get a poor result.

All of this is good. What went wrong? As is evident, partner couldn't accept a four-card major opening ... ever. On the convention card, the box

is for "Expected Min(imum) Length." If the "5" is checked, it implies you usually have five or more cards to open 1♥ or 1♠, but you're permitted to use judgment on occasion. I've found, however, many players who interpret this to mean "never" ... even in third position. These are usually the same players who would never overcall on a good four-card suit.

Bridge is a game of judgment. Even though I play five-card majors, I sometimes open a four-card suit with a good excuse. On this hand, I think you had a good reason for your bid.

The interesting part of this scenario is that there's a useful convention for hands like this ... Drury. After an opening bid of 1♥ or 1♠ in third or fourth position, a response of 2♣ can be used to ask about the quality of opener's hand. Drury would have given partner an option other than jumping to game on this deal.

I hope you avoided further games with this partner. It's stressful to play on the Internet with a partner who uses too much punctuation! —JH