



Ask Jerry

Well-known teacher and player **Jerry Helms** answers your bridge questions.
Send your questions to askjerry@jerryhelms.com.

Dear Jerry: My partner and I are often confused in competitive bidding. Recently, in a local duplicate game, we had the following auction:

WEST	PARTNER	EAST	ME
	1♥	1♠	2♥
2♠	3♥	Pass	4♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

My partner thinks the 3♥ bid was for competition only, but for me, it shows extras, as partner could pass. With the top of my bid, I raised to game, but we went down two tricks. Would you like to comment on this as we are intermediate players trying to improve our game?

—Confused in Competition

Dear Confused: The only part of your question I find curious is “would I like to comment?” Actually, I would love to comment!

In card play, there is a phrase, “eight ever, nine never.” Loosely, this refers to the scenario where the queen is the only card of significance missing from a combined suit holding. With a nine-card fit, in the absence of any interference provided by the bidding, it is slightly better to play the ace and king, rather than take a finesse. With an eight-card fit, it is better to finesse someone for the missing queen.

In his book, THE LAW OF TOTAL TRICKS, Larry Cohen pointed out that, in competitive bidding situations, this phrase should be reversed to “eight never, nine ever.” With apologies to Larry for any creative license I may take in attempting to say in a short article what he explained in great detail in his book, here goes:

In any competitive auction, it is usually best to compete to the level equal to the number of trumps your side holds.

To use one of my Jerryisms: “The one who knows is the one who goes.”

In your example auction, if opener held six hearts and is aware that the partnership holds at least nine trumps, opener should make a non-invitational competitive bid of 3♥ even with dead minimum values. With only five trumps, opener should tend to pass unless there are game possibilities.

A good partnership agreement is that a re-raise of your suit is never invitational in a competitive auction.

In your example auction, if opener had held extras, 2NT, 3♣, and 3♦ are all available as forward-going bids. When bidding space is available, use it!

For those who may be interested, consider this slightly more difficult problem:

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♠	2♥	2♠
3♥	?		

By agreement, 3♠, a re-raise of the partnership’s suit, is non-forcing. How does opener, North, now distinguish between hand types where opener simply wishes to follow “The Law” and compete to the three level as opposed to issuing an invitation to game? There is no bidding room available between 3♥ and 3♠.

The solution is to use the Maximal Game Try Double:

When no space is available after a competitive bid and raise, double is an artificial game try.

In the above auction, with a hand too strong to simply stop in a partscore of 3♠ but not quite strong enough to bid 4♠, North can double, asking South to decide whether to bid game or stop in 3♠.

In auctions like this, I would prefer to have an action that gives partner the option to make the last mistake ...I mean the last bid!

You mentioned that partner went down two tricks at the four level. That suggests that partner would have gone down only one trick at the three level if you had passed the 3♥ re-raise.

Did you go back after the game and check your matchpoint results? There is an excellent chance that down one in 3♥ would have been a better result than defending against the opponent’s 2♠, which may have succeeded. If this was not the actual case, don’t blame me...blame Larry Cohen!

—JH ♦

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