



Ask Jerry

Jerry Helms

www.jerryhelms.com

Dear Jerry,

The other day, holding:

♠8 ♥AQ104 ♦J9653 ♣AJ7,

I opened 1♦. When partner responded 1♠, I rebid 1NT. After a rather poor result when partner rebid his spades, I was chastised for rebidding notrump with a singleton. I see nothing wrong with my bidding. Do you?

Shorta Spade

Hi Shorta,

Yes! (I commend you, however, for not rebidding 2♦ on such a lousy suit.) Oh ... I suppose you would like for me to elaborate!

Many years ago, Alvin Roth gave the best advice I have ever heard about bidding. Although I acknowledge this as a Roth-Stone-ism I confess to cannibalizing it many times as a Jerry-ism:

“Always plan a second bid before you choose a first.”

It does not require a stretch of imagination to think that your partner's most likely reply to any opening bid might be 1♠. Before opening this hand, therefore, I would prepare for this likelihood.

With the actual hand, there are two main choices:

1. Playing five-card majors, open 1♥, planning to rebid 2♦. This perfectly describes a hand with at least nine red cards with anywhere between 12 to 18 points! Well, *almost* perfectly since partner will expect my shorter suit to be my longer one. At least he will not expect a balanced hand.
2. If I did open 1♦, I'd prefer a 2♣ rebid to 1NT. As above, at least partner would not expect balanced shape.

When you open and rebid 1NT, it should encourage responder to rebid a five-card major when holding a weak hand, low singleton. If, however, you held something like:

♠K ♥J872 ♦K9653 ♣KQJ,

a 1NT rebid would have more merit since the singleton king could be nearly as valuable as a low doubleton.

An appropriate Jerry-ism:

“The best bid available is often the least bad alternative.”

Dear Jerry,

There was a somewhat heated discussion the other day regarding a response to a standard 1NT (15-17 HCP) opening bid. Some say you always transfer to a five-card major with a weak hand, even with zero points. Others don't agree and suggest a pass unless the suit has some strength. What is your take?

JG

Dear JG,

I know this is hard to believe, but once again you have posed a question on which I have a strong opinion! (What a surprise!)

Most of the time, the weaker the responder's hand is, the more important it becomes to make his five-card or longer suit trump, irrespective of suit quality. Suppose you hold:

♠94 ♥J8752 ♦10653 ♣87

and hear your partner open 1NT. If you pass, your hand may take zero tricks in a notrump contract. If instead, you transfer to hearts, and then pass, your hand will certainly take some tricks even if partner holds a doubleton heart.

There certainly will be exceptions where pass will yield a superior result, but in the long run, I think bidding is superior to passing. □