

Ask Jerry

BY JERRY HELMS

Dear Jerry,

I held:

♠A J 4 ♥8 ♦A K 5 2 ♣A Q 8 7 3

and opened 1♣. Partner bid 1♠. I then bid 2♦ and partner passed! He held:

♠Q 10 8 6 3 ♥Q 7 6 2 ♦J ♣6 5 4.

We can make 4♠ (the ♣K is on-side). So how do we get there?

Bill

Dear Bill,

As always, partnership agreement reigns supreme, but perhaps we should start by looking at your sequence of bids. Your second bid of diamonds, a higher-ranking suit than your opening bid in clubs, was a classic “reverse.”

Quoting from the “Official Encyclopedia of Bridge,” a reverse is “an unforced rebid at the level of two, in a higher-ranking suit than the suit bid originally . . . in most cases, reverses imply that the first-bid suit consists of at least five cards and the second is shorter.” A reverse by opener after a one-level suit response should announce strong game possibilities where the partnership is expected to hold a minimum of 22–23 HCP. Another way to look at this: if opener’s rebid could force responder to take a preference at the three level when they have responded on minimal values, someone should have a good hand! That someone is opener.

Continuing from the encyclopedia: “In the past, reverses were not forcing after a one-level response. However, virtually all experts now treat them as forcing.” Noting your partner’s pass,

it is clear he considered your action as non-forcing. Perhaps he was regretting his initial shaded response, which brings me to my first point. Do not take positions on the same hand. The decision to respond on a “quacky” 5-point hand is one that I agree with. The panic pass after your rebid, I do not agree with. Once you have responded on shaded values, you must keep your mind alert to the meanings of the continued auction.

Even if your partner felt he could pass, why would he pass holding a singleton in a suit where you rate to have only four cards when he could take a preference to your first suit, where you are expected to hold at least five cards?

In my opinion, opener’s reverse after a one-level response should be 100% forcing — not *game* forcing, but forcing for one round. There needs to be some structure to help partnerships survive the murky nature of reverse auctions. Simplistically, a reverse should force to at least 2NT or three of opener’s minor. After a reverse, responder’s first priority should be to rebid a five-card or longer suit, which is neutral and forcing for one round. A rebid of 2NT or three of partner’s first bid suit is passable. Any other bid is game forcing.

Having said this, there are much better methods which experienced partnerships should consider. With the basic agreement, your partner would have been obliged to rebid 2♠, over which you would have been delighted to raise to game. Your partner would likely blanche, but with a little luck, all would be well.