

Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

My partner and I are relatively experienced duplicate players, but we had a serious disagreement on the following auction:

<i>Opener</i>		<i>Responder</i>	
1NT	2♣		
2♦	2♥		

Because we play transfers, I thought 2♥ was invitational, showing five hearts and four spades. Partner insisted this was a weak bid,

asking opener to pick a major. Am I right or wrong?

Right or Wrong?

Dear RW,

Yes.

Oh, I gotta do more?

As usual, a lack of partnership agreement rears up to create a problem. Without discussion, I would be worried about this auction, but surprisingly, I have a strong opinion about how to play it.

With a 15–17 1NT range, some partnerships utilize something called “crawling Stayman,” when responder holds 0–7 points and at least four cards in each major. After a 2♦ response, a rebid of 2♥ asks opener to pass or correct to 2♠. I have witnessed players take this action holding 4–4 in the majors, and when they survive in their 4–3 fit, I am always amazed. Does their partner never open 1NT holding something such as this:

♠A Q ♥A Q ♦Q x x x ♣Q x x x x?

I think the mainstream view would be to open this hand 1NT, and on occasion, “crawl” into a nasty 4–2 fit. Perhaps more sane proponents of this tool would always hold five hearts and four spades, which at least would guarantee the partnership to hold at least a seven-card fit. They would choose this action holding hands such as:

♠Q x x x ♥J x x x x ♦x ♣x x x

With a weak hand and this shape, you can hit a partscore home run when partner responds in his four- or five-card major and you gleefully pass.

Personally, when I swing for the fence,

I prefer trying to reach close games more often than stopping on a dime in the best partscore. So in my partnerships, Stayman followed by anything other than pass is at least mildly invitational and primarily for play in a suit contract. Holding:

♠A x x x ♥K x x x x ♦x ♣x x x x,

I would start with Stayman, planning on raising a 2♥ or 2♠ rebid from opener. Over 2♦, I would bid 2♥, guaranteeing five hearts and four spades, and mildly invitational values. We could still have an eight-card heart fit, and sometimes partner has values in both majors and a couple of minor-suit aces, which allows us to get to some very good games. Opposite the above hand, opener might hold:

♠K x ♥A x x ♦A x x x ♣A x x x.

With this 15-count and reasonable major-suit breaks, 4♥ comes rolling home. In fact, this is just the type of hand that opener should reevaluate his assets in view of the invitational action you have created. With a game-forcing hand over 2♦, responder can jump to three of his five-card major (standard), or utilize the Smolen convention by jumping in his four-card holding.

Years ago, Eddie Kantar said that when holding a poor hand with five hearts and four spades, simply transfer to hearts and pass. He added, “Don’t call me when opener holds four spades!” I would like to request the same courtesy. Don’t call me when you play the 5–2 fit instead of the 4–4 and go down in a partscore. But it’s okay if you call me when you get to the game others missed!