



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

Recently my partner and I had a bidding sequence that we did not agree on. Please arbitrate. The auction:

Partner	Me
1♣	1♥
1♠	1NT
2♥	Pass

With only 9 HCP, I passed, thinking partner was showing a minimum, unbalanced hand. I took 11 tricks on the 4-3 fit, and I also could have made 3NT. Partner had three-card heart support with 17 points. I thought she should have jumped at some point in the bidding to show a strong hand. What do you think?

Confused

Dear Confused,

I think I would prefer to be a legal arbitrator or perhaps a professional sports arbitrator, where the compensation would likely be greater. Maybe in my next lifetime.

Yours is a very good question about a concept that I find many players do not fully appreciate. An uncharacteristically short answer from me: I think your partner showed a strong hand. But you know by now there is no way I can stop there!

Let's examine the auction bid by bid:

1♣: Three or more clubs, 12-21 points.

1♥: Four or more hearts, 6 or more points.

1♠: Non-forcing, fewer than four hearts, usually four spades. The strength is somewhere between the worst 12-point hand ever opened, up to a hand not quite worth a game-forcing jump shift, therefore, 12 to a bad 18. (Is there really such a thing as a bad 18?)

1NT: 6-10 points. Could have a five-card heart suit.

2♥: Constructive, encouraging. Exactly three-card support with a medium-strength hand. Strong enough for some partscore if you held minimum values, including a poor four-card heart suit. Also strong enough for us to reach the appropriate game if you hold 9 or 10 points.

Opener's hand might look like any of the following:

♠K 8 7 6	♥K 7 2	A	♣A K 8 6 3
♠A K 7 6	♥Q J 2	♦10	♣K Q J 8 5
♠Q 9 3 2	♥A K 6	♦4	♣A Q J 4 3

Note the central characteristic: diamond shortness with opening notrump strength. Opener's bids show his pattern - clubs, spades, hearts, therefore, not many diamonds.

At what point should opener jump in the bidding? I can't fathom the reason to jump when I can keep the bidding low and express the full strength of the hand and let partner take charge. Defining this sequence in this fashion is consistent with one of my strong bidding philosophies: Structure your bids

to possibly reach good game contracts rather than trying to stop on a dime in a superior partscore.

After the delayed heart raise, responder's hand could be any of the following:

♠Q 10 5	♥Q J 8 2	♦K J 7	♣10 3 2
♠J 8	♥K J 10 6 5	♦A 6 4	♣9 7 3
♠8 7	♥Q J 6 5 3	♦Q J 8 2	♣9 7
♠10 4	♥J 6 5 2	♦K 7 3	♣K 7 6 3

With the first two hands, there's a game somewhere, probably 3NT on the first, certainly 4♥ on the second. On the third hand, I would pass 2♥, and on the fourth, I would carry partner to 3♣.

An analogous auction:

1♦	1♥
1♠	2♦
2♥	

Once again, this should not be a minimum, unbalanced, delayed three-card heart raise. This suggests strong 1NT values and unbalanced shape.

Another somewhat similar auction:

1♦	1♠
1NT	2NT
3♠	

Opener is accepting responder's game invitation, showing three-card spade support along the way. Responder should not pass! This is not the way to describe a weak hand looking for a better partscore. ■