



Ask Jerry

BY JERRY HELMS  www.jerryhelms.com

Dear Jerry,

As dealer, I held the following hand:

♠ A J ♥ 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 ♦ 5 ♣ A 7.

I did not know what to do and the opinions offered by the club experts ranged from pass to all numbers of heart opening bids. What would you do?

Hardly Heartless

Dear Har-Har,

I would do what I often recommend and actually do myself: When nothing appeals, consider the alternatives and choose the least bad. A portion of this would also be resolved by using Al Roth's admonition from the '50s which went something like this: Always plan a second bid before you choose a first.

- 1 Pass.** If you pass, would you be comfortable responding to an opening bid by partner or making any type of overcall if the opponents are the ones in the auction? Partner is unlikely to picture your playing strength or two quick tricks after an original pass. If it's the opponents who bid, do you really want to suggest a heart lead by making a simple overcall? After passing, does this look like a preemptive jump overcall?
- 2 2♥.** This shows 5 to 11 points, but suggests a good six-card suit. Do I need to say more?
- 3 3♥.** Less than an opening bid, suggesting a seven-card suit, implying more offensive potential than defensive potential.
- 4 4♥.** Certainly you have enough hearts, but not the right type of suit texture, not to mention two quick tricks on the side.

- 5 1♥.** This suggests five or more hearts of any variety and two or more quick tricks. If you're a fan of the "Suggestion of 22," this hand is close to an opening bid. To refresh your memory about this guideline, count your high-card points and add to this the length of your two longest suits. Provided that number is 20 or greater, and if you have two or more quick tricks, you have a one-level opening bid. While this hand doesn't quite reach the 20 part, 19 is awfully close!

1♥, while flawed, is the action that most closely resembles the cards you hold. It's useful to remember that an opening one-bid makes a statement about certain aspects of suit quantity, but provides no information regarding suit quality. This hand does contain the quantity of five or more hearts, and the quantity of two or more quick tricks. In my mind, this is enough strength to justify an opening bid in lieu of any of the other alternatives. It's the "least lie."

If your partner responds, your plan is to make minimum rebids in hearts to convey the extra length held without indicating extra strength. If the opponents intervene and ultimately buy the contract, and partner chooses to make a penalty double, he may not be thrilled with your heart holding if he leads it, but he should not be disappointed with your two outside defensive tricks. ■

Send your questions to: askjerry@jerryhelms.com