



Ask Jerry

BY JERRY HELMS jerryhelms.com

Dear Jerry,

My partner and I would appreciate your opinion on our bidding of this hand:

<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
♠ J 10	♠ —
♥ K Q J 7 5	♥ A
♦ A 8 7 6 4	♦ J 10 9 5 2
♣ Q	♣ A K J 10 8 6 3

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
<i>Me</i>		<i>Partner</i>	
1♥	1♠	2♣	2♠
Pass	Pass	3♣	3♠
Pass	Pass	4♣	All Pass

With diamonds behaving, we took 12 tricks in clubs, and obviously could have taken 12 tricks in diamonds as well. Where did we go so terribly wrong?

AV

Hi, AV,

With most questions that I receive involving a bidding disaster, I try to assign a little blame to both parties if possible. On this deal, you are totally in the clear.

One of the oldest chestnuts in the fire is this:

WHEN AN OPENING BID
FACES AN OPENING BID,
WE PLAY AT LEAST GAME.

With this in mind, your partner gets all the blame.

Part of the problem could have been a misunderstanding of the difference between bidding in competitive auctions versus bidding in uncontested ones. As a matter of style, I prefer to play 1♥–Pass–2♣ as 100% forcing to game. If RHO makes an overcall, however, you are back to Standard American where 2♣ tends to show at least five clubs and 10 or more points. It is forcing for one round.

The auction the two of you produced was fine until your partner simply rebid 3♣, which is non-forcing. With a full opening bid opposite your opening bid, how could it possibly be wrong to bid a forcing 3♦? Over this action, you have an easy raise to 4♦. As a matter of good bidding principles, you virtually always have four-card support when you raise a suit where partner could have as few as four cards. With this information, lacking any sophisticated tools, I would recommend your partner to follow the advice I've given myself for years:

FORCED TO GUESS,
GUESS HIGH!

I would leap to 6♦ and hope it was right. From my perspective, occasionally too high is preferable to often too low.

Dear Jerry,

Playing 1430 Roman key card Blackwood, partner bids 5♦ in response to 4NT. What is the correct way to determine whether responder has zero or 3 key cards?

Jerry

Hi, Jerry,

Ninety-nine percent of the time, if you ask for key cards and honestly can't decode the response when there's a three-key-card gap in partner's reply, perhaps you were premature in asking the question. In this case, if there is the three-key-card difference you fear, being at the five level is likely a serious mistake!

In the unlikely event that you somehow conceived an auction and asked for key cards, and partner shows either 1/4 or 0/3 and you really, really can't be sure, sign off at the five level of your agreed suit. With the lower number (1 or zero) of key cards, partner passes. With the greater holding (four or three), he bids slam. If you ask, and three or four is not enough, methinks you erred in asking!