Jerry Helms

Ask Jerry

Dear Jerry,

I thought an opening three-bid always showed a seven-card suit and an opening four-bid always showed at least an eight-card suit. What are your thoughts?

Rock Solid, Peoria IL

Dear Solid,

First of all, when discussing bridge, I avoid words like always or never, and favor words like generally, usually, probably. All preemptive opening bids are intended as constructive/obstructive actions. The intent is to suggest a hand type that is good for offensive purposes yet poor for defense. Preempts do not bar partner from introducing another suit, but they are warned about your probable lack of interest. In first seat, I would open 3♣ on the following hand:

♠7 ♥52 ♦8654 ♣KQJ1043.

One of my Jerry-isms is:

"A good bid is one that resembles the cards you hold."

Certainly, a 3♣ opening bid is superior to pass, which identifies possession of 13 cards and nothing to say.

On a similar note, holding ♠QJ109542 ♥8 ♦6 ♣QJ109, I would open 4♠. Even if partner tables a spade void and zero high-card points, I am a favorite to take seven tricks. Even doubled, down three is likely a victory, since the opponents, with 34 high-card points, including the ♠AK, the ♥AKQJ, the ♦AKQJ and the ♣AK should perhaps have a higher-scoring option. Opening 4♠ will likely not buy the contract on this layout, but it sure makes it tough for the opponents to begin their exchange of information at the five level.