*Well-known teacher and player **Jerry Helms** answers your bridge questions. Send your questions to jeryhelms@aol.com.*

Ask Jerry

***Dear Jerry:** If the partnership uses five-card majors, shouldn't you open 1♠ with this hand?*

♠ A K 8 7 3
♥ 4
♦ A Q 7 6 4 2
♣ 3

With a minimum-strength opening, don't you want to let partner know about the five-card major right away before the bidding gets too high?

O. Herman
Carlsbad, CA

Dear O.H.: I would disagree on two points. This hand isn't a minimum, and it should be opened in the longer suit, 1♦.

Point counters might see only 13 high-card points but, many years ago, Grant Baze wrote an article called "6-5 come alive!" The theme was that hands with a six-card suit and a five-card suit have great playing potential. To visualize this, suppose these are the combined hands:

You	Partner
♠ A K 8 7 3	♠ 4 2
♥ 4	♥ 8 7 6 5
♦ A Q 7 6 4 2	♦ 8 5 3
♣ 3	♣ 9 6 4 2

Although partner doesn't have a single point, you could make 5♦ on a lucky day. If the missing spades are divided 3-3, you trump the third round in dummy to establish the suit. You then try the diamond finesse and, if the doubleton ♦K is on your right, you won't lose a trick in that suit.

Let's give partner something:

You	Partner
♠ A K 8 7 3	♠ Q 2
♥ 4	♥ A 7 6 5
♦ A Q 7 6 4 2	♦ K 5 3
♣ 3	♣ 9 6 4 2

Partner has only 9 high-card points but you are a big favorite to make 6♦, losing only a club trick. If the spades don't break, you can ruff a spade in dummy.

It would be difficult to convince partner that you belong in diamonds if you start by opening 1♠. Partner will expect you to hold more spades that diamonds.

Instead, I would happily open 1♦, intending to bid and rebid my spades, showing a five-card suit. Partner will then know I have at least six diamonds, since I would have opened 1♠ with five cards in both suits. Partner can then make the best choice of trump suit.

Don't let the term 'five-card majors' lull you into opening the shorter suit. Come alive and show your distribution! —***JH***