Ask Jerry

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

***Dear Jerry**: When I open 1♣ or 1♦ and my partner responds 1♥ or 1♠, should I raise with three-card support? Isn't it possible that we'll play in a seven-card fit!*

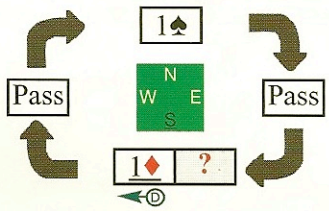
—S. U., Genoa, NE

Dear S. U.: Once we choose to play five-card major-suit openings, we must often open 1♣ or 1♦ when holding a four-card major suit. Now it becomes the responsibility of responder to bid a four-card major to try to uncover a fit. If neither partner is prepared to bid a four-card major, many eight-card fits will be lost. As a result, if we raise responder's major with only three card support, we might land in a seven-card fit.

However, I have no qualms about raising responder's major with only three-card support when there is no better alternative. In other words, when it's the bid that best describes the cards I hold.

The only objection seems to be that we don't like the thought of playing in a seven-card fit. But when that does happen, it might be the best contract ...and it will improve our card play! And if the bidding continues, the partnership has ways to determine whether there is only a seven-card fit before playing in the major suit.

Consider this hand where we open 1♦ and partner responds 1♠:

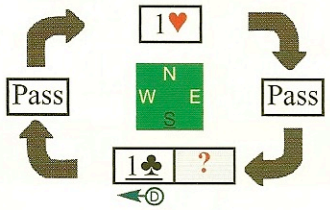


♠ A K J
♥ 4
♦ Q 8 7 4 3
♣ Q 6 4 2

It's natural to raise to 2♠. It's better than the other choices, and it's the bid that best describes the hand. A rebid of 2♦ would suggest a better and longer suit. A rebid of 2♣ would describe a hand with diamonds and clubs when we have 8 of our 12 high-card points in the spade suit.

Notrump with a singleton heart isn't attractive. In a spade contract, however, the singleton heart offers the potential to trump heart losers in the dummy. All roads lead to 2♠.

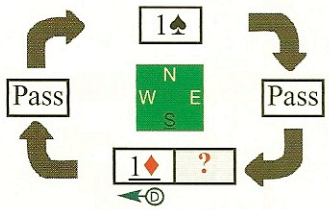
Here's another example. We open 1♣ and partner responds 1♥.



♠ 5
♥ K Q 3
♦ A K 8
♣ J 7 6 4 3 2

Rebidding 2♣ with a six-card suit couldn't be criticized, but the best feature of this hand is the support for partner's hearts. Rebid 2♥.

Although I'm happy to raise with three-card support with an unbalanced hand, I'm a strong believer that a balanced hand should be kept in the balanced-hand family—notrump.



♠ A Q 8
♥ 10 7 5
♦ A Q 6 4
♣ J 8 2

I would open this hand 1♦, and if partner responds 1♠, I'd rebid 1NT. It's true that I don't have a stopper in hearts, and not much of one in clubs, but a rebid of 1NT best describes the hand that I hold—a balanced hand too weak to open 1NT.

There are people who would raise to 2♠, but I don't agree with this at all. With a five-card spade suit, partner can continue to look for a fit, using methods such as New Minor Forcing.

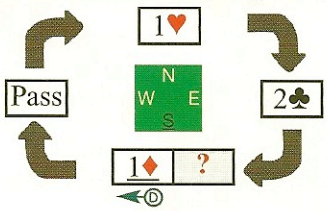
In summary, I raise responder's major with three-card support...if:

- My hand is unbalanced.
- There is no more attractive bid.

***Dear Jerry**: What is a support double?*

—K. A., Fort Lauderdale, FL

Dear K. A.: A support double is used to show exactly three-card support for responder's suit when the next player interferes with a simple overcall.



♠ A 5 4
♥ Q 7 3
♦ A K 9 7 3
♣ 9 5

We open 1♦, partner responds 1♥, and the opponent on our right overcalls 2♣. Partner might have only four hearts, so raising to 2♥ could land the partnership in a seven-card fit. In standard methods, a double of 2♣ would be for penalty, but if we play support doubles, we can double to show three-card support for hearts. Partner can then decide on the best place to play the contract.

If we had four-card support for hearts, we would simply raise hearts right away, knowing there is at least an eight-card fit. —*JH*