Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

I can't believe I'm asking such a basic question. This was my hand:

♠J 10 ♥Q 8 7 5 3 ♦J ♣Q 9 6 4 3.

With the opponents passing throughout, we had the following auction:

Partner	*Me*
1♦	1♥
1♠	2♣
3NT	Pass

3NT was down four. My right-hand opponent said I had no right bidding 2♣ because that told my partner I had 13 points. I was just trying to tell my partner that I had a distributional hand.

Just Bidding My Suits

Hi JBMS,

Let's start with something good before beginning the descent downhill. I applaud your decision to respond 1♥ on this woeful collection of "quacks." At this point, your partner correctly assumes you hold four or more hearts and 6 or more points. His rebid of 1♠ brackets his values somewhere between a dead minimum and not quite enough for a game-forcing jump shift.

At some point in every auction, someone needs to define his values, and in this auction, the time is now. In any system, a new suit bid by an unpassed responder is forcing. Did you consider your meager values worthy of requiring partner to speak again? I teach the following in my seminar called "Modern Methods of Responder Rebids." The first rebid by responder (actually the fourth bid in an uncontested auction) is often his first opportunity to actually define values held. Responder's rebid options using these methods are as follows:

With 6 to 10 points (a minimum hand), you should either pass, rebid 1NT or rebid/raise a previously mentioned suit to the two level.

With 11 or 12 points (a medium hand), you should rebid 2NT or rebid (or jump raise) a previously mentioned suit to the three level.

With 13 or more points (a maximum), bid game if you know what game to bid or bid a new suit if game values are clear, but which game to bid is murky.

I believe that the best available bid is often the least bad alternative. Another way to look at this is that when you don't know what to bid try to eliminate from consideration what you are sure *not* to bid. Apply these to your problem. With the 6 points you actually held, a new suit — in this case 2♣ — was not an option.

With minimum values, you must choose a minimum rebid. In this auction, the only options are Pass, 1NT, 2♦ and 2♥. Pass is poor because it just seems wrong to play a 4–2 fit. 2♦ is ridiculous. 2♥ is correct on values, and it does promise more than four hearts. So 2♥ is possible, but something about rebidding such a bad suit in an auction where partner could hold a singleton or void in hearts with minimum values seems wrong. 1NT is correct on values, but it doesn't show the fifth heart. At least you have the unbid suit somewhat stopped!

To me, 1NT is the best of the bad.

Many players today, myself included, define responder rebids as in the chart above. When we introduce the fourth suit, it is not only forcing, but is artificial and *game* forcing. This method is conventionally referred to as fourth suit forcing (4SF). Introducing the fourth suit is often a necessity when responder is sure of combined game values, but unsure of which game to bid. A typical hand where responder would need to bid 2♣ as an artificial forcing bid:

♠J 10 ♥A Q 7 6 3 ♦A Q 6 ♣9 8 2.

With your 13 points opposite partner's opening bid, game values are clearly established, but what game should you choose? Opener might still hold three hearts, making 4♥ the best game, but he might also hold two or fewer hearts, with clubs under control, where 3NT would offer the best hope. Aware that your introduction of the fourth suit was artificial, he should bid notrump only with a stopper himself. Otherwise, he should choose the most descriptive available.

Learn to consider what our bids actually show as opposed to what we wished they were showing. ❐