Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

My partner and I got a terrible result on the following deal. Our hands:

♠ Q 7 6 4 3　♥ K 10　♦ K 4　♣ A 8 6 3

♠ 2　♥ Q J 9 6 5 2　♦ A 6 3 2　♣ 7 5

Our Standard American auction:

1♠	1NT
All Pass	

We lost four clubs, three spades and a heart for down two. All the pairs who reached 2♥ took at least nine tricks. Knowing partner had 6–10 points, I never dreamed of bidding again. Partner does not have enough points to bid 2♥. How should we reach a heart contract?

Chip

Hi Chip,

Holding your cards, despite holding minimal values, playing Standard American, I would have introduced my club suit rather than passing. Let me give you a little background for the logic in bidding again.

I'm sure by now you have at least encountered players using 2/1 game force. An intregal part of that system is using some form of 1NT forcing over major-suit opening bids. Without delving too deeply, this is a necessary tool in the 2/1 system for, among other reasons, how responder deals with 11–12 point hands that are not worthy of a game force ... the type of hands that Standard players would have no problem simply bidding their suit at the two level. Some of the theory actually applies to Standard American auctions.

My "Space Theory"

Choices in many bidding sequences are affected by the number of options available. On the four that follow, note the available "space" between the opening bid and the 1NT response.

1♣	Pass	1NT

Holding appropriate length, responder could have bid 1♦, 1♥, 1♠ or 2♣ on as few as 6 points. Number of options? *Five.* The decision to bid 1NT would always guarantee a balanced hand.

1♦	Pass	1NT

Holding appropriate length, responder could have bid 1♥, 1♠ or 2♦ on as few as 6 points, yet chose 1NT. Number of options? *Four.* The decision to bid 1NT means a balanced hand *most* of the time. For the skeptics ... holding:

♠ 7 4　♥ 9 4 3　♦ A 5　♣ Q 9 7 6 4 3,

with 6 HCP, pass is not an option, nor is bidding a new suit at the two level, ergo, 1NT!

1♥	Pass	1NT

Holding appropriate length, responder could have bid 1♠ or 2♥ with that same 6-point hand, yet he chose 1NT. Number of options? *Three.*

1♠	Pass	1NT

Holding three or more spades, and the requisite 6 points, responder could bid 2♠. Number of options? *Two.* On all hands with two or fewer spades and 6–10 points, 1NT is the *only* option.

A brief summary: A 1NT response to 1♣ *never* contains a singleton or a void. A 1NT response to 1♦ *rarely* contains a singleton or a void. A 1NT response to 1♥ will *often* contain a singleton or a void. And a 1NT response to 1♠ *frequently* contains a singleton or a void.

When asked to define what a 1NT response to 1♠ shows in Standard American, the frequent response is, "6 to 10 points, balanced distribution." The actual answer should be, "6 to 10 points, frequently unbalanced." As unappetizing as it may seem, what is the appropriate response to 1♠ on each of the following:

♠ 5　♥ 8 2　♦ A J 8 7 5 2　♣ J 7 5 4

♠ —　♥ A K 3　♦ 10 8 6 5 3　♣ 9 7 6 5 2

♠ 2　♥ Q J 9 6 5 2　♦ A 6 3 2　♣ 7 5

You might recognize the third example. Even playing Standard American, it is usually best for opener to bid a second suit if he holds one, even with minimum values. This will allow responder to escape to his long suit if he has one, or sometimes simply take a preference to opener's major holding a doubleton.

Had you opted to rebid 2♣, your partner should introduce his long heart suit. Definitely not forcing, since he failed to bid 2♥ originally. You should pass. And *that* is how you get to 2♥ with Standard American.