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Ask Jerry

Dear Jerry,
My partner and I have been playing 2/1 for only a short while. The following deal and ensuing result has made us reconsider our decision. The layout:

Opener	Responder
♠ A 10 7 5 2	♠ K 3
♥ A K 3	♥ Q 8 6 4 2
♦ 4	♦ Q 7 5
♣ A 8 4 3	♣ K J 2

1♠	1NT (forcing)
2♣	2NT
3NT	All Pass

Unfortunately, the opponents took the first five diamonds, while a heart game was cold. Should responder have bid 2♥ over 1♠? Should opener have rebid 2♥ over 2♣? Easy bidding, playing Standard American. Where did we go wrong?
Considering Back to Basics

Hi CBB,
Playing 2/1 as a game force was never touted as a perfect solution to all bidding issues. On this layout, a simple Standard American auction that starts with a 2♥ response to 1♠ would easily reach the top spot. That being said, there is a sequence that would allow you to reach a similar conclusion. No, you do not have the values to bid 2♥ immediately on an aceless, balanced 11-point hand. No, you do not have the appropriate holding to rebid 2♥ over 2♣.

Just for a refresher, using 1NT as forcing, or semi-forcing (my preference), responder's values are typically in the 6–12 point category. After a response from opener to 1NT, responder needs to follow with a bid that reflects whether or not he started with 6–10 points, or 11 or 12 points. The 6–10 point rebid options on this sequence would include: 2♦, 2♥, 2♠, or perhaps pass. Choosing your own suit in this auction to show minimal values, strongly suggests a six-card or longer suit ... which you did not have!

Some bids to reflect the upper end of your forcing notrump include: 3♠ (three-card limit raise – which you don't have), or 3♦/3♥, played by many as a good six-card or longer suit, just under game-forcing values ... which you also don't have. Your 2NT rebid was clearly the best alternative.

With your partner holding 15 HCP, game values have been clearly identified so it becomes a version of "the one who knows, goes." The key is to proceed in a fashion that leaves all possible options available. The auction I would suggest:

1♠	1NT
2♣	2NT
3♥!	4♥

The 3♥ bid by opener accepts the invitation to game by "patterning out." Utilizing deep analytical skills, it certainly seems like opener has exactly five spades, exactly three hearts, a singleton diamond and four clubs. If he held four hearts, he would have bid 2♥ over 1NT. The purpose in bidding 3♥ now is to cater to the possibility of a five-card heart suit in responder's hand. A home run on this layout as responder did in fact have five hearts!

If responder instead held:

♠K 3 ♥Q 10 6 ♦K Q 10 5 ♣J 6 5 2

although warned of diamond shortness, 3NT would be the bid.

If instead, he held:

♠K Q ♥Q 10 8 6 ♦J 7 5 ♣K Q 5 2,

either 4♠ or 5♣ would be clearly superior to 3NT, knowing that opener holds a singleton diamond.

A few important points:

- Unless some type of conventional action, 2NT by either opener or responder is always a forward-going action and never running from anything.
- If opener wanted to reject the 2NT game try, he could rebid 3♣ or pass.
- If opener rebids his spades, it should show game acceptance with six spades and four clubs. Defining 6–4 hands can be assisted by remembering a mnemonic. Either AAB or ABA; if minimum values, you bid and rebid your original suit and, if given the opportunity, introduce the other suit. With medium values, you tend to bid your first suit, then your second suit, then rebid your first suit if you get the chance. If this all seems too complicated, ignore this point and go back and re-read the column down to the previous point!

Stick with 2/1. Ultimately, I think you will find it superior to the Standard American alternative. ■