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

Ask Jerry

Dear Jerry: *What is the meaning of South's 2♣ call in this auction:*

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	1NT	Pass	2♣?

N. Innerson
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Dear N.I.: The modern style is to play "systems on" after a 1NT overcall. This means the partnership uses the same methods as when responding to a 1NT opening bid. If you use Stayman and Jacoby transfer bids when partner opens 1NT, they also apply after a 1NT overcall. Similarly, if partner overcalled 2NT over an opening weak two-bid, the partnership should use the same methods as over a 2NT opening bid.

Unless the partnership has made some other agreement, therefore, I'd assume South's 2♣ bid is Stayman in this auction. Likewise, a bid of 2♦ by South would be a transfer to 2♥.

There are some differences between a 1NT opening and a 1NT overcall. It's dangerous to overcall 1NT, since the opening bid shows about 13 or more points, leaving responder well-placed to make a penalty double of a 1NT overcall with as few as 9 or 10 points. So, the range for a 1NT overcall is usually raised from 14^+ to 17 to 15^+ to 18.

As a consequence, we can afford to be more aggressive when our partner overcalls 1NT. Consider this hand, for example. We have

♠ K 3
♥ 9 7 4
♦ K J 10 4
♣ Q 10 7 5

9 high-card points. If partner opens 1NT, this is only worth an invitational raise to 2NT. If partner overcalls 1NT, however, I would raise to 3NT. Not only do I expect partner to have a good hand, but partner should have a big advantage in the play.

The opening bidder has about 13 points, partner has at least 15 and we have 9. That only leaves a couple of points for opener's partner. If we are missing the ♦Q, for example, it should be easy for partner to guess which opponent holds it.

Similarly, there is a difference between a 2NT opening bid—which shows about 20-21 points—and a 2NT overcall of an opponent's weak two-bid. The 2NT overcall shows about the same strength as a 1NT overcall, 15+ to 18 points. Although we use the same conventional responses in both cases, we must be aware of the strength difference when deciding how high to bid.   *—JH*