



Ask Jerry

Jerry Helms

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Jerry,

My partner opened 1♥ with six hearts and four clubs. As the bidding developed, he bid hearts twice, then clubs. With 6-4 distribution, however, I thought that it was better to bid hearts, clubs, hearts. What do you think?

Ted

Dear Ted,

As is always the case, bids should be chosen to provide the maximum information possible regarding both values and shape. The decision on how best to describe 6-4 hands is primarily about minimum versus extra values.

The following hands have 6-4 distribution, but are very different:

♠ — ♥AK8765 ♦953 ♣AKJ6

♠ — ♥KQ8765 ♦J53 ♣AQ64

With the first hand, I would like for partner to know that I held at least six hearts, plus four clubs and a few extra values. With the second, if possible, I would like to inform partner that I held the same shape, but with minimum values. The prevailing theory is that holding a 6-4 pattern with extras, bid your first suit, mention your sec-

ond suit, then rebid your original suit if possible. Holding 6-4 with minimum values, however, plan to bid and rebid your first suit, and if possible, later introduce your second suit.

The auction for the first hand could go 1♥-1♠; 2♣-2♠; 3♥. Although non-forcing, this suggests a medium-strength hand and the appropriate distribution.

The auction for the second hand might be 1♥-1♠; 2♥-2♠; 3♣. This suggests minimum strength with similar distribution. While there may be debate as whether you should bid a third time on the second hand, if you did bid, it would confirm weakish 6-4 distribution.

Dear Jerry,

My partner opened a weak 2♥, and my right-hand overcalled 2♠. I doubled and my partner pulled to 3♣ saying that my bid was a negative double.

Is he correct?

Doris M.

Hi Doris,

No.

Oh, wait — my assistant says this answer, while correct, is insufficient.

First, a history lesson, albeit a bit on the sketchy side. In the Fifties, the long dominant theories of Culbertson and Goren were challenged by “radical” concepts devised by bridge experts Alvin Roth and Tobias Stone. The Roth-Stone system, as published in 1958, “tore the normal bidding

structure apart ... traditions were ignored ... bids which were seldom used were given new meanings.” Their innovative ideas, now standard in tournament play, included weak jump overcalls, the unusual notrump, five-card major openings and Roth-Stone negative doubles.

The requirement to hold at least five cards in a major suit to open the bidding had the resulting effect that occasionally a minor-suit opening could contain as few as three cards. After a minor-suit opening and a major-suit overcall, responder, holding moderate values along with four cards in the other major, needed a way to compete. Negative doubles became the solution to uncover secondary fits in auctions where the opponents competed after a suit opening bid at the one level.

Preemptive opening bids suggest single-suited hands, however, so using responder’s double of an intervening overcall to search for a secondary fit that is rarely present is not advisable. Your double of 2♠ in this auction should not be construed as negative, but as “positive.” From your perspective, despite partner’s announcement of a long suit and a rather weak hand, you are inclined to believe that RHO has bid too much. Your double is neither negative, cooperative or optional, but is, in fact, 100% penalty. This would be true following any preemptive opening at any level.

Perhaps my original answer was sufficient after all. □