

Why reversing 'properly' is important

Dangers ...

Here's a pretty typical part-score auction. Opener offers a choice of suits and responder is able to make a weak preference. The final contract is 2 hearts.

♠ 10	1♥ – 1♠ 2♦ – 2♥	♠ Q J 5 3
♥ A K J 9 7		♥ 8 6 4
♦ K Q 9 2		♦ 8
♣ 8 6 4		♣ K 9 7 5 2

Give opener 5 diamonds and 4 hearts and the situation changes. If opener now rebids 2♥, responder's in trouble. She can't pass (!), bid 2NT or show her clubs. All she can do is show preference for diamonds – at the THREE level. Opener's reverse has forced the auction too high!

♠ 10	1♦ – 1♠ 2♥ – ?	♠ Q J 5 3
♥ A K 9 7		♥ 8
♦ K Q J 9 2		♦ 8 6 4
♣ 8 6 4		♣ K 9 7 5 2

Because of this risk – that if partner is weak you might end up in an unmakeable 3-level contract – opener needs to be STRONGER THAN A NORMAL OPENING HAND (16+ points) in order to reverse. On the above hand, she must ignore her hearts and simply rebid 2♦. Partner can now pass gratefully.

... and opportunities

As well as avoiding danger, the 16+ reverse can be a valuable tool in the search for game. Partner will know that you have a stronger hand (16-19 points) and can respond appropriately. In fact, reversing is forcing for one round, so partner *has* to find a 2nd bid.

If we strengthen opener's hand with the addition of the ♣A, the reverse is fine.

Forced to bid, East will probably opt for 2NT, which will become the final contract.

♠ 10	1♦ – 1♠ 2♥ – 2NT	♠ Q J 5 3
♥ A K 9 7		♥ 8
♦ K Q J 9 2		♦ 8 6 4
♣ A 6 4		♣ K 9 7 5 2

Knowing that partner's reverse signals at least 16 points, a stronger East can easily calculate that 3NT is the best contract: 16 + 9 = 25.

♠ 10	1♦ – 1♠ 2♥ – 3NT	♠ K Q J 5
♥ A K 9 7		♥ 8
♦ K Q J 9 2		♦ 8 6 4
♣ A 6 4		♣ K 9 7 5 2

It's not uncommon for a partnership to declare 'Oh, we don't do reverses', by which they mean that they reverse whether they're strong enough to or not. The disadvantages of this are twofold. First, they run the risk of getting into unmakeable contracts, as seen above. And second, they can only guess whether game is on or not. With a 9- or 10-count, does responder bid on or not? Since her partner can have anything from 12 points up, she has no way of knowing. Might as well toss a coin!

What about our heart fit?

Sitting as opener on the 2nd hand above, you might worry that if you simply rebid your diamonds you're in danger of missing a heart fit with partner. Well, if she has 4 hearts, she must have 5 spades (otherwise she would have responded 1♥ to start with), so now she can show her heart suit as her 2nd bid. If you have a proper agreement with partner about reverses, she'll be aware that you might have a heart suit but not enough strength to show it. Trust your partner!