

Other Ways to Get Into the Bidding

Rule of 20

Add the number of Cards in your two longest suits. Add this total to your HCP and if this yields a value of 20+, you may Open the Bidding. Examples:

- a) ♠AJ753 ♥KQ985 ♦3 ♣85 – 10 HCP + 5♠ + 5♥ = 20.....Open 1♠
- b) ♠A832 ♥KQ9854 ♦3 ♣85 – 9 HCP + 4♠ + 6♥ = 20.....Open 1♥ rather than 2♥
- c) ♠J3 ♥Q985 ♦AK96543 ♣ -- 10 HCP + 4♥ + 7♦ = 21.....Open 1♦ rather than 3♦

In the last two examples the 1-level Opening allows for Partner to have in (b) 4♠'s or in (c) 4♥'s. In these cases you might in (b) find an 8-Card ♠ fit or a 9-Card ♥ fit and in (c) an 8-Card ♥ fit. If the alternate fits are found the your long suit becomes a valuable side suit.

Rule of 22

Most people are more comfortable with this Rule in comparison to the Rule of 20. There are two ways to apply the Rule of 22. The easier method adds the number of Quick Tricks to the value achieved using the Rule of 20. Quick Tricks are A=1 and AK=2. In the examples above only (c) meets the Rule of 22. One can substitute Quick tricks with the notion of "Defensive tricks" to arrive at the number "22".

Defensive Tricks

We count defensive tricks as follows: To the Quick trick category of A=1 and AK=2 we add Kx = ½, KQ = 1, AQ = 1½, AQJ or AJT = 2 (note: any 3-Card suit with 3 honors including the T yields 2 defensive tricks).

Rule of 15

While the Rules of 20 and 22 apply to any seat, the Rule of 15 applies only to 4th seat, the Pass-Out seat. For the Rule of 15 add your HCP to the number of ♠'s in your hand. If that value is 15 or higher Open 1♠ or 1♥. The rationale behind this Rule is Opening 1♠ forces any opponent to have to bid at the 2-level to outbid you. Any suit other than ♠'s means an Opponent can outbid you at the 1-level and possibly find a ♠ fit; you have opened the possibility for an opponent who couldn't Open with a 10-11 HCP/5-Card suit hand to enter the bidding through an OverCall and possibly get the Contract. The Rule of 15 avoids having a hand capable of making a part-score from being Pass-Out. Let's consider a particularly troublesome hand: ♠9753 ♥Q54 J5 ♦Q54 ♣AKJ5... 11 HCP & 4♠'s you might be tempted to open the 1♠ because most of your HCP are in ♠'s. However, you have just opened the door for your opponents to find a fit in ♥'s and if partner has only 3 ♠'s you will never find that competitive advantage. If Partner has 3+♠'s the Drury conventions is available for Partner to query the strength of your Opening bid. Drury is not available over a Minor suit Opening, thus I suggest that in 4th seat a Minor suit Open implies a full 12/13+ HCP. Regardless of what flavor of Drury you use you are going to find yourself in either a 2♠ or 1NT contract. In 2♠ you have 21+ HCP and at least a 7-card fit. In 1NT you will likely have a total of 16HCP and opponent will be warned off ♠'s because of your Opening bid. Let's look at one further case: ♠9753 ♥AKJ54 ♦Q54 ♣J... again 11HCP and meeting the Rule of 15 you Open 1♥, because the likelihood of the opponents finding a ♠ fit is reduced. Compare the last hand to this: ♠9 ♥AKJ54 ♦Q54 ♣J943, Same 11 HCP but now the chance that the opponents finding a ♠ fit is much higher. It's the Rule of 15 protecting you. Finally let's look at this one: ♠9 ♥Q74 ♦AKJ4 ♣K943, a full Opener but a 2-1 chance that the opponents can find a Major suit fit that you cannot defend. I would hesitate in Opening this one in the 4th seat. If Partner had his share of HCP, i.e. 9/10 and a lots of ♠'s & ♥'s he could have used the Rules of 20 or 22 to Open. So if your Partnership uses these Rules they should be good reasons for Passing on this last hand.

3rd Seat Light Opening

With a strong suit many experts recommend Opening that suit with only 10-11 HCP but only in the 3rd seat. The rationale: With two players already having shown less than Opening points and you holding this type of hand there are two likely situations. First, everyone at the table has a similar hand (perhaps without the strong suit). If that is the case then the HCPs are almost evenly distributed and your side has an equal (or better with your strong suit) advantage in finding a part-score Contract. The second possibility is that the two passed hands are indeed that weak in which case your LHO, sitting in 4th seat, has a very strong hand. If this is the case your LHO is going to OverCall, taking you off the hook. Don't let cold feet keep you from opening light in 3rd or 4th seat.

There is a singular danger in this strategy. Partner Passed because he didn't have quite enough HCP to Open, 10-11 HCP, and may like your suit and give you a limit raise. Not what you want after Opening light! To avoid this there is a Conventional bid for Partner to make, Drury. But if you have not learned this Convention don't let it stop you from 3rd Seat Light Opening.