

Third and fourth hand openings. ♠♥♦♣ August 2013

Opening the bidding considerations, after your partner has passed, change dramatically. Strangely, even the most erudite of bidding texts seem to ignore this fact completely. Perforce, you must play a different system. What follows is based on the realities of the scoring table. In general, it is rarely wrong to play in your chosen contract at the one or two-level. The best opponents in the world will cannot double you for penalty, and if you are defeated by brute strength, your opponents have lost the value of their own best contract, sometimes a game. If you can make first use of the low-level bids, do.

The difference lies in the fact that partner's hand strength is limited by his initial pass. You have a much better idea of whose hand it is. This knowledge permits all sorts of tactical activities which might simply get in your own way if partner is strong.

A lot will depend upon your own opening bid range. Even when your system decrees the stodgy minimum-requirement of 12 points, knowing that you face a maximum of 11 points will limit your game aspirations on quite strong hands. Drop your first and second hand opening bid requirements to 10 points and things really change. More often you will know the hand belongs to your opponents and your openings can be chosen purely to make matters hard for them. You must be able to tell your partner, however, when you do have real game prospects despite his initial pass. Often you can do this simply by making a rebid, any rebid.

An opening bid promises only four cards in the bid suit and no rebid is promised. There is absolutely no upside to playing five-card majors in third or fourth seat, so many tactical openings are denied to you. It is entirely counter-productive to open a bad suit with a weak hand. Partner must take this obvious fact into account and slavishly lead the suit you bid. Even 1C will be real.

More and more players are dropping their minimum requirement to open the bidding. Some grimly hang on to the 1950's style, 13 points or a good 12 points. Some use the rule of twenty, when your high-card points added to the length of your two longest suits comes to twenty, you have an opening bid. With 4333 shape, you need 13 high card points. Strange, because it was the administrators who invented this yard stick to determine what they deemed to be a "legal" opening one-bid.

There will be something in this article for you, regardless of your system requirements, but to keep it readable, I have directed it at people who have seen the light and decided to open all ten counts. The opening one-bid range

assumed is 10-19 points. The upper limit is selected, simply because bidding is impossible exercise if you must try to cater for a 20, 21 or 22 point one-bid. The occasional over-reach following a 2C opening on a 20 point 5431 hand will be more than balanced out by better bidding on the everyday hands. You will not have to stretch to respond, an action which can in itself lead to an over-reach, and you will bid and make some games that are played in a one-bid at other tables. Your passed partner, whose hand is limited to 9 points, will not get inconveniently busy over one of your more creative openings. You can mix up your pre-empts for example.

Choice of bid.

One of a suit.

Partner, without a fit, will not take you beyond the level of two of your suit. Accordingly there is no minimum requirement for an opening bid. It is, however, a completely futile exercise to open with nothing worth showing, the only one inconvenienced will be you. Holding ♠KQJ2, ♥543, ♦642, ♣753 it is reasonable to bid 1S. You know the hand does not belong to you, you want the lead and you are pleased to be able to consume bidding space in reasonable safety. This is about as weak as a one-bid should be and is, effectively, cost free. You will happily pass any two over one, which must be based on a five-card or longer suit, albeit in the range 6-9 points, and deny even a three-card fit. A raise to 3S must show four-card or better support and shape. There is no place for Drury. 2C in its natural sense is too valuable. All these provisos make you a very elusive target.

You are not required to rebid so to rebid at all suggests that game is a live possibility. To rebid your suit or 1NT shows a good hand, 14++ points is the minimum requirement. To raise partner must draw a balance between being constructive and being obstructive, but it is rarely wrong to show four-card support for a one over one response. When partner's one over one strikes your doubleton and you have no values to spare, pass. Provided partner makes it his policy to show long before short, and not to conceal a fit*, this will be a playable spot. Playing four-two fits is an art in itself and can be fun to acquire. Crashing the opponents' trumps is usually the prime consideration. A rebid in a new suit will promise extreme shape or extra strength, or both.

*See examples.

One NT

A minimum NT rebid will show a hand in the 15-17 point range so you have a little license in deciding whether to open 1NT or with a suit bid. Bidding

enthusiasts may wish to change the meaning of a third or fourth hand 1NT altogether.* Balanced hands up to 14 points are simply opened and passed.

*Use 1NT as the system strong bid, all 20+ point hands, giving more room to explore, and if necessary, get out. That one extra bid makes a big difference. Open 2C to show clubs.

Pre-empts.

A two- or three-level pre-empt can be quite strong but suggests that game chances are remote in the light of partner's pass. Partner will move only with support. With a big fit it is rarely material whether you make or not. Pre-emptive game openings can be quite strong but with slam chances remote. The narrower the range of "pass" the better will be your assessment. At the other end of the scale, a weak-two with a weak hand but with a good five- or six-card suit simultaneously directs a lead, solves a rebid problem and takes bidding space from your better endowed opponents. Pre-empts with defensive values will often push opponents overboard.

Splinters.

You will always want to make a jump-raise of a major with a big fit and a shortage. This simple scheme allows you to show it and distinguish between a singleton and a void. It is, after all, the key feature of your hand. The partnership can subside in three of the major.

After 1S, a jump in a new suit shows, only, a big fit and a singleton in the bid suit. 2NT shows a void somewhere. Over 2NT, 3C asks where. A return to the agreed suit by responder shows a club void.

After 1H, the bids of 3C and 3D show singletons, 2NT shows a spade singleton while 2S shows any void. Over 2S, 2NT asks for the void, with a return to 3H showing a spade void.

Examples.

Note the difference the initial pass makes to these auctions.

♠Q65	♠A4
♥K832	♥QJ64
♦QJ76	♦AK854
♣84	♣A5
W	E
Pass	1D

2D (1)	2H
3H (2)	4H

1. With the diamond fit it would be wrong to bid 1H. With say 3253 shape and minimum, partner is obliged to pass it. Hands like this demonstrate the futility of inverted minor.
2. Your raise must show four-card support, but do not bid 4H. You will not be passed out. Partner's 2H could be a NT probe or a cue-bid with diamonds agreed.

♠K97	♠A65
♥KQ654	♥93
♦732	♦AKQ654
♣64	♣K5

Pass	1D
1H	2D (1)
2S (2)	3NT

1. Opposite 6-9 points there is no need to bid precipitately. 2D shows a very good hand here, you are single suited yet you did not pre-empt. Lacking the ♠A, for example, you open 2D or 3D.
2. Partner has denied four spades so this is quite safe. It simultaneously shows a good hand, five hearts, spade values and diamond tolerance.

♠---	♠653
♥7643	♥AK9852
♦97654	♦AKQ3
♣10865	♣--

Pass	1H
2S (1)	2NT (2)
3H (3)	7H

1. Showing the big fit and an undisclosed void. No other bid does this potentially great hand justice. As a non-passed hand, West must settle for a raise to 4H*. Opposite a third hand opener, possibly based on a four-card suit, it would be wrong to commit the partnership beyond 3H.
2. Where?
3. In spades. Opposite a diamond or a club (?) void, the partnership will settle for 4H.

*While the raise to 4H may not be a "must" to some, it is an application of basic bidding theory. A direct raise to game is a pre-emptive action, it denies the high-card strength to make a lower-level bid in the same denomination,

2H or 3H. For the same reason, an opening bid of 2H, 3H or 4H denies the possession of sufficient high-card strength to open 1H. With a void and the ninth trump, the hand is far too good to pass and any bid but 4H would be misleading. Bidding theory has nothing to do with “system,” it is simply the logic of bidding.

♠65

♥A632

♦4

♣KQJ1063

While this hand is a clear 1C opening in first or second seat in any standard system, in third it is a clear 3C. The opponents will not have room to explore all the options. The partner holding the ♣A may well bid 3NT and be left there. What you do in fourth seat is the real problem. Playing 10 point openers you should certainly pass. If you play stronger openings it is a guess between pass, 1C and 3C. If your partner might hold 12 points 4333, pass is a big gamble.

♠QJ54

♥5

♦AK732

♣542

Whatever the range of partner's pass this hand will give you a problem in third seat. Essentially your choices lie between pass, 1D and 2D. If you pass you could find yourself shut out of the bidding with a contract your way and partner making a disastrous opening lead. If you bid 1D, you can happily pass anything but 1H. A 2C response would be most welcome, and since a 1NT response will deny five clubs, it must contain three diamonds. Over 1H it would be dangerous to bid 1S, implying a very sound opening bid. To pass 1H is probably the best shot and consider rescue manoeuvres if the need and opportunity arises. Playing 1H undoubled is unlikely to be a seriously bad result. When you have a mis-fit, it is always best to give the opponents a chance to do the rescuing. Opening 2D solves the rebid problem and directs a lead but may lose a good contract in spades or clubs. Opposite 0-9 points, my preference is 1D, passing everything, but raising 1S or 2C in competition.

This is a very rewarding area for partnership discussion. This article will provide matters to consider.