

# 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Seat Openings and Light Openings in the 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Seats

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Seat Openings

Third (3<sup>rd</sup>) seat opening criteria, as it is in the other seats, is somewhat unique. By all means, a 3<sup>rd</sup> seat Player should certainly open a hand with 13 or more HCP's, or a good 12, a hand that would normally qualify to open in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> seat, using the "Rule of 20." It is, however, generally considered appropriate and acceptable to lower the high-card point strength requirements for a 3<sup>rd</sup> seat, one-of-a-suit, opening bid, especially if doing so suggests a good lead to Partner, should the team, by chance, wind up on defense. One does not routinely open light in the 3<sup>rd</sup> seat just for the sake of opening. However, holding a hand that represents one that would have normally made a "sound" 8-12 HCP overcall is surely a reasonable candidate for a 3<sup>rd</sup> seat opening. (See Examples 1-4)

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<b>86</b>	<b>975</b>	<b>K853</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>AKJT</b>	<b>J642</b>	<b>Q764</b>	<b>9832</b>
<b>8752</b>	<b>J85</b>	<b>QJ5</b>	<b>KQJ82</b>
<b>Q94</b>	<b>AKQ</b>	<b>K9</b>	<b>K8</b>

- (1) Open **1H** despite your usual Partnership understanding that you are playing "Standard American," 5-Card Major suit openings. The Opponents are likely to become the declaring side, and prompting Partner to lead Hearts is likely to be the optimum defensive lead. Worst case scenario, Partner will raise you with three, Heart pieces – your trump suit is surely strong enough to handle a 7-card, "Moysian" fit." As a matter of fact, should you have had a 5<sup>th</sup> Heart, along with the same values, a pre-emptive opening of **2H** would have been the optimum choice, notwithstanding Partner's expectation that you had held 6-Hearts.
- (2) Open **1C**. Should your team wind up on defense, no other lead from Partner is likely to be fruitful, and you should always give Partner all the lead-help possible, if one is available.
- (3) Here, you should "**Pass**." With Partner having previously "**Passed**," the hand clearly does not appear to belong to your side, and, in addition, you are absent any suit that longs for a particular lead from Partner. The danger in opening a weak hand like this, besides its shortcomings just enumerated, is that you might (a) assist Declarer in identifying the missing honors, and/or (b) keep the Opponents from reaching a contract that is destined to fail. One should never be hesitant to "**Pass**," when appropriate.
- (4) Open **1D**! In this instance, you certainly would favor a Diamond lead as your side is highly unlikely to become the declaring team and, here, you hold a unique opportunity of sharing this information with your Partner.

## 4<sup>th</sup> Seat Openings

The same as in the case of the 3<sup>rd</sup> seat position, just discussed, a Player in the 4<sup>th</sup> seat position relative to the Dealer, (one in the so-called “*Pass-out*” seat, owing to there having already been three successive “*Passes*” by the Dealer and the next two Players,) should certainly open the bidding with a full-opening, high-card, point count as his/her side, almost assuredly, holds the balance of the power, under such conditions.

Statistically, however, opening light in the 4<sup>th</sup> seat requires some caution since both sides are likely to hold similar HCP holdings, and care is, thus, required so as to not allow the bidding to get too high.

The 4<sup>th</sup> seat Player holds the option of opening the bidding or, conversely, to allow the hand to become “*Passed-out*,” and thus, whether or not any score, plus or minus, by either side, is scored.

Because, in such circumstances, the HCP strength is evenly-divided between the two teams, a contract for either side of **1-NT** becomes a difficult one to fulfill. Both sides are likely to have a makeable, 2-level contract, assuming Trump fits are present, but the team that competes to the 3-level, however, is likely to fail in the attempt. In the final analysis, the team that owns the Spade suit is in a superior position, as the opposing team, should they choose to compete, must bid to the 3-level.

Bottom line – some additional guidance, if one is available, is needed for the 4<sup>th</sup> seat Player to assist him/her in the decision as to whether or not to open the bidding. The Spade holding of each team is a vital factor in this regard, and “**The Rule of 15**” serves as the likely deciding factor. The “**Rule of 15**” is applicable only for use in the 4<sup>th</sup> seat. It should never be used in the 1st, 2nd, or 3rd seat for decision-making as to whether or not to open the bidding.

**“The Rule of 15” states that a hand qualifies for an opening bid of one of a suit, in the 4<sup>th</sup> (“Pass-Out” seat) position, if the summation of HCP’s plus the total number of cards in the Spade suit equals, or exceeds, the number “15.”** With fewer than 13 HCP’s, add the number of Spades within the hand to your HCP total. If the total is “15” or more, open in the 4<sup>th</sup> seat, if the total is below “15,” “*Pass.*”

Assuming three successive “*Pass, es*,” which of the below-listed hands should a 4<sup>th</sup> seat Player open?  
(See Examples 5-8)

(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
---	<b>KJ953</b>	<b>Q963</b>	<b>J53</b>
<b>AKJ85</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>A7</b>	<b>A832</b>
<b>AQ73</b>	<b>AQ95</b>	<b>KQ753</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>9842</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>AQ96</b>

(5) Open **1H!** Holding 14 HCP’s, notwithstanding the Spade void. This hand is too strong to “*Pass.*”

(6) Open **1S!** Yes, you only hold, 10 HCP’s, here, but the “**Rule of 15**” is satisfied owing to the existence of the hand having 5-Spades.

(7) Open **1D!** The HCP’s here (11), plus the number of Spades (4) = 15.

(8) “*Pass!*” Your HCP’s (11), plus the number of Spades (3) = 13.

## Light Openings in the 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Seats

The advantages of opening aggressively light in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> seats, within the limitations in each of the two seats, just shown, culminate in an effective, and likely successful, format for opening light in these two seats in an assertive and likely useful manner. Aggressive approaches to opening light are further helpful in complicating the potential entrance into the auction by the Opponents in two distinct areas: (1) Any opening bid by your team acts, to some extent, as partially pre-emptive, making overcalling by an Opponent somewhat more difficult; and (2) most importantly, becoming the opening bidding team causes the Opponents, should they choose to enter the auction, to act as **Overcaller** and **Responder to the Overcaller**, a far more difficult bidding discourse for most Partnerships than if they had been allowed to act as **Opener** and **Responder to the Opening Bidder**, should you not have opened.

With the realization of the advantages of an aggressive opening approach in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> seats, one can begin to explore whether some prudent guideline might be available for carrying over this light, opening style for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> seat Players, as well. The stretching of the opening guidelines for the “**Rule of 20**,” using some prudence, accomplishes this goal.

Consider making light opening bids in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> seats, *especially* when not vulnerable against vulnerable. The ability to successfully achieve this can be facilitated by requiring satisfaction of a **21½** opening point criteria (when Vulnerable) and a **20½ - 21** opening point criteria (when Not-Vulnerable):  
*(High-Card Points {HCP's} + Two Long Suits + Quick Tricks)*

Each of the following hands, under this modified, aggressive guideline would qualify for a **1S** opening bid in either the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> seats. Highly distributional holdings have the trick-taking capacity beyond that which might have been anticipated at first examination.

(9)	(10)	(11)
<b>KJ8743</b>	<b>K97642</b>	<b>AT642</b>
<b>AJ9653</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>87</b>
-----	<b>AJ9753</b>	<b>AQ53</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>74</b>

(9) Open **1S!** **9** HCP's + **11** cards in the two longest suits + **1½** quick tricks = **21½**

(10) Open **1S!** **8** HCP's + **12** cards in the two longest suits + **1½** quick tricks = **21½**

(11) Open **1S** if not vulnerable! **10** HCP's + **9** cards in the two longest suits + **2** quick tricks = **21**