

3rd & 4th Seat Openings and Light Openings in the 1st & 2nd Seats

3rd Seat Openings

Third (3rd) seat opening criteria, as it is in the other seats, is somewhat unique. By all means, a 3rd 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 1st or 2nd seat, using "**The Rule of 20.**" It is, however, generally considered appropriate and acceptable to lower the high-card point strength requirements for a 3rd 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 3rd 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 3rd seat opening. (See Examples 1-4)

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

(1) Open **1H** despite your usual Partnership understanding that you are playing "**Standard American,**" 5-Card Major 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 5th 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.

4th Seat Openings

The same as in the case of the 3rd seat position, just discussed, a Player in the 4th 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 4th 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 4th 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 4th 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 4th 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 4th (“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 4th seat, if the total is below “15,” “*Pass.*”

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

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

(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 1st & 2nd Seats

The advantages of opening aggressively light in the 3rd and 4th 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 3rd and 4th seats, one can begin to explore whether some prudent guideline might be available for carrying over this light, opening style for the 1st and 2nd 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 1st or 2nd 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 1st of 2nd seats. Highly distributional holdings have the trick-taking capacity beyond that which might have been anticipated at first examination.

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

(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**