

Lesson 11 - When is a Hand Good Enough to Open?

1st (Dealer) or 2nd Position

THE RULE OF 20: This states that a hand qualifies for an opening bid of one of a suit if the summation of HCP's plus the total number of cards in the two longest suits equals, or exceeds, the number 20. The "Rule of 20" is *only* applicable for use in the first seat, the Dealer, or in the second seat, the player to the immediate left of the Dealer, should the Dealer have passed. It should *never* be used in the third or fourth seat, under any circumstance.

Examples: KXXXX JXX AKXX X (11+9=20) – (Open 1S)
XX AJXXX AKX XXX (12+8=20) – (Open 1H)
KXXX AXX QXXX QX (11+8=19) – (Do not open)

Note: All Hands having 13 HCP's or more will automatically satisfy the "Rule of 20" since they can have no fewer than 7 additional points resulting from seven (7) cards in two of the suits held if the hand (worse case scenario) were evenly divided 4-3-3-3. Additionally, almost all hands holding 12 HCP's (exclusive of a 4-3-3-3 distribution) will also qualify under the "Rule of 20" since, exclusive of this holding, there will be at least two 4-card or longer suits present.

All 11 HCP hands (see the examples below) which have a 6-card suit will satisfy both the ability to open under the "Rule of 20" calculation, but, they will also qualify as to the requirements necessary to open a weak 2-bid. In this instance it is recommended that if the 6-card suit be Spades (Example a), one would fare best, since Spades is the controlling suit, to open 1 Spade.

4th Position - Opening Criteria

THE RULE OF 15: When in the 4th position relative to the Dealer, the so-called "Pass-out" seat; i.e., there has already been three successive passes by the Dealer and the next two players, this player is in a unique scenario. He/She holds within his/her power as to whether or not the hand gets passed out, and, thus, whether or not any score, plus or minus, by either side, be scored. "The Rule of 15" states that a hand qualifies for an opening bid of one of a suit, in the fourth ("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". Since Spades is the controlling suit, the more actual Spades one possesses, the less likely the opponents can enter the same auction competitively at the same level Opener's team would be willing to bid. The "Rule of 15" is applicable *only* for use in the last seat. It should *never* be used in the first, second, or third seat for decision-making as to whether or not to open.

Examples: XX QXXX AQXX AXX (14 Points) (**Do not** open!)
XXX QXX AQXX AXX (15 Points) (**Do** open!) (1D)

3rd Position - Opening Criteria

The third (3rd) seat opening criteria, like the other three seats, is unique. It is generally considered appropriate and acceptable to lower the point count requirements for a 3rd seat opening bid of one of a suit. Since this be occasionally done, it is important for the Partner of the 3rd seat Opener (the previously passing 1st seat player), to be able to ascertain whether or not the 3rd seat opener has a full opening count, else a lighter than full count, *especially* if the 1st seat player, who previously had passed, has a near opening count himself/herself. It is, recommended, therefore, that if one does indeed choose to open light in the 3rd seat, one must only open with a hand that can afford to pass any bid made by Responder, and that if the 3rd seat Opener makes *any* re-bid, he/she guarantees a full opening count. Absent this ability to Pass any bid made by Responder, 3rd seat player should pass with a less than a full opening HCP count (a hand with 12 HCP's or fewer).

Examples: X JXXX AQXXX AXX (Do not open – Cannot afford to Pass a 1S Response)
XXX JXX AQXX AXX (Open 1C - Can Pass any Response)