



## Intermediate- Lesson 29

# Opening 4<sup>th</sup> in hand after 3 passes

This comes up from time to time- everyone else has passed, and you are 4<sup>th</sup> to bid. What to do?

Let's say, for example, you are playing duplicate pairs, as N/S.

A passed-out hand will score 0 for each side on the traveller, so you score better than every other NS where EW make any positive score, or where NS go down in any contract. Therefore, if you bid, and your side ends up declarer and fails to make your contract, or your bid allows the opposition to enter the bidding with an overcall, and they make their contract, you would have done better to pass. If, on the other hand, you pass, and other N/S pairs bid and make a contract, you would have done better not to pass, but to make a bid.

This lesson is aimed at helping you decide what to do in such a situation.

**If you have a genuine opening bid, make that bid anyway.** Partner might be sitting with a fair hand, but just not quite enough to open, and you can make a plus score.

But if you are a little bit below opening strength, with a hand you would not have opened as dealer, should you open, or pass out the hand? You might have heard the maxim "borrow a king" in such a situation- the idea is you count your hand as if it had an extra king (so a 9 HCP hand now "counts" as 12 HCP, and you open.

Beware!!

If you have a balanced hand, and open 1NT on this basis, the balance of probabilities is the opposition will have more points than your side: if you have 9, there are 31 HCP distributed amongst the other three hands, all of which have passed. The best you can hope for is partner has 11 (if she had 12, she'd have opened) and the points will be 20-20. If partner has 10 or fewer, the opposition have more HCP than your side, and 1NT is probably going to fail.

What about opening a suit?

The highest-ranking suit (the "boss" suit) is spades, so if your opening bid is 1♠, you'll probably be OK. But if it's any other suit, the risk is the opponents will be able to overcall 1♠ - and might end up in a spade contract, making. Your bid allowed opponents to find a making contract. There is a great rule of thumb to help you decide: the "rule of 15".

### **The Rule of 15**

If you are 4<sup>th</sup> in hand, after 3 passes, and are borderline whether to open or pass, add the number of high card points in your hand to the number of spades: if it comes to 15 or more, open. If it comes to less than 15, pass.

What would you bid, 4<sup>th</sup> in hand after 3 passes, holding the following hands:

1     ♠ 5 4 2     ♥ A Q J     ♦ A 10 9 8 5     ♣ 7 6     11 HCP

“Borrowing a king” would make this count as 14HCP, and you might think of opening. But HCP + number of spades = 14. Not quite good enough. **Pass.**

2     ♠ A K 10 9 6 2     ♥ 4     ♦ K 10 7 4     ♣ 3 2     10 HCP

You have 6 spades and a “rule of 20” 10HCP hand. HCP+ number of spades = 16. Open 1♠

3     ♠ 7 3     ♥ K Q J 9 8     ♦ 8 7     ♣ A J 4 3     11 HCP

You have a lovely 5-card heart suit, and a “Rule of 20” hand justifying a light opening bid. Borrowing a King would take you up to 14HCP, so you might well be tempted to open 1♥. Many players would do, and sometimes it will pay off. However, there’s a chance partner might respond in diamonds, in which case you’d have to rebid your 5-card heart suit. But what’s more concerning is a 1♥ bid might let opponents in with a 1♠ overcall, and they find a making part score in spades. You count that your HCP + number of spades = 13. You **Pass** (reluctantly). See example 5 below.

4     ♠ 9 3     ♥ Q 4     ♦ Q J 10 9 5 4     ♣ A 7 4     9 HCP

Playing weak twos, that 6-card diamond suit might tempt you to open 2♦. But remember, a big part of the point of playing weak two’s is pre-emptive, ie making it hard for the opposition to find their contract. You are 4<sup>th</sup> in hand after 3 passes, so if you pass, they’ve not found one. Pass.

5     ♠ J 7 4 3     ♥ K Q J 9 8     ♦ 8 7     ♣ A 3     11 HCP

This is the same hand as hand 3, except the J♣ and 4♣ are now J♠ and 4♠. You still have a “Rule of 20” opener and a good 5-card major, but now you also have four spades, making it much less likely that opponents have a spade fit. You satisfy the rule of 15: HCP + number of spades = 15. Open 1♥.

### Example

Both sides vulnerable, dealer N.

	♠ A J 9 4 2	
	♥ 10 6 3	
	♦ Q 10 2	
	♣ K 10	
♠ 7 3		♠ Q 8 5
♥ K Q J 9 8		♥ 7 5 4
♦ 8 7		♦ A K 9 5 3
♣ A J 4 3		♣ 8 7
	♠ K 10 6	
	♥ A 3	
	♦ J 6 4	
	♣ Q 9 6 5 2	

North, East, and South all passed, leaving West with a decision whether to pass, or bid her hearts.

With 11 HCP, an excellent heart suit, and her hand satisfying the “Rule of 20” test for a light opener, she opened 1♥.

North overcalled 1♠. East, with 9 HCP and a good 5 card diamond suit, bid 2♦ (rule of 14 for a 2-level response). South, with 10 HCP and 3-card spade support, bid the Unassuming Cue Bid (see Lesson 21) of opponent’s opening suit at the lowest level, ie 2♥, showing 10+ HCP and 3+ support for partner’s spades. West was unable to support partner’s diamonds, and not strong enough to rebid her hearts at the 3 level, so had no option but to pass. North now had to decide the level of the spade contract to bid, and judging that game was unlikely, bid 2♠. That was the final contract.

East led out A♦ and K♦, and partner petered with 8♦ then the 7♦, to show a doubleton. East continued with a 3<sup>rd</sup> diamond for West to ruff. West continued with the K♥ to dummy’s A♥. Declarer then led a club from dummy to see where the A♣ was, having no concern that it might lie with East, as another diamond would concede a ruff and discard of her losing heart. When the ♣A showed up with West, declarer placed the Q♠ with East, to have enough points for her 2♦ bid. He took the trump finesse through East, so EW were limited to two diamonds, a diamond ruff, a heart, and a club. 8 tricks and +110 to NS.

We see that by opening the bidding, West was now chalking up -110. If she had passed, the score would have been 0 (hand passed out). The points had been 20-20, but North-south had the boss suit, spades.

### What should have happened:

West should have looked beyond her lovely heart suit and “Rule of 20” light opener, and, with a borderline hand, used the Rule of 15. She would judge her hand not good enough to open, and pass.

