



Play & Learn

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Rule of 20 or 22?

Last month we introduced the Rule of 20, which suggests bidding more aggressively with borderline distributional hands as dealer or directly after dealer passes. This bidding guideline lets us open more frequently, which can be an advantage.

The Rule of 20 became popular in the '90s after Marty Bergen popularized it in his book "Points Schmoints." Some players lived by it even when it meant opening 1♣ with this hand:

♠AQJ ♥Q742 ♦Q ♣K76542.

Adding high-card points plus length (one point for each card beyond four cards in long suits), gives us 12 total points, a total that requires judgment on whether or not to open. The Rule of 20 has us add 10 HCP to the 10 total cards in our two longest suits (clubs and hearts). With a sum of 20 or more, opening is suggested. How about you? Would you open?

One-level opening bids in first- or second-seat tend to show both offense – the ability to win tricks as declarer – and defense – the ability to win tricks if the opponents win the bid.

If you find a good fit and your side wins the bidding, opening might work out well, but your high cards are too scattered to guarantee many tricks on offense. Happiness is having our high cards together in our long suits. Only 5 of this hand's 10 HCP are in suits having length, and those 10 HCP are not the best.

The 4-3-2-1 point-count system undervalues aces and overvalues

queens and jacks. Being aware of these facts makes you upgrade or downgrade a hand as you gain judgment. What if your opponents win the auction? On defense, the ♣K could be a trick, but the club length might be offset by shortness in an opponent's hand. Singleton and doubleton honors could fall. On a bad day, this hand could provide zero tricks on defense. Regardless of the fact that the Rule of 20 is met, I would pass.

Several Bulletin writers have suggested using the Rule of 22, an easy and reasonable modification that takes defensive tricks into consideration. The extra 2 comes from the required number of quick tricks – tricks that can be won if you end up defending. A definite first- or second-round winner (an ace or a king-queen combined) is one quick trick. A possible first- or second-round winner counts as half a quick trick. Aces and kings usually count as quick tricks. Queens count only when paired with a higher card in the same suit.

Ace = 1 quick trick

Ace-king in same suit = 2 quick tricks
(*Don't add more with the queen*)

Ace-queen in same suit = 1.5 quick tricks

King-queen in same suit = 1 quick trick

Protected king = .5 quick trick
(*More than a singleton but without the ace or queen*)

We might think of the Rule of 22 as The Rule of 20+2 with the "+2" an

additional requirement to the Rule of 20. The hand we've been discussing has only a half quick trick (the ♣K) for 20.5, not the suggested 22, and passing is suggested.

Let's apply the Rule of 22 to three hands you might hold as dealer. None comes to 13 points including HCP plus length, so your decision is whether or not to open a little light.

1. ♠AQ974 ♥83 ♦KJ872 ♣5
2. ♠KQ ♥J8753 ♦KJ952 ♣5
3. ♠KQ74 ♥K875 ♦KJ54 ♣5

Hand No. 1 values to 12 total points, counting one length point in each five-card suit. If you're in doubt as to whether to open, apply the Rule of 20, which is met with 10 HCP + 10 cards in the two longest suits. The hand also has 2 quick tricks to meet the Rule of 20+2. Open 1♠.

With 10 HCP and two long suits, you might value hand No. 2 at 12 points; but because the hearts are a bit weak, you might judge this hand to be worse than hand No. 1. While we do meet the Rule of 20, we're lacking in the quick-tricks department, with only 1.5 (one in spades and a half in diamonds). Pass, because the hand does not meet the Rule of 20+2.

With 12 HCP, hand No. 3 meets the Rule of 20 (adding 8 cards in the two longest suits). There are also two quick tricks (one for the ♠KQ and .5 each for the ♥K and ♦K). Open 1♦.

With a full 13-point opening hand, ➤



Ask Jerry

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Hello, Jerry,

For some reason, I agreed to play with an experienced player who is known to be rude ... my mistake. As dealer he held:

♠ A K 7 ♥ K 10 9 4 ♦ J 10 7 ♣ A Q J			
West	Partner	East	Me
	1♦	Dbl	Pass
Pass	Pass		

My hand:

♠ Q 9 6 4 ♥ Q 8 7 5 ♦ 6 5 ♣ 9 6 3

I feel, first of all, he should have opened 1♣ and then bid 1NT instead of sitting for the double. He said that my passing the takeout double indicated support for his diamonds. I think he's wrong. After the session, he informed me that if I ever wished to play again, I would need to pay for his entry because he didn't want to waste his money. What do you think?

JB

► Play and Learn *continued*

the Rule of 22 is not needed. Use it only when deciding whether or not to open with fewer than 13 points. Once you apply the Rule of 22 to open, gauge your future bids on the actual strength of your hand along with judgment based on what you learn as the auction progresses. But don't chicken out mid-auction and pass partner's forcing bid. Opening the bidding obligates you to see that the bidding remains open after partner makes a forcing bid. ■

Hi, JB,

Wow! This so-called experienced player was wrong on so many counts that it is staggering. I'll start with his initial mistake and work my way down.

1. Why would anyone ever open 1♦ on J-10-x instead of 1♣ on A-Q-J? A 1♦ opening shows four or more diamonds 97.2% of the time; the only time we open 1♦ with a three-card suit is when specifically holding 4=4=3=2 distribution. In addition to distorting his shape, he was apparently choosing a "lead deflector" just in case he ended up playing the hand.
2. How could your pass of a takeout double possibly show diamond support? His contention casts serious doubts on his expertise. From your perspective, the opponents may well have been preparing to play in one of your four-card majors. Any bid by you over the takeout double would be natural and forcing, showing more than the 4 high-card points you actually hold. Your pass is the only action that is conceivable.
3. Although you did not specify the decibel level of his unwarranted criticism, I suspect he was guilty of violating one of my more important Jerry-isms:

It's OK to be wrong, but it is NOT OK to be wrong loudly and rudely!

My general feeling is that if the opponents think they can beat you in a one-level contract, they usually can. For this reason, I would seize any reasonable option to escape 1♦ doubled. Before your partner passed, he had one last chance to do something right on this deal. He should have made an SOS redouble. This redouble announces to responder that there might be a better place to play and to please pick his longest suit.

On this deal, you would have an easy 1♥ bid. 1♥, if left there, is a clearly superior contract to 1♦ doubled. If opener thinks the opponents have erred and he can make his contract, he should simply smile inwardly and pass.

You're right that a 1NT rebid would be correct with your partner's hand had his left-hand opponents made an overcall in a suit. But when 1♦ doubled comes back around to him, redouble is the better call.

This interpretation of the redouble in this type of auction has become standard to experienced duplicate players. Perhaps he felt you would not understand it. From my point of view, this is just one more undeserved insult hurled in your direction.

Pay his entry fee? Surely he jests! ■