



Ask Jerry

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Hi Jerry,

It seems to me that Jonathan's hand in your February 2016 article (pg. 46) doesn't quite meet your Suggestion of 22 requirement. The hand adds up to only 19 according to your scale: 10 high-card points plus 6 (spades) plus 3 (hearts).

Marsha

Hi Jerry,

My partner and I have been discussing the whens and whys of Rule of 20 openings. Regarding your Suggestion of 22 in the February 2016 Bridge Bulletin, Jonathan's hand in the second example does not meet the Rule of 20 or your Suggestion of 22.

Gina

Hi Marsha, Gina and a host of others,

Years ago, I was asked to speak to a group of bridge players and non-players as part of an enrichment series lecture program. I attempted to relate some Jerry-isms to aspects of real life. At one point I said, "If you ever hope to be successful, you must learn how to color outside the lines."

My non-bridge-playing wife, Gini, was in attendance, and she gave me an incredulous look. Afterwards, I asked her why the look. She said, "How could you possibly tell people to color outside the lines when you've never seen a line in your life?"

Online dictionaries define *rule* as "what is or is not allowed in a particular game, situation, etc."

A *suggestion* is "an idea ... put forward for consideration."

The Rule of 20, as attributed to Marty Bergen, was intended as a method to determine whether to open hands with marginal high-card strength in first or second position. Using the Rule of 20, add your high-card points to the number of cards you hold in the two longest suits, and if the total equals 20 or more, you have an opening bid.

My mantra for opening the bidding is the Suggestion of 22, which is an embellishment on the Rule of 20: If high-card points plus length of two longest suits equals at least 20, a hand qualifies as a one-level opening bid *provided it contains at least two quick tricks*.

I believe that blind adherence to rules does not make one a very good bridge player. For example, you hold:

♠ Q J ♥ Q J ♦ Q J 6 5 ♣ Q J 4 3 2.

Using the Rule of 20, your 12 HCP plus nine cards in your two longest suits adds up to 21; so therefore, this is an opening hand?! You have no aces or kings – zero quick tricks!

By the same token, Jonathan's hand:

♠ K 9 7 6 4 3 ♥ A K 5 ♦ 7 5 4 ♣ 10,

was a tad short of my suggestion, but then again, that's why I prefer suggestions to rules.

I tell my students that they must open the bidding if their values meet or exceed "22." When their judgment is limited because of lack of experience, I urge them to think about reasons to bid rather than excuses to pass.

Holding Jonathan's hand, you can count 10 HCP, six spades and three hearts. You also have two and a half quick tricks. Pass??

If you pass, do you hope to overcall later holding this less-than-solid suit? Are you happy about the prospects of allowing the opponents to begin their exchange of information at the lowest possible level? Will your partner really play you to have this much defensive strength after your original pass?

In my opinion, Alvin Roth's greatest contribution to bridge theory was this aphorism: "Always plan a second bid before you choose a first." On this hand, plan to open 1♠ and rebid your six-card suit at the lowest available level to convey the information that you have more than five spades and minimum values.

Relax. If your crayon crosses over a line, you don't have to tear the page out of the coloring book and throw it away. To me, a rule in bridge is just another line I've never seen. ■

Send your questions to
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