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Newer Players

Ask Jerry

An important suggestion from Jerry

As the originator with unwavering belief in The Suggestion of 22, instead of the faulty Rule of 20, it makes me feel that some of my advice on this matter has clearly fallen on deaf ears.

In a recent BBO game, I was playing with a student, who held:

♠K Q J 10 4 3 ♥J 6 ♦Q J ♣Q 6 4.

He and the entire field opened 1♠ in first seat and we, along with all pairs, reached a hopeless 4♠. I suppose the decision of most was predicated on the presence of 12 HCP, which apparently indicates an opening bid with perhaps justification after applying the Rule of 20 – 12 HCP, a six-card suit and a three-card suit, exceeding the magic number 20, ergo, an opening bid. Despite responder holding a full opening hand with three-card support and three quick tricks, eight tricks were the limit of the hand on best defense. A few pairs managed to take nine tricks. Down one, in a 10-trick contract, was a near 80% result. My guess is a plus score would have been even better! I wonder if there was a way to avoid the hopeless game?

I do not consider myself a conservative bidder by any means, but I try to have an opening hand when I open the bidding.

In first or second seat, with a marginal opening bid decision, utilize “The Suggestion of 22”:

- ① Count your HCP. In this case, 12.
- ② Add to this number the sum of the length of your two longest suits. In this case, 6 + 3 = 9.
- ③ If this sum is equal to at least 20, take the last step: If you have two or more quick tricks, you have a clear

one-level opening bid.

Applying my guideline, the hand above, with one quick trick, is in fact a hand that should be opened, but it is best described as a weak two-bid! 5–11 HCP, typically a reasonable six-card suit. Oh, that’s right, this hand had 12 HCP! I implore all bridge players to recognize that queens and jacks are overrated by the point-count system we all fall back on and that aces and kings are undervalued. Don’t forget about those 10s and 9s, especially when they are joined by honor cards.

Partnership style, tendencies, vulnerability, all come into play. To be clear, you may not require two or more quick tricks to open, but it certainly helps. Depending on style, there may be hands which do not clearly fit The Suggestion, but you are at liberty to make decisions, which is why it is a suggestion, not a rule. For instance:

♠A K 7 6 3 2 ♥6 ♦K 5 2 ♣7 4 2.

10 HCP, a six-card suit and a three-card suit bring you to less than 20. Despite this, in my opinion, you have a clear-cut 1♠ bid with a strong six-card suit, along with 2 ½ quick tricks. Once again, a suggestion!

An old partner of mine offered some advice that I have taken to heart over the years. In first or second position, if you hold a strong six-card major (and perhaps even a strong six-card minor), pass is not an option. You either have a one-bid, a two-bid or a three-bid.

One of my favorite Jerry-isms: A good bid is one that most closely resembles the cards you actually hold.

A strong six-card spade suit with a bunch of balanced “quacks” in the side suits certainly looks like a

preemptive weak two-bid to me. If you choose this course of action on the hand above, you have a fighting chance of avoiding a hopeless game.

I expect pushback on my opinions as expressed above. Somewhat in the vein of Lesley Gore ... it’s not my party, and I have no intentions of crying, but it is my column and I’ll express my opinions if I want to! ■

CHALLENGE OF THE MONTH

North (Dummy)

Dlr: North ♠A
Vul: N-S ♥A 8 3
IMPs ♦J 8 7
♣Q J 10 8 6 2

South (You)

♠7 4 2
♥K Q 6 2
♦Q 4 2
♣A K 3

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♥
1♠	Dbl ⁽¹⁾	2♠	3♠
Pass	4♣	Pass	4♥
All Pass			

(1) Three-card heart support

West leads the ♠K.

Ugh! 3NT would have been trivially easy to make. If your counterparts at the other table get to that contract, you’ll need to make 4♥ to avoid losing a lot of IMPs.

Of course, if trumps are 3–3, things will be easy. But what can you do about 4–2 trumps?

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