

Two hands this month involving opening bids. The first, from Bob Whiting, comes from Steyning (14th Dec, board 14) :

AKQ109852

J6

Q

A2

Dealer, on your right, Passes. What is your opening bid ?

Before you decide, let me tell you that your bidding system uses weak 2 opening bids of 2D, 2H and 2S, so you have no Acol strong 2S bid (or a Benji Acol 2C bid) available. Your choices are therefore limited to 1S, an Acol 2C, or perhaps an opening 4S.

Unless one opponent holds four or five spades, you have nine sure winners in your own hand. You need very little from partner to make a game in spades. A red suit Ace, or the King of clubs, would do nicely. Even the King of hearts might be enough.

Despite the risk of missing game, I would open One Spade. It's possible that you might be left to play in One Spade only to find that partner has Passed with one of the cards you need to make game. But that's an unlikely scenario. If partner cannot respond to your One Spade opening bid, there's a good chance that one of the opponents will bid something. If partner does not have the values to respond, the opponents will have 20-24 points between them with length in one or more of the other suits. If you think about it, an auction of One Spade – NB – NB – NB is pretty unlikely.

Some players might open Two Clubs, despite having little in the way of defensive tricks, but it would never be my choice.

In fourth position, probably in third position too, I would open Four Spades. Anything is possible – you might not be able to make ten tricks, or you might be able to make twelve. On balance, partner (who has already Passed) is unlikely to have the exact cards you need to make a slam, and an opening bid of Four Spades will hopefully shut the opponents up.

Partner had this hand :

6

A8

87652

KQ965

Six Spades was a great contract but not at all easy to bid, unless you could discover that partner held the Ace of hearts along with the King and Queen of clubs. Not surprisingly, all the N/S pairs played in Four Spades.

Here is the second hand, from Brian Spears. You are Dealer and both sides are vulnerable :

void

4

Q7432

AQJ10932

Who knows what is going to happen here but it's unlikely that you would feel comfortable allowing the opponents play in a major suit game contract.

Opening One Club doesn't feel right and it does nothing to prevent the opponents from overcalling. In fact, both opponents might get the chance to bid before the bidding returns to you.

A pre-emptive Three Clubs will make it harder for next hand to overcall but this hand has a lot of playing strength for a pre-emptive opening bid, especially as partner has not yet had a chance to bid. Give partner this hand :

xxxx
xxxx
AKx
xx

- and he will Pass your opening bid of Three Clubs, yet you have a very good chance of making a game, perhaps even a slam.

Despite being vulnerable, I would open Five Clubs and let the opponents decide what to do. If they decide to bid Five Hearts or Five Spades then I'll Pass. On these freak distributional hands it's usually a good idea to bid as high as you dare at once and force the opponents to make a decision at an uncomfortably high level.

Footnote : when Bob Whiting e-mailed me the details of the first hand, I remembered a similar hand I held in a Scottish Cup teams match around 1980. On the last hand of the match I picked up a solid eight-card spade suit with no outside honour cards and heard my vulnerable right-hand opponent open 1NT (12-14). Our opponents were a strong team and the match seemed very close. I decided to Pass. After a couple of rounds of bidding, the opponents reached 3NT and I came to life with a Double. There was no further bidding. After cashing eight spade tricks I switched to a club and my partner won the next three tricks in that suit. Declarer took the remaining two tricks with the red suit Aces and finished seven down.

Our team mates returned and we began scoring up. The match was dead level until the last board when the conversation was as follows :

"Did you bid the spade game on the last board ?"

"No, sorry."

"What ? Didn't you overcall the 1NT opening bid with Four Spades ?"

"No, I decided to Pass."

"*What ? You Passed with a solid eight-card suit ?* Oh well, we've lost then. They made eleven tricks against us. For goodness sake, what were you thinking about ... blah blah blah ..."

"So what was your score on the board then" ? interrupted my partner.

"We lost 450."

"Not to worry," replied partner, "we got 2,000."

Enjoy your bridge !