

Opening hands - 'Rule of 20'

The 'Rule of 20' is a guideline for deciding whether to open the bidding, usually on marginal suit hands.

- (i) You are opening the bidding. Other players may have already NB
- (ii) Your hand is not suitable to open 1NT (balanced and 12-14 hcp)
- (iii) Your hand is not suitable for a 2/3/4-level pre-emptive opening bid.
- (iv) but you have a potential opening hand with 12 hcp or less?

Rule of 20 Add your high card points to the number of cards in your two longest suits. If the total is 20 or more, then the hand is worth an opening bid at the 1-level.

♠	A Q J 3 2	7
♥	9 4	0
♦	10 7	0
♣	A 8 6 4	4

(11)

Rule of 20; $11(\text{hcp}) + 5(\spadesuit) + 4(\clubsuit) = 20$.

Sufficient value to open (1♠)

Note; Not suitable for 1NT.

Most hcp in 2 longest suits.

You have a planned re-bid (2♠)

Examples

♠ K J 10 7 ♥ 2 ♦ 6 4 3 ♣ A Q J 7 2	(11)	Rule of 20? Yes HCP in long suits & singleton. Open 1♣ and plan to re-bid 1♠
♠ Q J ♥ J 9 4 3 ♦ K 7 6 3 2 ♣ K J	(11)	Rule of 20? Yes but Poor HCP in long suits. Poor Suit Quality in longest suit No convenient re-bid. PASS
♠ Q 6 ♥ 9 7 5 4 2 ♦ K Q ♣ K 9 5 2	(10)	Rule of 20? No PASS
♠ A 10 9 ♥ Q 9 4 2 ♦ K Q 9 ♣ J 10 5 3	(12)	Rule of 20? Yes but Hand shape is balanced. Open 1NT

Sample deal

Dealer; South
Vul. None

♠ K 10 9 4
♥ 7 3 (6) (HCP)
♦ 5
♣ K 8 7 4 3 2

♠ 8 5
♥ K 10 8 5 2 (12)
♦ A Q 8 4
♣ Q J

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 7 6
♥ A Q J 6 (11)
♦ K J 9 6 3 2
♣ 10

♠ A Q J 3 2
♥ 9 4
♦ 10 7 (11)
♣ A 9 6 5

	♠	♥	♠	NT
N	4	-	4	-
S	4	-	4	-
E	-	4	4	-
W	-	4	4	-

W	N	E	S
-	-	-	1♠ ¹
NB ²	4♠ ³	NB	NB
NB			

1. Applied rule of 20.
2. ♥-suit overcall? Poor SQ=6.
3. Pre-empt/shut out. And LTC=7.

By opening 1♠ on the rule of 20, North/South steal the contract from East/West, who have a biddable and makeable 4♥ contract. With North/South's shape it easily makes their 4♠ contract, and could make 12 tricks depending upon the lead.

Remember

If you remember just one thing – the 'Rule of 20', but don't be a slave to it.