

The Next Level

I. Basic opener strategy

(iv) Two unbalanced rebid rules

(A). The Five-Four rule. A player bidding two suits should normally have five (or more) cards in the first suit. Do not bid a second suit unless you have five cards in the first suit. You may have to do so with the awkward 4441 shape but not otherwise. More on 4441 later.

(B). The Six-card Repeat rule. A player bidding and repeating the same suit should strain to have six cards in the suit. Try to avoid repeating a five-card suit; you may occasionally have to do so with a minimum opener if you are five-four and cannot introduce your four-card second suit below Two-of-your-suit; but not otherwise.

The vast majority of opening hands present no rebid problem — the Five-Four rule and the Six-card Repeat rule take care of matters. But here's a tricky one:

♠ KQ982
♥ 42
♦ QJ82
♣ K2

You have only 11 points but your honours are predominantly sequential and in your long suits: it is a clear 1♠ opener. (It satisfies the Rule of 20: the number of cards in the two longest suits added to the point-count get to 20.) You'll have no rebid problem (you can rebid 2♦) unless partner responds 2♥. What then?

You could rebid 3♦, showing your five-four shape. But is that wise — making a nine-trick bid (which forces partner to speak) with no assurance of a fit, nor

more than half the points? It is wiser to rebid 2♠. Partner needs to be aware that the more cramped the auction, the less the repeat guarantees the sixth card.

We'll look at more tricky rebids — and the dreaded “barrier” — later.

Dealer: South ♠ K2
♥ A732
♦ 64
Vul: Neither

♠ J987 ♣ AJ542 ♠ 10
♥ J10 ♣ N W E ♥ Q9864
♦ Q10873 ♣ W S ♦ AJ9
♣ Q7 ♣ S ♦ K1098
♠ AQ6543
♥ K5
♦ K52
♣ 63

S	W	N	E
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♠(1)	Pass	4♠(2)	End

(1) Must be six cards in this auction — South would open 1NT with 5♠332 and show his second suit with 5♠-4♥/♦/♣.
(2) Loves ♠K, two aces and, crucially, a ruffing value (the doubleton diamond).

Declarer won ♥J lead with ♥A to lead ♦4 to ♦K, the finesse winning. Note, the early diamond play is necessary in order to ruff a diamond in dummy. At trick three, he gave up a diamond to void dummy.

East won ♦2 with ♦J and switched to ♠10 in a vain attempt to prevent the diamond ruff. Winning dummy's ♠K, declarer crossed to ♥K then ruffed ♦5, the crucial extra trick. He then led ♣A and ♣2. East won ♣K and led ♥Q, West overruffing ♠4 with ♠8. However, declarer could ruff his ♦Q and cash ♠AQ. Ten tricks and game made.

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