

THIRD & FOURTH SEAT

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Suppose that we open the bidding in 1st or 2nd seat. Our actions in these seats tend to be relatively sound and straightforward, and our three main objectives can be summarized as:

Bid all of our Games & Slams (easier said than done, of course).

Compete for the Part-Score (the general idea is to go plus, and in an ideal world we'll either make our own part-score, or else push the opponents overboard in their part-score).

Obstruct the Opponents (even when the hand belongs to the opponents, we don't sit idly by, we harass them with bold preempts and raises, all the better to make their lives as miserable as possible.)

Actually, there's also a fourth objective, namely **Bidding for the Lead**. Nobody finds the killing opening lead all the time, so any help we can give Partner in that department is always welcome. Bidding for the lead is a valuable weapon in whatever seat we happen to be parked, but it is an especially important weapon when we are in third seat, after two passes, holding a minimum (or sub-minimum) opening hand.

Imagine a power auction by our side, where we zip into game or slam. No need to worry about lead direction here, because our side is not on lead. Now, imagine that there are two passes to our balanced 10 HCP hand. Question: When the dust clears, which side will be declaring this hand? Nobody knows for sure, but the odds suggest that usually (our guess is 75% of the time) we will be defending this one. That being the case, 75% of the time our side will be striving to find the best choice of opening lead, and it makes sense to assist that choice in the bidding.

Lead direction is a big reason why it's common practice to open light in third seat, especially if we can open 1♥ and 1♠. These light major suit openers also have the benefit of crowding the auction for the opponents, and there is always good old Drury to protect the light opening side from getting too high.

Here is a veritable plethora of third seat hands awaiting your opinion. Two passes to you, and you hold:

Hand A: ♠ A 3 2, ♥ K 6 2, ♦ Q 7 2, ♣ J 5 3 2

10 HCP and you are in 3rd seat. Who could resist throwing in a light 1♣ opening bid just to gum up the works for the opponents? The answer should be "Everybody!" Bidding here serves no useful purpose ... it's not preemptive ... it is most unlikely to help you win the part-score battle ... and when you end up defending, you have no reason to want a Club lead from Partner. As the old saying goes, "Don't open bad hands with bad suits."

Hand B: ♠ A Q 4, ♥ Q 7 5 3, ♦ Q 3 2, ♣ Q 3 2

Remember this beauty from a previous Tuesday Chat? Yes, it's the same square 12-count for which we debated the merits of opening (in 1st or 2nd seat). At the time, we noted all those isolated Queens, the alarming absence of Tens, the failure to pass the Rule of 20, and the appalling lack of distribution. Now that the hand is residing in 3rd seat, it's no less ugly. But is it worth a 3rd seat opener? Many would open (presumably with 1♣), and that could well be the winning choice. However, we expect to defend more often than not, and have no reason to encourage a Club lead, so we would pass (with trepidation).

Hand C: ♠ Q 7 5 3, ♥ Q 3 2, ♦ Q 3 2, ♣ A Q 4.

Same miserable hand as before, but with the suits jumbled. But now a 1♣ lead-director is hard to resist, don't you think? Having opened 1♣, your game plan is to pass Partner's next bid.

Hand D: ♠ A K Q 5, ♥ K Q 7 6, ♦ 6, ♣ Q 6 5 4

A trick question! You don't want a Club lead, of course, a Spade would be far more appealing. But you probably won't get a Club lead! Or any lead at all, come to that. Because your hand is so strong, the chances are that your side will declare this one. Remember that with strong hands we just make the normal bid, which in this case is 1♣.

Hand E: ♠ K Q J 3, ♥ 5, ♦ J 6 3, ♣ Q 10 9 4 3

Hand F: ♠ 5, ♥ K Q J 3, ♦ J 6 3, ♣ Q 10 9 4 3

Hand E is a 9-count with decent offensive possibilities, and the best way to take advantage of this is to bid our suits naturally. So, we'd probably bid 1♣ with this one, and if Partner shows Spades, we'd raise. But in Hand F, it is the opponents who have the Spades, outranking us if it comes down to a major suit part-score scrap. So, perhaps this time it's worth opening 1♥ for the lead, while keeping our fingers crossed that we don't belong in 3♣ or 4♣.

Hand G: ♠ K Q J 6 5, ♥ 4, ♦ J 6, ♣ Q 6 5 4 3

Hand H: ♠ Q 6 5 4 3, ♥ 4, ♦ J 6, ♣ K Q J 6 5

With Hand G we are, of course, going to bid Spades. But how many? 2♠ gets our vote. What's your choice?

But with Hand H, we would not dream of 2♠ with that awful suit. The choices are 1♠ or 1♣. Opening 1♣ could work out rather well because of its obvious lead-directing qualities. And as you fish around in the bidding box for that 1♣ card, you can fantasize that LHO will overcall 1♥ (quite likely) and that Partner will make a Negative Double, allowing you to compete up to 3♠. One of the good things about owning the Spade suit is that you still own it on the next round of bidding.

Hand I: ♠ 7 6 4 2, ♥ 4 2, ♦ 5 4 3 2, ♣ A K Q

Hand J: ♠ 8 7 6 4 3, ♥ 4 2, ♦ 5 4 3, ♣ A K Q

If we are going to open light, we need a good reason. The ♣AKQ are the only reason to take any action with these hands. So, in both cases, we say “Phooey!” to the long suits (even that 5-card major) and we open 1♣. As it’s highly unlikely that we can compete effectively on this hand we might as well get in our lead-director.

Drury

The auction had gone:

<i>You</i>	<i>LHO</i>	<i>Pard</i>	<i>RHO</i>
Pass	Pass	1♠	Pass
??			

Partner has opened in third seat, and may well be lighter than a normal 1st or 2nd seat opener. What next? It’s time to introduce Drury, one of this planet’s most valuable conventions. The purpose of this convention is to make it possible for the third-seat bidder to open light, without his Partner taking him too literally.

There are various flavors of Drury, we’ll start with the most commonly used version, which is One-Way Reverse Drury. In that case, 2♣ by Responder says (a) I have a Spade fit (3+), and (b) I have some values for my passed hand. Typically, the Drury bidder has game-invitational values, or something close. And remember that Drury applies only when the third-seat bidder opens one of a major.

The auction proceeds:

<i>You</i>	<i>LHO</i>	<i>Pard</i>	<i>RHO</i>
Pass	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♣	Pass	??	

Opener will now usually bid one of the following:

- 2♠ I do not believe I can make game opposite a passed hand (in other words I have opened light, or I have a real but miserable opener)
- 4♠ I have extras, so I’m taking a shot at game.
- 2♦ I have an opening bid alright, but I’m not sure about game. Tell me more. Now you will bid 2♠ (minimum Drury values), or 3♠ (maximum; in other words a hand that was close to opening the bidding first time around)

Those are the basics and enough for most situations. There are lots of spare bids available if you want to make things more complicated. For example:

- Pass 1♠, 2♣ 2NT asks for shortness (this sequence usually shows slam interest)
- Pass 1♠, 2♣ followed by a new suit is a game try (could be help suit, short suit, side-suit, you choose)

Some Drury Hands

The auction starts:

<i>You</i>	<i>LHO</i>	<i>Pard</i>	<i>RHO</i>
		Pass	Pass
1♥	Pass	2♣	Pass
??			

What do you do with the following?

♠ K 4
♥ A Q 7 6 3 2
♦ A 7 6 2
♣ 7

No need to mess around ... we have a sound opener and some shape ... there's no chance of slam ... so we just go straight to game

♠ K 4
♥ A Q 7 6 3
♦ A 10 6
♣ 7 3 2

A sound opener but very little extra. Still, it's worth trying trying for game, and the best way to do that is to bid 2♦, an artificial bid, asking for strength. Partner will now bid 2♥ or 3♥, depending on how much she likes her hand.

♠ K 4
♥ A Q 7 6 3
♦ K 10 6
♣ 7 3 2

Still a sound opener, but not a hand that seems likely to make game opposite a passed hand. So, we'd say that this merits a weakness-showing 2♥ bid.

♠ 6 5
♥ A J 10 9 3
♦ 4
♣ A J 10 9 4

You may remember this stellar 10-count from a couple of Tuesdays ago. We went out of our way to assert that the hand was a bona fide opening bid thanks to the shape and intermediates. In other words, it is not a light opener, and as such we recommend a 2♦ rebid. Yes, seriously! All we need is for Partner to hold the right 8-count, let's say ♠xxx, ♥KQxx, ♦xxxx, ♣Kx, and game is cold!

♠ A 6
♥ A J 10 9 3 2
♦ 6
♣ A Q J 2

This is a lovely hand, definitely slammish, and it would be a good idea to try 2NT now. Or you could leap to 4♦ if you have the agreement that this is a splinter bid.

Drury in Competition

How about these auctions?

Pass Pass 1♥ 1♠
2♣

Pass Pass 1♥/♠ Dbl
2♣

In both cases, Partner has opened a third-seat one-of-a-major ... in both cases, the opponents have interfered ... and in both cases 2♣ is still available to us. Our suggestion is to use 2♣ here as Drury, just like usual.

How about this one?

Pass Pass 1♥/♠ 2♣
Dbl

It would not be illegal to use the Double here as Drury, a kind of stole-my-bid atrocity. Our suggestion is for the Double to be a Negative Double. If you want to show a good raise in Partner's major, you can always cue-bid 3♣ (hopefully, that won't get you too high).

Drury Variations

Some pairs use *both* of the following auctions as Drury:

Pass Pass 1♥/♠ Pass
2♣

Pass Pass 1♥/♠ Pass
2♦

Both sequences can be used to show support for Partner's major and some values. But the 2♣ bid shows *three*-card support, and the 2♦ bid shows *four*-card support. This variation is known as Two-Way Drury and appeals to enthusiasts of the Law of Total Tricks. The general idea is for Opener to feel free to compete to the 3-level when there are 9 total trumps between the two hands.

Many otherwise sensible players favor the Two-Way version, but it has the disadvantage of hijacking two useful natural bids instead of just one. Also, if the opening bid is 1♥ and Responder perpetrates a 2♦ Drury bid, then you will have to re-jigger the responses listed above to handle this special case. So, keep life simple, go One-Way, that's our suggestion.

Fourth Seat

Suppose there are three passes to you. Any special methods in this 4th seat situation? There's not a lot to report here:

- To state the obvious, there's no point in opening in 4th seat unless you think your side is favorite to go plus on the hand. Having lots of HCP makes you favorite to go plus, and the same goes for having lots of those lovely outranking Spades.
- The Rule of 15 is a useful 4th seat guide when deciding whether to open or pass out the deal. Just add your HCP to your Spade length, and see if your hand measures up.
- If you do choose to open 1♥ or 1♠ in 4th seat, then Drury is again a useful tool. As evidence of this, consider ♠ A7532, ♥ KQ8, ♦ Q87, ♣ 84. You'd open this in 4th seat because the HCP appear to be evenly split, but your Spades give you the edge in the part-score battle. And after you open 1♠, your Partner will have good old Drury to stop things from getting out of hand.
- Don't imagine that the Rule of 15 is infallible. We'd certainly want to open in 4th seat with this: ♠ 2, ♥ QJ9864, ♦ KQ65, ♣ A6. This hand has only 13 Rule of 15 points, but the playing strength surely compensates.
- What do 4th seat opening bids of 2♦ or 2♥ or 2♠ show? They are not weak, of course, with such a hand you would not be favorite to go plus, and so you would pass out the deal. Standard treatment is for these bids to show a 6-card suit and around 10-14 HCP. That's a hand which expects to go plus, and which would also like to keep the opponents out of the auction.
- And 3-level preempts in 4th seat? Same idea, but with a 7-card suit.

Five Takeaways

- In third seat, we have a tendency to open light, especially when we have a good suit that we would like Partner to lead.
- Just because we open in third seat, it does not mean that we are sub-strength. Sometimes we have a real opener! Partner uses Drury to find out which it is. Drury only applies when Partner opens a major.
- When you open one of a major in 3rd seat, and when your LHO doubles or overcalls 1♠, are you and your Partner on the same page? Suggestion: Drury is still on.
- There is a Two-Way version of Drury for those who are that way inclined.
- In 4th seat we tend to be guided by the Rule of 15. And Drury is available for keeping things low.