

When do you open in the 3rd Seat? By Neil H. Timm

What is your strategy for third seat opening bids after your partner and the opponents have passed?

Depending on your values, you know if your left-hand opponent (LHO) has an opening hand or a weak hand. Why?

Assuming most players open the bidding with about 11HCP and at least two quick tricks and that most preemptive bids are between 6-10 HCP, we may assume on average after two passes that each person has about 8HCP so that $40-16=24$ remaining points. Subtraction your HCP from 24 tells you the approximate strength of your LHO, the person in the 4th seat!

With this information you may decide to bid a suit with a weak hand for a lead (usually at the one level since the person in the 4th seat is going to bid anyway), bid aggressively to interfere with the opponents by bidding 1NT* (about 13HCP and a 6-card minor) or by making a 2-level bid (12+HCP and a 5+card suit), or pass where *=alert 10-14 in the 3rd & 4th seats.

What might a 1NT hand look like? Consider a hand like ♠Qxx ♥Qxx ♦AKJxx ♣xx. If partner transfers to a major, you will pass. Or some may open 1♦ for a lead and if partner bids a major you may pass and over 2♣ you would bid 2♦.

Recall that if you make a 1-level bid in the third seat and then bid 1NT/2NT you promise a full opener with normal strength for a rebid.

A common practice for 3rd seat bids is for partner to use some form of Drury (e.g., regular, reverse or perhaps Lawrence Drury) and many employ the rule of 15 with spades “a guideline” (also referred to a Casino/Pearson points): add the number of HCP to the number of spades and if the result is 15 or more bid spades (a one level spade bid requires 10-11 HCP e.g., ♠KJxxx ♥AJxx ♦Qxx ♣x or ♠KJxxx ♥Axx ♦xx ♣Qxx). Note with 12 HCP one only needs 3 spades, with 11HCP and 4 spades, and with 10HCP and 5spades.

What would you do with a hand: ♠KQJx ♥Jxx ♦Ax ♣Qxxx? Some may open 1♠ applying the rule, but a safer bid without 5-spades might be 1NT*. If partner transfer to hearts, you will pass and if partner transfers to spades you might invite. Following Dorothy Rice Sims, a common practice is to make a psych bid in the third seat and bid 1♦. If partner next bids 1NT you will pass and perhaps avoid a diamond lead or pass any 2-level suit bid by partner. And if your LHO has diamonds it makes it more difficult to X or bid with diamonds.

What might you do with this hand: ♠x ♥KQJx ♦Axxx ♣Jxxx? Please PASS and if your LHO bids 1♣ and his partner next bids 1♠ your might now X to show 4-4 in the unbid

suits.

Bidding tactics for 3rd and 4th seat bid are complicated and Mike Lawrence (2011), "Opening the Bidding in the Third and Fourth Seat" 2nd Edition, Master Point Press is a must read for the average bridge player. In his book he also addresses in detail responding to 3rd and 4th seat bids.

For example, a 1NT response to a major suit opening bid is ALWAYS semi-forcing and a jump shift to the 2-level in a major suit after a minor suit opening is forcing for one round.

However, it should never show a maximum hand with a 5-card major, a common treatment employed by many because you may bid 1 over 1. The bid must show a 5-card major with 4/5-card support for the minor.

Finally, how to you play the bid of 2NT* after a bid of a major in the 3rd seat? It is clearly not Jacoby but should show a maximum hand with 4+ card support and a singleton/Void. The bid of 3♣ is the asking bid after 1M where is your S/V? The responses are 3-level bids: 3♦/3♠/3M=♣. The bid was purposed by "Bobby" Goldman as part of the Aces Scientific Bidding System.

The primary difference between 3rd and 4th seats opening bids is that in the 4th seat bids are more likely to be valid 1-level opening bids since one may pass. However, many now use 2-level major suit bids to show an opening hand with 12-14HCP and a 6-card suit in the 4th seat.