



Ask Jerry

Jerry Helms

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Dear Jerry,

I haven't played bridge in 20-plus years, but I am now back.

I played on a team game and didn't do well. I didn't know about the "Rule of 20." In second seat, I held:

♠A Q 8 6 3 ♥10 8 5 4 2 ♦Q ♣Q 9.

The player sitting my way at the other table opened this hand, but I didn't. Of course, they made game, while I was floating in a partial.

Is this trend something that happened in last two decades? Should I start using the Rule of 20?

Ruth

Dear Ruth,

Over the past several years, there have been multiple articles in the Bridge Bulletin regarding the Rule of 20 from columnists Marty Bergen, Mel Colchamiro, Zeke Jabbour, yours truly and others. In its simplest form, the Rule of 20 is this: Add your high-card points to the length of your two longest suits and if the number equals 20 or more, you have an opening bid. From this basis, some would say you passed an opening bid ... but I think not.

In the mid-Nineties, my first published article on the subject was titled "The Suggestion of 20," somewhat expressing my disdain for "rules" while expressing a preference for

guidelines. If you uncritically obey the Rule of 20, the following would be an opening bid:

♠Q J ♥Q J ♦Q J 7 6 ♣Q J 7 6 4.

12 HCP plus a five-card suit and a four-card suit equals 21, therefore an opening bid! *Puleeze!* This collection of quacks (queens and jacks) does not remotely resemble an opening bid.

Furthermore, say you held:

♠A K 10 7 6 3 ♥K 8 4 ♦9 8 5 ♣2.

With 10 HCP plus a six-card suit and a three-card suit, you do not have an opening bid, and therefore should either pass or open a weak two-bid. Yuck!

My original article should have been titled: "The Suggestion of 22" which aligns perfectly with later articles by Zeke (Rule of 22) and Mel (Rule of 20 + 2). Our suggestion: Add your points and the length of your two longest suits. If this adds to 20, provided you have two quick tricks, open the bidding. What's a quick trick? They are high honors (or combinations thereof) that would allow you take tricks in the play. For example, an ace is one quick trick, while an ace-king combination is two quick tricks. Others include ace-queen (1½ quick tricks), king-queen (1 quick trick) and K-x (½ quick trick).

Note my second example adds to 19, but has 2½ quick tricks. Yes, I believe in weak two-bids, but I am convinced that this hand is far too

strong defensively to be described by any form of preemptive opening bid. (On a similar note, playing weak two-bids as showing 5-11 points, I would open 2♥ holding:

♠Q ♥K Q 10 7 6 2 ♦Q J ♣Q 9 6 4.

Despite 12 HCP and meeting the conditions of the Rule Formerly Known As Twenty, I would *not* open 1♥.)

Having danced all around your question, my answer is this: I, along with several experts whose opinions I value, would all have begun floating with you in the partial by passing the hand you held. I don't know the other hands, so I can't comment on whether you should have reached game despite having passed originally, or whether the game your opponents made could, or (worse yet) should, have been defeated.

Just remember the right technical action does not always yield the best possible result. □