



Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

My partner did not open a hand in which she held:

♠ A J 7 5 2 ♥ A Q 8 4 3 ♦ 10 ♣ 9 5.

She quoted you as saying you never count length in deciding whether to open. I said I would ask you.

Anne S.

Hi Anne,

I am often amazed at the number of things attributed to me as quotes. I am even more amazed how often I never said what I was quoted as saying!

I have certainly said I do not consider shortness in determining whether or not I have an opening bid. I *have* said

long suits are an asset, and good long suits are worth more than weak long suits. Any long suit is more valuable if you know that your partner also has two or more cards in your suit, but I've never been a proponent of adding specific values to a long suit.

My mantra for opening the bidding is what I call the "Suggestion of 22," which, in my opinion, is an improvement over what is popularly confused as the "Rule of 20."

The Rule of 20 is attributed to Marty Bergen and is intended as a method to determine whether to open hands with marginal high-card strength in first or second position. Bergen expected players to use some judgment, but many simply adopted the "rule" in its simplest form and abused the concept. Using the Rule of 20, add the high-card points to the number of cards held in the two longest suits, and if the total equals 20 or more, you have an opening bid. As is frequently the case, blind adherence to rules can be a mistake. Consider:

♠ Q J ♥ Q J ♦ Q J 6 4 ♣ Q J 8 7 3.

12 HCP plus nice cards in your two longest suits give a total of 21. If you indiscriminately followed rules all your life, this would be an opening bid. Argghh! It hurts me to think anyone would do anything other than pass with this collection of "quacks."

Using the Suggestion of 22, count your points, and try to remember that number. Add up the length of your two longest suits, and try to remember that

number, too. Add these two together, and provided the sum is 20 or more, you're almost there. Next, check out your quick tricks. The basic quick trick scale:

A K (x) = 2 quick tricks
 A Q (x) = 1½ quick tricks
 A (x) = 1 quick trick
 K Q (x) = 1 quick trick
 K x (x) = ½ quick trick

Provided you have two or more quick tricks to go with your sum of 20 or more, you have a clear opening bid in any system!

A first- or second-seat opening bid should not just be a suggestion that your side declare. It should also send a message about potential defensive strength. This is different than an opening preempt, which announces playing strength while tending to deny defensive strength.

Partnership style and agreement, as always, must be factored in. Some players might prefer less rigid requirements to open the bidding. In answer to your specific question: Giving no consideration to the singleton diamond or doubleton club, with 11 HCP, 10 cards in the two longest suits, plus 2½ quick tricks, this is an opening bid that anyone should be 1) proud to make, 2) not embarrassed to put down as dummy, and 3) able to contribute should your side be called on to defend.

By adding one math step, the Suggestion of 22 requires a little more effort, but it's worth it. ■