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Ask Jerry

Dear Jerry,
The bidding went: Pass–Pass–Pass–2♠. A slight disaster resulted because partner and I were on a completely different wavelength. Your opinion please.

Alice

Hi Alice,
Using the beginning statement to a majority of answers I supply to my Ask Jerry, "Depending on your partnership agreement ...," this question perfectly fits the mold. This issue needs firm definition and there is no definitive right or wrong.

After two passes, a pass by the third-seat player is somewhat revealing. Clearly the third hand lacks a full opener, but most modern players strain to get into the auction in this position with almost any excuse. If, in the fourth seat, you lack a strong hand, you have a clear inference that your partner is marked with some values, despite his original pass.

One thing is clear: You should never open in fourth position without a reasonable expectation of a plus score. I prefer a fourth-seat weak two-bid to be constructively obstructive. Constructive in that it provides a reasonable description of my holding, and obstructive as it prevents the opponents easy access back into the auction. A typical hand for me would be something like 10–13 HCP with a good six-card suit. In my opinion, opening 2♥ or 2♠ bid in fourth seat is weaker than opening 1♥ or 1♠ and then rebidding your suit if provided the opportunity to speak again. Examples:

♠K Q J 10 6 4 ♥K 7 ♦Q 5 ♣Q 6 5

♠Q J ♥A Q 10 9 5 3 ♦Q J 3 ♣J 4

Another way to look at it is that a fourth-seat weak-two would not accept most game invitations from their partner via some type of Drury limit-raise invite. Notice the similarity of these hands. Both have a near absence of outside aces and kings, and somewhat balanced distribution; typically hands filled with quacks and jacks! Even if partner has passed a near-opening bid, game is remote without a perfect fit, yet the values he is likely to possess make a plus score a strong probability, either playing the hand, or defending something at the three level.

Coincidentally, both of these hands fit the Rule of 15, Pearson Points or Casino Points, which all refer to the same issue of opening in fourth seat. Count your high-card points, add to that the number of spades you hold, and if that number is at least 15, open the bidding. The principle here is that the values around the table are likely somewhat evenly distributed. If this is the case, the spade suit carries a lot of importance. With spade length, either side has the opportunity to play their suit at the lowest available level.

An opening bid of 2♦ in fourth chair is an entirely different matter because both major suits remain easily in play. For this reason, I prefer a weak 2♦ in fourth chair to be more of an intermediate/robust type of hand. More like 12–15, with a good suit and some outside defense. Perhaps:

♠A 5 ♥J 10 6 ♦A K J 8 6 3 ♣7 2

With a weak hand and long diamonds, the best course of action is likely to pass the hand out and move on to the next deal.

As an addendum, Larry Cohen recommends CRIFS (Cohen's Rule In Fourth Seat). Essentially, if checking your hand and you do not meet the Rule of 15, and a pair of experts are your opponents, pass quickly. If, however, your opponents on a prior deal seem to be having issues, perhaps you should open anything and everything! ■

CHALLENGE OF THE MONTH

Dlr: South
Vul: N–S
IMPs

♠8 6
♥J 3 2
♦7 6 5 3
♣Q 9 5 4

♠K 5 2
♥A K Q 10 9 6
♦A K
♣A 2

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			2♣
Pass	2♦(1)	Pass	2♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

(1) Waiting

North's jump to 4♥ shows a weak raise.

West leads the ♦Q. As South, you start with nine top tricks. What's the best shot for making your 10th trick at IMPs?

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