

## 11. Being a slave to the Rule of 20 and not opening when you should

Opening the bidding when the number of cards in your two longest suits added to your total point-count reaches 20 is a good guide. It factors in the power of shape as well as your high cards. It's a guide not gospel, though.

Bridge is fundamentally a game of winning tricks. Take a hand containing ♠KQJ109 and ♥32 compared with a hand containing ♠Q5432 and ♥KJ. The first contains four certain tricks (with spades as trumps), while the second contains none at all; yet both have the same 5♠-2♥ shape and six high-card points.

When considering whether to open the bidding on a marginal hand, consider whether your high cards are in the long suits or short suits. Are the high cards sequential (good), or “gappy” (bad); do the long suits contain intermediate cards?

Also, will you be able to rebid conveniently? If you hold a hand with (say) five spades and four hearts, you will have an easy 1♠-then-2♥ route, whereas a hand with (say) five diamonds and four hearts will probably give you a tricky rebid (1♦-then-2♥ normally sends you to the dizzy heights of the Three-level).

You should definitely open the bidding with each of these ten-point hands (which fail the Rule of 20).

♠QJ1083	♠AQ109	♠4
♥KQ109	♥2	♥AQ1093
♦Q107	♦932	♦KJ98
♣2	♣KJ1032	♣1092

Dealer: South, Vulnerability: Neither

♠AJ53		♠7
♥KQ3		♥9542
♦5		♦KJ962
♣95432		♣KQ6

  

♠862		♠KQ1094
♥87		♥AJ106
♦AQ104		♦873
♣AJ108		♣7

### What Happened

S	W	N	E
Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass

### What Should Have Happened

S	W	N	E
1♠(1)	Pass	4♠(2)	end

(1) Loving his robust majors, worth way more than their point-count value. And with an easy 1♠-then-2♥ bidding plan.

(2) Loving the singleton — worth about three extra points.

Contract: 4♠, Opening Lead: ♥8

### What Happened

Nothing to see here.

### What Should Have Happened

South opens 1♠ and soon finds himself in the excellent 4♠. Win West's ♥8 lead (best) with ♥K and lead ♦5. West wins and leads ♥7.

Win in hand with ♥10 and ruff ♦3. Now lead ♠5 to ♠9 and ruff ♦8 with ♠A. Overtake ♠J with ♠Q, cash ♠10 (drawing West's trumps) and enjoy ♥AJ. Only a club is lost at the end — 11 tricks and game made plus one.

andrew.robson@thetimes.co.uk