

When to open the bidding in 4th seat

There is one major difference about opening in fourth seat from all other seats: you know exactly what the final result will be if you pass -- the board will be passed out, for a score of 0 to both sides!

It is unwise to open in fourth seat unless it is with the intention of making your contract.

One-level openings

If you have a strong hand -- say more than 13 HCP -- you should certainly make your normal opening bid. Your side is almost guaranteed to have more than half the deck, and you plan to have a constructive auction to a makeable contract - quite possibly a game. You even have a fair chance of not getting serious interference from your opponents, who have neither the strength to open at the 1-level nor the distribution to preempt.

If you hold a minimum opening in fourth seat, neither side is likely to have game -- and both sides are likely to have a partscore. If you open with only 11 points in fourth seat, *you have to be planning to out-compete the opponents* at the 2- or 3-level. This leads us to the single most important factor in deciding whether to open a minimum hand in fourth seat:

Do you have the major suits -- especially spades?

If your fit is higher-ranking than your opponents' fit, you have an advantage. If theirs is higher ranking, you face an uphill struggle for a plus score.

The only subminimum hands worth opening in fourth seat are ones with a clear advantage in a partscore struggle.

In a competitive auction, the partnership that has the spade suit has an advantage. It can outbid the opponents at any level with contracting for more tricks. For example, if one side is in a contract of 2♥, a competing bid of 2♠ will either win the auction or force the opponents to go a level higher to buy the contract with hearts as trumps.

One popular rule of thumb for fourth-seat openings is "**Pearson's Rule**" or the "**Rule of 15**": open if your HCP total plus your spade length is 15 or more.

So you would pass out this hand :

♣4 ♥K J 5 ♦K J 8 7 ♣K 9 8 7 4 (11 HCP + 1 spade=12)

but open: ♠K Q 10 9 2 ♥A J 4 ♦8 7 6 ♣5 3 (10 HCP + 5 spades=15)

Note the second hand has fewer HCP than the first.

Another Example:

			North	
			♠2	
			♥K75	
	West		♦QT973	East
	♠QJ53		♣AQ97	♠KT4
	♥J32			♥A964
	♦A8		South	♦J54
	♣K643		♠A9876	♣852
			♥QT8	
			♦K62	
			♣JT	

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♠ (1)
Pass	2♦ (2)	Pass	Pass(3)
Pass			

1. South opens the bidding with 15 Pearson Points.(rule of 15)
2. North barely has enough to bid 2♦.
3. South knows that game is impossible since North is a passed hand.

American bridge player, teacher and author Larry Cohen has his own interpretation of when to open in the 4th seat, or when to pass:

“ forget the Rule of 15 for deciding whether to open or pass out the deal in fourth seat. I prefer CRIFS- **«Cohen’s Rule In Fourth Seat.»**

Any time it is borderline (like 10 or 11 HCP), evaluate your opponents!

Yes, I am serious. If you are playing against Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell (or the best pair at your local duplicate game), then pass it out. You will likely get a middlish score/result. Who needs to open and have to do battle with an expert pair who will fight hard for the partscore and play or defend well?

Conversely, if you look up at your opponents and see Schlemiel and Schlimazel (the worst pair), then open the bidding. You can push them around in the auction and will get an extra trick or two in the play/defense.”

Of course this technique is not recommended in any way, just included for a bit of fun!

The summary is, In fourth seat open only when you expect a plus score from bidding on.