

Article 21 Off-Beat “Rules” for Assisting Bidding and Play

Andrew Robson, as explained in earlier articles, is one of the UK’s leading players and bridge teachers. He advocates innumerable rules and acronyms to assist bridge players. Some are well known. I would like you to consider a few less well known.

While they are excellent guidance they should not be applied when other information/guidance can be obtained from the bidding or play. Well known are:

“The Rule of 11”. This has been useful guide for defending against NT contracts for over 50 years. Provided your partner leads 4th highest against NT then subtracting that from eleven tells you how many cards higher than the lead are held in the other three hands. Since dummy is down declarer know how many, if any higher cards are held by the opening leader’s partner and therefore the highest card required to be played.

“Rule of 14”. This suggests that responder has sufficient to respond at the 2-level provide his points plus the length of the suit make up 14. The caveat is that a significant number of points should be in the suit bid. Otherwise respond no more than 1NT.

“Rule of 20”. When I first started playing bridge it was strongly encouraged that one required to open a suit. Nowadays players are more aggressive and a guide for lighter openings. You have a valid opening hand when your points and the length of your two longest suits come to 20 or more. Again I would suggest that the majority of your points are in the two suits.

What about the “Rule of 15?”

This is less well appreciated. How often have you had three passes and you are sitting with 11pts and pass:

- Only to find that you get a poor score perhaps with partner having a reasonable 11pt hand as well
- Find that you get a poor score because by opening the bidding you get a poor score because opponents have the balance of the points and good defensive hands.
- You get a poor score because by opening the bidding you allow opponents to compete and get a good fit to make a contract.

The **“Rule of 15”** provides good guidance on potential hands suitable for opening light e.g. with 10/11pts. It suggests you can **consider** opening light provided your points and the length of your spades reaches at least 15. Again a caveat is that you should have a reasonable spade suit.

The logic is that if you have 10/11pts after 3 passes then the contract, if any, is going to be a part-score; hence the suit that is likely to win a part-score contract is spades. (Highest ranking)

Consider these 3 hands. Should you open?

(i)	(ii)	(iii)
♠ AQ632	♠ 43	♠ QJ42
♥ K7	♥ J962	♥ A4
♦ 1042	♦ KQ974	♦ K9742
♣ J96	♣ AJ	♣ J7

- (i) **Open 1♠.** You have 5 spades, 10pts and strength is the ♠ suit. You would never open 1♠ in 1st or 2nd position as you don't have a rebid over a change in suit response from partner. In 3rd or 4th position you could open knowing that you would pass any response from partner (2♥ response should invariably have a 5-card suit)
- (ii) **Pass.** With so few spades (pts + number of spades =13) should you open in 4th position there is a danger of opponents finding a good 2♠ contract so it is wise to throw this hand in. Strangely you may consider this suitable for opening in the first three positions but definitely not in 4th.
- (iii) **Open 1♦.** (Obeys rule of 15 with 11pts and four spades). You must open 1♦ not 1♠, but you have a rebid of 1♠ over any 1-level response from partner.

A key issue illustrated from example (iii) is that if you have obey the rule of 15 but only have 4 spades the hand is only suitable for opening a 4 or 5 card suit below the spade suit. The points should be in the two long suits.

Hand play

♠ Q984 ♥ QJ10 ♦ KQ10 ♣ 952	♠ AJ632 ♥ 72 ♦ 842 ♣ AJ7
♠ K107 ♥ AK854 ♦ 65 ♣ 1064	♠ 5 ♥ 963 ♦ AJ973 ♣ KQ83

Bidding			
S	W	N	E
			p
p	p	1♠	p
2♦	All Pass		

Lead: ♥Q

This hand is interesting as the declarer did not find his spade contract but allowed responder to play in 2♦. It illustrates the fact that opening light in 4th hand means that you must be able to tolerate any response from partner. Even 2♥ can be passed as S should have 5 hearts to be able to respond 2♥. So N expects never to play in less than a 7-card fit.

East overtook the ♥Q with the ♥A and led back the ♦5, recognising the doubleton ♥ to prevent a potential ruff of the 3rd ♥. East knows that west also has the ♥J having led the ♥Q. S ducked the ♦ return to allow W to win with the ♦10. W returned the ♦K to try to reduce the chances of the ♥ ruff. Declarer won with the ♦A and led the ♠5 to dummy's ♠A and ruffed the returning ♠2, returned to dummy with the ♣J and ruffed the ♠3 and a return to dummy with the ♣A to give a 3rd ruff of the ♠6 and then led the ♣KQ discarding the ♥7 with W winning the 4th ♣ round with the ♦Q. This allowed dummy to ruff the 2nd ♥ in dummy to **make 10 tricks**

.Even if E/W had taken the 2nd ♥ trick then declarer can still make 9 tricks.