

Light Openings

In 1989 Mike Lawrence published *Passed Hand Bidding*, a book that dealt exclusively with opening bids opposite a partner who had previously passed. He applied commonsense in allowing light opening bids with a 4-card major. For example, he recommends $1\spadesuit$ on $\spadesuit AQJ7 \heartsuit 85 \diamond 764 \clubsuit QT53$ and pass

on $\spadesuit QT53 \heartsuit 85 \diamond 764 \clubsuit AQJ7$. The problem with opening the second hand with $1\clubsuit$ is that it might provoke a partner to overbid with a good passed hand. We've all experienced that. The first hand can be taken care of by using the Drury convention. A key element of Lawrence's third hand bidding structure is the weak two whose role is expanded to include hands that have only a 5-card suit, or have a second 4-card suit in the other major, or have a void, or are extremely weak. For example, he suggests a $2\spadesuit$ opening bid at favourable vulnerability on $\spadesuit QJ987 \heartsuit 8643 \diamond - \clubsuit Q643$, an 8-loser hand.

Lawrence asked, 'why not open light in all seats?' His answer, 'responder will have to spend so much time finding out if opener has a real opener that other important facts will get lost.' That was true in 1989, but no longer as response structures have been devised to overcome the apparent flaw. Nonetheless, sometimes partner is handcuffed, as Karen McCallum showed during the recent USBF Women's Semi Finals. On Board 17 of the 6th segment she opened $2\heartsuit$ in first seat on $\spadesuit T85 \heartsuit AT964 \diamond 3 \clubsuit 8532$, a 9-loser hand, only to find partner doubling the $3\diamond$ overcall. What can one do in that case except hope partner has her double?

Vul: None Dlr: North		N McCallum \spadesuit 1085 \heartsuit A10964 \diamond 3 \clubsuit 8532			
		W Rosenberg \spadesuit KJ973 \heartsuit K82 \diamond K7 \clubsuit 1094		E Sulgrove \spadesuit 2 \heartsuit Q73 \diamond AQJ9852 \clubsuit 76	
		S Baker \spadesuit AQ64 \heartsuit J5 \diamond 1064 \clubsuit AKQJ			
W	Rosenberg	N	McCallum	E	Sulgrove
—		$2\heartsuit$		$3\diamond$	
All Pass				Dbl	

Ideally before taking an action at the table a player dispassionately estimates the risk-to-gain ratio. Lynn Baker is a law professor and a world champion, a consultant in corporate law, so she is well qualified to exploit the loopholes in McCallum's bidding system, but it is hard to argue on the case that her penalty double had much to gain and little to lose in this situation. Yes, looking at her hand alone, 3♦ might be going down 1, but the score would be increased insignificantly from +50 to +100. There is a real risk that partner will contribute very little to the defence. On the other hand, if the preempt has been effective, after a pass Debbie Rosenberg, motivated by greed, will be obliged take some risky action opposite an unlimited overcall. The defence against 3NT doubled should prove much easier than the defence against 3♦* as the South hand contains 5 tricks off the top after a black suit lead.

When Baker avoided leading her partner's bid suit, opting instead for 3 rounds of clubs, she lost 12 IMPs. No one says it's easy – and even Stephen Hawking might pursue the same you-can't-fool-me defence without the benefit of an intelligible signal from a nearby terrestrial being (and I am not referring to some wee doggie signalling a need to leave the room.) The strategy behind the weak weak-two is to promote uncertainty, but there should be some way for a partnership to unravel the mystery subsequently if it is in their interest to do so, and clear defensive signalling was required in this situation.

At the other table Shannon Cappelletti passed as North and Irina Levitina pre-empted with a bid of 3♦, which under these circumstances implied weakness, not strength. Jill Meyers doubled as South and got the response I would have feared, 3♥ from partner. This contract on a 5-2 fit at the 3-level was 'unbeatable as the cards lie', as critics say disapprovingly when someone successfully violates one of their sacred conservative principles.

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