

Mike's Bridge Lesson

When should you open four of a major? What does it show? For guidance, check out the following examples.

Say your partner opens 4♥, vulnerable, and you hold:

♠A K 7 6 4 3 ♥Q ♦K Q J ♣K Q 7.

What do you bid? The answer can be found by asking what you need for slam. If your partner has seven or eight hearts to the A-K or A-K-J, you rate to have no losers there but in addition to this trump holding, you need him to have an ace in one of the minor suits.

This is the kind of hand you need him to have if you hope to make six:

♠2 ♥A K J 10 6 5 3 ♦A 7 6 ♣8 6.

This raises the question: Is this a 4♥ opener?

If you have a long major with opening-bid values, open with a one-bid. If you pick up this hand at the table, you might start thinking the opponents have spades and will outbid you if you open 1♥. If you open 4♥ in an effort to shut out their spade suit, a number of things will occur.

1. You will find that your partner has a bunch of spades and they cannot make anything.
2. Your partner will have one hand out of an assortment of hands where you cannot make 4♥, such as:

♠Q J 9 8 4 ♥4 ♦K 9 4 ♣Q J 7 4.

If you bid 4♥ and find this dummy, you are a favorite to go down.

3. Your partner will have a big hand and you will miss a cold slam.
4. The opponents will bid something

(4♠, 5♣, etc.) and your partner will bid 5♥, thinking your side does not have any defense.

5. The opponents will bid something and go down three. Partner won't double because he will not expect you to have this fine a hand.

Essentially, bidding 4♥ on the example hand is negative thinking that will ensnare your partner as often as it catches the opponents.

Here are some hands from recent play. Note the seat and vulnerability for each.

1. Dealer, vul versus not

♠A K 3 ♥Q J 10 8 7 6 5 ♦K J ♣9

Open 1♥. In first or second seat, if you have something that is clearly worth a one-bid, bid one. Do not open with a preempt.

2. Dealer, non vul

♠3 ♥K Q J 8 7 6 4 3 ♦K 7 6 ♣3

Bid 4♥. You do not have an opening bid and you have eight hearts. On this hand, many would open 3♥. That is a poor choice. With eight-card suits, it is seldom correct to open with a three-bid.

3. Dealer, both vul

♠A K Q J 8 7 5 ♥J 3 ♦8 3 ♣10 6

This is not easy. Both sides are vulnerable, so you should probably open 3♠. You have an opening bid but little defense outside of spades. If no one was vulnerable, no opening bid really does this hand justice. 1♠ is my choice, but it is not quite an opening bid considering you have everything in spades. 3♠ is just wacky because you have seven solid tricks. If your



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partner has two aces you probably can make 3NT, and he won't know to bid it. 4♠ is not wise — you have seven tricks but no hope for more unless your partner has a lot of help.

4. Dealer, both vul

♠J 3 ♥A K Q J 8 7 5 ♦8 3 ♣10 6

This is the same hand as the previous except that you have hearts. If you are vulnerable, 3♥ is right because you show a nice hand when vulnerable and this one is not exactly an opening bid.

If no one is vulnerable, this hand is really difficult. You might reject all the opening bids and try a pass, hoping to come in later. The trouble is that if you bid 1♥ and they bid spades, you will have a hard time telling partner that you have lots of hearts and very little defense. Would you like it if your partner doubled 4♠? 3♥ and 4♥ are dubious when not vulnerable because partner will not play you for a suit this good if you bid 3♥ and he will not play you for this kind of hand if you bid 4♥. Tough.