

*Second Edition*



THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO  
PASSED HAND BIDDING

A MIKE LAWRENCE  
BRIDGE CLASSIC



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# INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP WITH MIKE LAWRENCE for the 1989 World Championships in Perth, Australia, gave me the pleasure and opportunity to study the thinking processes of one of the best bidders in the world.

Now, readers of this book have the same opportunity. Mike has written about the little explored area of passed hand bidding in great depth. All of his concepts are valuable to any level of player.

For example, he gives the following guidelines for a third seat opener's rebids:

- A 1NT rebid promises a full opening bid.
- A pass of a one-level response shows tolerance for partner's suit.
- A new suit rebid or rebid of original suit shows nearly a full opening bid.

Thus, if in third seat you pick up

♠ 6 ♥ K Q 10 8 7 ♦ K 5 4 2 ♣ J 5 3

it is clearly wrong to open 1♥, since a 1♠ response will leave you no reasonable follow-up. The correct opening bid is a weak 2♥ call, which Mike explains can be made on several hands that wouldn't be opened in the first or second seat. Without an understanding of these guidelines, many players would fall into the trap of opening 1♥ on this hand.

In addition to giving excellent principles for all stages of passed hand bidding, Mike examines the more scientific approaches available, such as the forcing notrump response by a passed hand, possible meanings of a jump shift, and Drury. I found these discussions especially interesting, since there has been virtually nothing written in this area.

Here is one favorite example on hand evaluation. West holds:

♠ A J 10 7   ♥ J 10 3   ♦ K J 4   ♣ 8 6 2

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♥	pass
2♣*	pass	4♣**	pass
?			

\*Drury, promises heart support

\*\*Splinter bid

To the average bridge player, this might look like a minimum Drury bid worth nothing more than a 4♥ call. Mike points out that this is really an excellent hand with nothing wasted in clubs. He recommends a 4♦ cuebid, followed by 4♠ if partner signs off at 4♥. This cuebid of the ♦K should help partner evaluate his hand for slam purposes.

All in all, Mike has made a major contribution to bidding theory. Many new important concepts are introduced, and many old concepts are clarified in a way that is easy to understand and fun to read at the same time. While *Passed Hand Bidding* is geared primarily for the average player, all players from novices to experts will find plenty to learn.

*Kit Woolsey*

PART ONE

OPENING THE BIDDING  
IN THIRD OR FOURTH  
SEAT





# CHAPTER ONE

## THIRD SEAT BIDDING

Experience has shown that active players get better results than passive players. The more aggressive players, within suitable limits, create more problems for their opponents and consequently reap better results when their opponents misjudge. Not all situations are suitable for aggressive behavior. But some situations practically scream for it.

One such situation occurs in third seat. A proven effective tactic is to open in third seat with hands not strong enough to open in first or second seat. There are quite a few reasons why opening light in third seat might work.

1. Game and slam bidding become more difficult for your opponents.
2. Partner may be directed to a good opening lead.
3. Your opponents may misjudge their values.
4. You may reach a contract that makes, or one that fails by a small amount.

Following are examples of these reasons.

### REASON ONE:

#### A LIGHT THIRD SEAT OPENER CAN BE OBSTRUCTIVE

A light third seat opening bid, whatever it is, will force the opponents to use their defensive bidding structure rather than their opening bid structure. As far as game bidding goes, your opponents will not suffer too much, but their slam bidding will be very much impaired.

South deals, Vulnerable vs. Not Vulnerable

<p><b>West</b></p> <p>♠ 8</p> <p>♥ 9 7 6 3</p> <p>♦ K 10 6 5 4 2</p> <p>♣ K 2</p>	<p><b>East</b></p> <p>♠ A K 10 5 2</p> <p>♥ 8</p> <p>♦ A J 9 3</p> <p>♣ A 6 5</p>
---	---

For example, with the above hands, if East is allowed to open in fourth seat, a possible bidding sequence could be:

West	North	East	South
			pass
pass	pass	1♠	pass
1NT	pass	2♦	pass
3♦	pass	4♣	pass
5♦	pass	6♦	pass
pass	pass		

Here, 6♦ is an excellent contract. It is a hard slam to bid, but certainly one should reach 5♦.

Now try bidding the same hands with the opponents opening the bidding.

West	North	East	South
			pass
pass	1♥	?	

Should East bid 1♠ or double? Regardless of which bid he selects, how should the bidding continue? Whatever sequence you found, I predict it was not easy. If you just reached 5♦ you would have scored well. Success was not universal when this hand was played in a recent tournament. Typical unsuccessful sequences were:

West	North	East	South
			pass
pass	1♥	dbl	2♥
pass	pass	2♠	pass
3♦	pass	pass	pass

West	North	East	South
			pass
pass	1♥	1♠	2♥
pass	pass	dbl	pass
3♦	pass	pass	pass

West	North	East	South
			pass
pass	1♥	dbl	2♥
3♦	pass	3♠	pass
4♦	pass	pass	pass

East and West had a sensible auction up to East's final pass. He should at least have raised to 5♦. Given West had shown some values, East probably should have bid 4NT on the way to 6♦. As bad as these sequences were, these pairs at least got to a diamond contract. One pair failed to reach diamonds at all:

West	North	East	South
			pass
pass	1♥	1♠	pass
pass	pass		

All in all, not a good demonstration of bidding by East-West. For the record, on this sequence South did not raise hearts. West should have bid 2♦, which would get East's attention.

## REASON TWO:

### A LIGHT THIRD SEAT OPENER CAN HELP PARTNER'S OPENING LEAD

Another reason for opening light in third seat is to get partner off to a good lead that he might otherwise not find if you pass.

For example, as East, Vulnerable vs. Not Vulnerable, holding:

♠ 8 6 5 ♥ K Q 10 8 ♦ A J 3 ♣ 9 5 2

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♥	

East's 1♥ bid is not going to get his partnership to a good contract, but it will get West off to a good lead if South plays the hand.

<p>♠ A 7</p> <p>♥ 9 6 2</p> <p>♦ 10 9 8 4 2</p> <p>♣ 10 8 6</p>	<p>♠ J 9 3</p> <p>♥ J 5 3</p> <p>♦ K 6 5</p> <p>♣ K J 7 3</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <p>N</p> <p>W      E</p> <p>S</p> </div>	<p>♠ 8 6 5</p> <p>♥ K Q 10 8</p> <p>♦ A J 3</p> <p>♣ 9 5 2</p>
	<p>♠ K Q 10 4 2</p> <p>♥ A 7 4</p> <p>♦ Q 7</p> <p>♣ A Q 4</p>		

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♥	1♠
pass	2♠	pass	4♠
pass	pass	pass	

With any lead except for a heart, declarer makes 4♠. With a heart lead declarer is down one.

### REASON THREE: A LIGHT THIRD SEAT OPENER MAY CAUSE THE OPPONENTS TO MISJUDGE

Opening light in third seat may influence your opponents to misjudge their values. If the auction becomes competitive with everyone having something to say, each opponent may credit your side with real values. Either opponent may get it into his head that it is his partner who is doing the pushing.

This type of result happens often:

<p>♠ 10 6 2</p> <p>♥ A J 10 7 3</p> <p>♦ 8 4</p> <p>♣ Q 10 5</p>	<p>♠ Q 8</p> <p>♥ K 5 4</p> <p>♦ Q 7 5</p> <p>♣ A 8 6 4 2</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <p>N</p> <p>W      E</p> <p>S</p> </div>	<p>♠ A K 9 5 3</p> <p>♥ 9 6 2</p> <p>♦ J 9</p> <p>♣ J 7 3</p>
	<p>♠ J 7 4</p> <p>♥ Q 8</p> <p>♦ A K 10 6 3 2</p> <p>♣ K 9</p>		

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♠	2♦
2♠	3♦	pass	pass
pass			

West led a spade and declarer ended up making four. However, 3NT was cold. South had a good hand but was afraid North was pushing. If North raised on

♠ Q 8 ♥ 10 5 4 ♦ Q J 5 ♣ A 8 6 4 2

instead of

♠ Q 8 ♥ K 5 4 ♦ Q 7 5 ♣ A 8 6 4 2

3♦ would be high enough. Any game try by South would lead to a minus score.

North-South didn't do anything terrible. It just happened that 3NT would make and probably would have been bid without East's third seat opening bid.

## REASON FOUR: SOMETIMES YOU FIND A FIT AND DISCOVER YOU CAN MAKE SOMETHING

This reason is sort of an afterthought that is an unexpected bonus. If you find a fit and are able to make something, you should consider yourself lucky. It is possible that you cannot make your contract but your bidding may succeed in pushing them too high or it may allow you to get away for a modest penalty. When you open a major with a 9 point hand and somehow end up with ten tricks, you really should file it away under luck and not good bridge.

## WHY NOT OPEN LIGHT IN ALL SEATS?

Looking at the discussion above, you might get the idea that light opening bids are a good thing. If so, why not open light all the time? The reason you do not do so is that your constructive bidding will become impossible. If you open with a weak hand, there are tools you can use to keep you out of trouble if you have the bidding to yourselves. But if the opponents come into the bidding, your partner will make bids you do not want to hear. For instance, if you open 1♠ with a 9 count and they bid 2♥, you will not be happy if your partner bids 2NT or even 3NT.

You want to make life hard for your opponents without starting major wars with them. Some discretion will be needed.



# CHAPTER TWO

## FIVE RULES FOR PASSED HAND BIDDING

I would like to introduce five rules that will improve your passed hand bidding decisions and help keep your enthusiasm in line.

### RULE ONE

*When partner responds in a suit at the one-level*

---

**A pass of partner's new suit response at the one-level shows a tolerance for his suit.**

---

If you open in third seat and then pass partner's one-level response in a new suit, you promise a tolerance for his suit. Ideally you would like to have three-card support, but you might (rarely) get away with a doubleton honor.

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♥	pass
1♠	pass	?	

What should East rebid with these hands?

♠ 8 6 5   ♥ A Q 10 7 5   ♦ K 6 4   ♣ J 2

♠ Q 10   ♥ A K J 9   ♦ 7 6 5 4   ♣ J 10 2

♠ 3   ♥ K J 10 8 7   ♦ J 7 6   ♣ K Q 8 6

Passing is okay in the first case and probably okay in the second case. But with the third hand any rebid will be misleading. Passing would show a tolerance for spades. Bidding on would imply a full opener.

Should you have passed in third seat? No. You should have opened with 2♥. Weak two-bids in third seat with five-card suits will become a way of life for you. This way, you don't have to deal with the difficult situation where you bid 1♥ and partner bids 1♠.



As East, Not Vulnerable vs. Vulnerable, what should you bid in third seat?

♠ 4 2   ♥ K 8 7   ♦ K Q 10 7   ♣ Q 9 8 7

Pass. It is semi-reasonable to open 1♦ because you want a diamond lead. Also, if partner responds with anything other than 1♠ you can pass with comfort. Partner doesn't have to bid 1♠. Sometimes the opponents bid spades. Nonetheless, I personally would pass. Good things can indeed come from opening 1♦, but if partner bids 1♠ our sequence will be in jeopardy. I don't want to set my partner up for a fall. If partner plays in 1♠ and does poorly he may become gun-shy on later hands. Partner is special. Don't embarrass him.

It is important to understand why opening 1♦ and then passing 1♠ is dangerous. It is not that 1♠ will always be a bad contract. Partner may have ♠J865, in which case 1♠ will be an awful spot. But he may have ♠Q10863. In this case, 1♠ will be a decent spot.

The trouble is that 1♠ does not always end the auction. Say your partner, West, has this hand:

♠ Q 10 8 6 3   ♥ Q 5   ♦ J 3 2   ♣ A 10 6

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♦	pass
1♠	pass	pass	dbl
pass	2♥	pass	pass
?			

If your partner bids 2♠, expecting a mild fit, he will be unhappy with your hand.

### *Plan ahead*

A consequence of rule one is that you should avoid opening very weak hands in third seat when you have a higher-ranking singleton or worthless doubleton. If you are not strong enough to make a rebid, you should pass if partner's most likely bid will get the partnership into a bad contract.

## RULE TWO

*When partner responds in a suit at the two-level*

---

A pass of partner's new suit response at the two-level does not promise a fit or even a tolerance.

---

When partner responds at the two-level to a third seat one-bid, he should have at least a good five-card suit. For this reason opener does not have to worry

much about bad holdings in lower-ranking suits than the one he is opening. He knows his partner has a good suit when he bids it at the two-level.

As East, Neither Vulnerable, holding:

♠ A 7 5   ♥ K Q J 6   ♦ 4 2   ♣ 9 7 6 5

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♥	pass
2♦	pass	?	

What do you bid?

Pass is fine. You do not like having only two diamonds but since West has at least five of them, 2♦ should be a playable contract. By comparison, when partner responds at the one-level, he is permitted to have a poor four-card suit.

Once in awhile you will open light and partner will respond in your singleton at the two-level. Now what?

As East, Neither Vulnerable, holding:

♠ J 7 6   ♥ A J 9 7 5   ♦ 3   ♣ K 10 8 5

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♥	pass
2♦	pass	?	

What do you bid?

I suggest pass. It is contrary to what I have said, but it does stop the bidding. Partner can have a singleton heart, so bidding 2♥ isn't going to improve matters. It was reasonable to bid 1♥, since partner could have responded with either 1♠ or 2♥, or even 2♣, Drury. Partner's 2♦ response means you lost your gamble. Do not try again. Pass before you get into an even poorer contract.

## RULE THREE

---

**A notrump rebid promises a full opener.**

---

If you open in third seat and then rebid 1NT or 2NT you promise a full opener with normal strength for your rebid. This means you do not have a 10 point hand and you usually do not have a singleton in partner's suit. If you rebid 1NT, your partner is entitled to bid his hand as if you have your promised values.

As East, Neither Vulnerable, holding:

♠ A Q   ♥ Q 7 6   ♦ Q J 7 5 4   ♣ 9 8 4

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♦	pass
1♠	pass	?	

What do you bid?

Pass. It is slightly unusual to pass partner with only two cards at the one-level, but at least they are good ones. You can't rebid 1NT because that promises a full 12-14 points. If your partner passed a good 11 count or a shabby 12 count, he would be right to raise to 2NT, which you do not want.

As East, Neither Vulnerable, holding:

♠ 9 6   ♥ K Q 10 4   ♦ A J 9 8   ♣ K J 8

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♦	pass
1♠	pass	?	

What do you bid?

Bid 1NT. If you are in the habit of bidding 1NT with 10 or 11 point hands just to get out of partner's suit, he will be gun-shy about raising you when he has a good passed hand. How would you feel if your partner huddled and passed regretfully? Would you like hearing that partner was afraid to raise because he was worried that you might have a dog?

As East, Neither Vulnerable, holding:

♠ A J 8 7 4   ♥ K 6 4   ♦ 8   ♣ Q J 4 3

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♠	pass
2♦	pass	?	

What do you bid?

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## HOW DOES YOUR BIDDING STRUCTURE CHANGE WHEN YOUR SIDE OPENS THE BIDDING IN THIRD OR FOURTH CHAIR?

So many things have to be rethought – for example, which auctions are forcing, and what sequences change their meaning completely? This is the definitive book on auctions that begin in third or fourth seat. Originally published in 1989, it quickly became recognized as a ‘must-read’ for any would-be bridge expert, and has never been out of print since that time. Now, more than twenty years later, the author has revised and updated it to take into account modern developments in bidding. Anyone who is at all serious about improving their game needs to read this book.

*‘A major contribution to bidding theory... easy to understand and fun to read at the same time.’* Kit Woolsey (multiple World Champion).

**MIKE LAWRENCE** (Tennessee) has Hall of Fame credentials both as a player and a writer. An original member of the Dallas Aces, he has won three world titles and eighteen national titles. Many of his books are regarded as classics of the game. His most recent book for Master Point Press was *The Complete Book on Overcalls, Second Edition* (2010).



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