

Is a 4♥/♠ opening weak or strongish?

Here's a hand from news-sheet 139: -

Dealer:	♠ 842				
North	♥ K8	West	North	East	South
Both vul	♦ 10954	-	pass	4♥ (1)	pass
	♣ Q1098	pass (2)	pass		

♠ AQ3	N	♠ K
♥ 7	W E	♥ AQJ85432
♦ AQ762	S	♦ K
♣ A653		♣ K72
	♠ J109765	
	♥ 106	
	♦ J83	
	♣ J4	

- (1) What would you open with this East hand ? An opening 4♥/♠ is normally played a pre-emptive; the same as a 3♥/♠ opening but with one more trump.
- (2) And I too would pass with this West hand as slam looks remote.

And what happened? 13 tricks were easy with the ♥K doubleton on-side.

Hand A	So an easy 6♥ missed, what went wrong? Now I agree that 4♥ is a better opening than 1♥ provided that partner knows that it may be this good.
♠ 7	But then what do you open with this Hand A?
♥ AQJ85432	Clearly you cannot make the same opening bid.
♦ 7	The answer is to play Namyats.
♣ 872	In my (and many others) opinion 4♣ and 4♦ are not really good as natural pre-emptive bids (as they go past 3NT if partner has a good hand) – so with a weak minor hand open 3♣/♦ or 5♣/♦ or a gambling 3NT.

So that leaves 4♣/♦ 'spare' and the best use of these is to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' 4♥/♠ openings. So a 4♣ opening is a good 4♥ and a 4♦ opening is a good 4♠. So playing Namyats we open the East hand with 4♣ and with Hand A with 4♥.

And here's another extract from an old new-sheet (No 106): -

Namyats

Board 12 from Friday 12th, N-S vul

West (H)	East (M)
♠ QJ987642	♠ 3
♥ 53	♥ AQJ8
♦ 3	♦ AJ8
♣ Q9	♣ AJ1063

Table A

West	North	East	South
3♠ (1)	pass	4♠ (2)	all pass

Table B

West	North	East	South
4♠ (1)	pass	pass (3)	pass

Table C

West	North	East	South
4♠ (1)	pass	6♠ (4)	all pass

So what did you open with Hand H in this week's quiz? 3♠ or 4♠? At this vulnerability I would like to open 4♠, but not if partner is going to leap off to slam. I'll explain how to avoid this problem later.

- Table A: (1) 3♠ was the most popular choice of opening bid, quite sensible if you can't differentiate between a decent 4 opening and a heap.
(2) And what did you bid at (2) with Hand M in this week's quiz? Everybody got this right. I like to think that some of them may have been influenced by my writings – I bet a number would have bid the poor 3NT a year or so ago?
- Table B: (1) At this vulnerability I agree with a 4♠ opening.
(3) An inspired pass?
- Table C: (4) This East bid slam – quite reasonable opposite most 4♠ openers.

And what happened? The ♣K was onside and so 4♠ made and 6♠ was down. But is there a more scientific approach if West wants to pre-empt at the 4 level?

Hand R	Hand S	
♠ QJ1087642	♠ AKJ109876	Consider these two hands. 4♠ is a very sensible opening with either of these hands, but how do you let partner know that Hand R is purely pre-emptive whereas Hand S would not be adverse to an advance towards slam? The answer is Namyats.
♥ K3	♥ -	
♦ 3	♦ K93	
♣ 92	♣ Q9	

Now you may recall from previous news-sheets that I do not like to open 4♣ or 4♦ with a long minor suit as it goes past 3NT. Thus the bids are spare and are used to differentiate between 'good' and 'bad' 4 of a major openings.

So with Hand R (or our West Hand H) we open 4♠ - a real heap. But with Hand S we open 4♦ - a sound 4♠ opener (4♣ is a sound 4♥). Partner then either bids 4 of the major to sign off or else investigates slam.