

HAND EVALUATION

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HIGH CARD POINTS

Aces are underrated, Queens and Jacks are overrated if they are not together. This is especially true in suit contracts. .

For opening bids, Marty Bergen recommends subtracting a point if you have 3 more Q's and J's than Aces and 10's, and vice versa. (November 2008 Bridge Bulletin)

K J x x	A 10 x x
Q J x x	K 10 x x
Q x x	A 10 9
Q J	x x

He would evaluate the first 12 HCP hand as 10 points and the second 11 HCP hand as almost 13 points.

This applies mostly to opening hands. If partner opens 1NT (15-17) and you have **QJx Qxx QJxx Qxx** don't say Bergen only counts this as 8 points and pass; bid 3NT!

Tens and Nines are better than lower cards, especially if they are together.

A 8 6 opposite **J 7 4** will rarely take more than 1 trick.
A 10 9 opposite **J 7 4** will usually take 2 tricks (3 out of 4 times).

This is especially true in NT contracts or if the suit is trumps.

Think about being in slam with no outside losers when your trump suit is

- **A 10 9 5 3** opposite **J 8 x** (makes 75% of the time)
- **A 7 6 5 3** opposite **J 8 x** (always down at least 1)

Generally honors are worth more if they are in long suits.

AKxxx	is a much better hand than	xxxxx	or even	Kxxxx
AQxx		xxxx		Axxx
xx		AK		Qx
xx		AQ		Ax

Try these hands opposite **Qxx Kxxx xxx xxx**

Honors are worth a little more if they are together, especially Queens and Jacks.

- QJx xxx** is better than **Qxx Jxx**
- opposite **Kxx xxx** the first set will take two tricks, the second usually only one.
 - opposite **xxx xxx** the first set will take a trick 75% of the time, the second only 25%

DISTRIBUTION

You will rarely play a contract where your only tricks are high cards. Usually some tricks will be taken by the x's. More distribution, more useful x's especially in suit contracts. High cards in your long suits increase the chance that the x's will become tricks.

LOSING TRICK COUNT is method of evaluating distributional hands. **It is not a bidding system**, it is one way of evaluating hands. Rules:

Losing trick Count evaluates the number of "losers" in a hand (more details at end).

- Each suit has at most 3 losers, and each A, K or Q in the suit reduces the count by one. However Qx is still 2 losers and singleton K is one loser.
- If the number of Aces and Queens (that count, not Qx) is not equal, subtract ½ loser for each extra Ace and add ½ loser for each extra Queen.
- Honor cards that are not used to reduce losers are "extras"

<p>A x x x x evaluates 1 trick less than A Q x x x</p> <p>A x x x</p> <p>Q x</p> <p>Q x</p> <p>(12 HCP, 7 "losers")</p>	<p>A Q x x x</p> <p>A Q x x</p> <p>x x</p> <p>x x</p> <p>(12 HCP, 6 "losers")</p>
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Ways to use Losing trick Count:

- Open 6 loser hands at the 1 level
- Limit raises are usually 8 loser hands

Some "10 point" hands:

AQxxxx xx Kxxx x (6 losers)

- Open 1 spade, not 2 spades

Axxxxx AQxx xx x (5 ½ losers)

- Open 1 spade; accept a 4 card limit raise with your 10 HCP.

Axxxxx AQxxx xx void (4 ½ losers)

- Open 1 spade. If partner makes a 4 card limit raise you should think about slam.

NO GUARANTEES. Sometimes you will get too high.

SOURCE OF TRICKS

Hands with a fit and a source of tricks can make games or slams even if the high card points are lacking:

xx xxx AKxxxx xx

- Bid 3NT over partner's 1NT opening (you have a "fit" since partner cannot have a singleton diamond).

Axxx x KQJxxx xx

- If partner opens 1 spade, this could easily make 6S opposite a good balanced 13 count (KQxxx xxx Ax Axx)

HAND EVALUATION DURING THE AUCTION

Always reevaluate your hand during the auction, based upon both your partner's bid and the opponent's bids. Queens and Jacks aren't worth much opposite partner's short suits but they are opposite his long suits.

Qx Qxx Kxxx A109x

(you)
1S Pass 1NT(1) Pass
2H Pass 2NT(2) Pass
3H(3) ??

(1) Forcing (2) Invitational (3) Not forcing

This is a clear 4H bid. Compare with:

Ax Kxx Qxxx Q109x

On the same auction you should pass 3 hearts. The 2 Queens have very little value.

AKxx Qxxx xxx xx

Partner opens 1NT (15-17), you bid 2C and partner bids A) 2H B) 2S.

- A) Bid 4H. The AK of spades and the Q of hearts are definitely working.
- B) 3S is probably enough. The heart Q may or may not be working.

Watch this hand change!

Kxx Axx xxxx KJx

(you)

1H P 1NT 2C
P P ??

Partner opens 1 heart vulnerable vs. non-vulnerable, and you bid Forcing 1NT intending to make a 3 card limit raise. However, the next hand bids 2 clubs over 1NT. **This is no longer a 3H bid.** It is probably best now to just bid 2H (or 2NT or double if you feel adventurous):

- The clubs are almost worthless.
- If you are missing the spade Ace it is probably with the 2C bidder.
- If hearts don't break (more likely with the 2C bid), they are probably on the wrong side.

Another auction:

Kxx Axx xxxx KJx

(you)

1H P 1NT 2D
P 3D ??

This hand just kept getting better during the auction. Partner should not have more than 1 diamond and all his cards should be working. This is probably going to make 4H.

THE 30 POINT DECK

The hand above is a good example of the "30 point deck" idea. If your side has nothing in one suit you are effectively playing with a 30 point deck. In this case if partner has nothing in diamonds, even opposite a minimum hand you have 23-24 of the remaining 30 points (not counting diamonds). The opponents will rarely be able to get more than 2 tricks with their remaining 6-7 points.

Another 30 Point Deck example:

Ax AKxxx QJx xxx

You open 1 heart and partner makes a splinter bid in clubs showing an opening hand, 4 trumps and a singleton or void in clubs.

This is almost a guarantee to make 6 hearts and might even make 7 if partner is void in clubs. Here you are again playing with a 30 point deck and need to take the remaining 12 tricks with at least 27 of the remaining 30 points.

WHEN YOU HAVE ALREADY LIMITED YOUR HAND

When you have already limited your hand you must evaluate it within those limits. From a Bobby Wolfe column in the Bridge Bulletin:

10 x x x
K 10 9 x x
x
x x x

(you)
3D X P 3H
P 3S P ??

This is an excellent hand given that you are limited by bidding only 3 hearts originally. Wolfe recommended bidding 4 diamonds, showing great hand for spades on the bidding, with a diamond control.

Let's give you a better hand:

Axx xx AQJxx KQx

(you)
1NT P 2H P
2S P 3NT P
??

You couldn't make a "super accept" of the 2H transfer with only 3 trumps, but this is really a maximum within the limits of the bidding. Bid 4D, which should be a potential source of tricks.

Partner might have: **KQxxx Axx Kxx xx**

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- WHY ARE YOU BIDDING?

The value of your hand clearly depends upon why you are bidding. Usually you are bidding to find the best contract. However there are other reasons for bidding:

- Lead Direction

-Pre-Emptive Value

- VULNERABILITY

Very few players really look at vulnerability when bidding. The biggest danger of opening marginal hands vulnerable is going down 200 not doubled in a part score hand. Partner has a right to expect full values vulnerable.

- CAN I SHOW THIS HAND LATER?

Another consideration on marginal hands is whether you can show the hand later in the auction.

If you are opening a suit you want led this might tip the balance towards bidding:

xx KJxx Qxxx KQx Pass in any seat

xx Qxxx KQJx Kxx Open 1D non-vulnerable or in 3rd seat; maybe your only chance.

xx x AQxxx Kxxxx

Pass in 1st or 2nd seat. You might be able to bid NT later to show this hand. Opening 1D does not take up much room. Light openings are best in the majors, where they take up some room.

If the auction proceeds 1H P 1S, bid 1NT **** This shows both minors ****

If the auction proceeds 1H P 2H, bid 2NT. This is fairly safe since they have a fit.

If the auction proceeds 1S P 2H, *Pass*. 2NT just tells them how to play the hand.

AQxxx Kxxxx xx x

Open 1S; this takes up a whole level of bidding for the opponents and a spade lead cannot hurt.

Jxxxx KQxxx Ax x

Don't open this one 1S. You do not want a spade lead and you may be able to get in the auction later. If you do partner should be suspicious of your spade suit quality.

1D P 1NT (2D)

This shows a "Michaels" bid, and partner should be wary of leading spades

The same principles apply to overcalls:

KQ10xx xxx Qxx xx

After a 1C opening consider bidding 1S, especially if partner is a passed hand. Partner is likely to be on lead, and the 1S bid takes away some bidding room for the opponents. This is worth the risk of overbidding the hand. Maybe pass if vulnerable depending upon partner's sense of humor.

After a 1H opening, **PASS**. You are much more likely to be on lead, and the 1S takes up no room and gives the opponents some extra options, including playing 1NT.

xxx xx AK xxxxxx

P P 2S X ?

Bid 3D! Looks like they are on their way to 4H or 3NT and partner is going to be on lead. Get partner off to a good lead. Partner should know you cannot have a real 3D bid as a passed hand.

xxx xxx Kxxxxxx void

1S 2NT 4S ?

Bid 5C! When soundly doubled, go to 5D. Partner should lead a club against 5S. (You won't really get many opportunities like this).

Pre-emptive hands:

7 -2-2-2 Hands are dangerous to pre-empt:

- **xx AKxxxxx J10 xx** Consider opening this 2 hearts vulnerable
- **x AKxxxxx J109 xx** Open 3 hearts at any vulnerability

7-4-1-1 hands can have a lot of playing strength:

- **x AKxxxxx J109x x** This is usually a better 4 heart than 3 heart opening, but consider vulnerability and position

OTHER INFORMATION

Losing Trick Count Theory:

The theory of Losing Trick Count is that when you have a trump fit, the number of tricks you can take is 24 minus the number of losers in the combined hands. Thus 2 6-loser hands should produce a slam ($24-6-6 = 12$ tricks), and two 7-losers hands (most balanced 13 counts are 7 loser hands) should produce game in a major ($24-7-7 = 10$ tricks). Therefore if you have a 6-loser hand and you major is raised to 2, you should invite and partner should accept with an 8-loser hand ($24-6-8 = 10$ tricks).

Losing Trick Count has been around for about 90 years and was “re-born” by a Ron Klinger book in 1987.

Other Hand Evaluation Methods

Bergen “20 Point Rule” (“Points Schmoits”)

- If total HCP plus the length in your 2 longest suits is 20 or more, open.

ZAR Points

- Count is HCP (6421) + length of 2 longest suits + difference in length between longest and shortest suits. Bid a major suit game with 52 combined points, slam with 62 etc.

Kaplan and Rubens evaluation of weak balanced opening hands

- Devalues honors in short suits, adds for honors in long suits

These are temporary aids. Learn to evaluate hands yourself.

Other Sources

Banzai Method (“Better Balanced Bidding” by Ron Klinger and David Jackson)

- 54321 count, 10’s count as 1 (Actually 5.00, 3.97, 3.06, 1.93, .95)

- 60 HCP in the deck; 3NT = 37+ HCP, 6NT = 51+ HCP

“Modern Losing Trick Count” Ron Klinger 1987

Ted Muller’s web site: <http://tedmuller.us/Bridge/>

- This has the Kaplan Rubens evaluation and several others