

Valuation, Valuation, Valuation

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How Good is Your Hand?

- ▶ Valuation is key to bidding well.
- ▶ If you only knew the combined assets of both hands you'd know what contract to bid.
- ▶ ...Well, not quite, the opponents won't show you their cards.
- ▶ There are any number of 'calibrations' of a bridge hand; is the answer a (complex and ever-extending) list of additions and subtractions for different holdings?

How Good is Your Hand?

No – you'll be pleased to hear – the key is using the right tools – but properly.

Valuation one...

- ▶ **High Card Points:** work well for no-trumps and 'no-fit' hands (where the best trump-fit is only seven cards).

Valuation two...

- ▶ **Losing Tricks:** work well when you have a 9-card fit and pretty good for 8- and 10-card fits.

Valuation three...

- ▶ **Total Tricks:** work well in low-level competitive situations when your best score may be a minus.

High Card Points

- ▶ A = 4
K = 3
Q = 2
J = 1

- ▶ But it's a bit more complicated than that. What does it actually mean? We are measuring the quality of a bridge hand in units but what, exactly, is one HCP?
- ▶ The only real currency is measured in tricks; how do HCPs relate to those?

High Card Points

- ▶ High cards take tricks – but not all of them. At no-trumps an ace will be a winner but a king? Is that $\frac{3}{4}$ of a trick?
- ▶ No, not really. Those accompanied by an ace almost certainly will. Historically early valuation methods (honour tricks, quick tricks) regarded combinations of honours, rather than a score for each.

AK = 2 AQ = 1½ A, KQ, KJ10 = 1 Kx, QJx = ½

Our current simplification to the 4-3-2-1 count has obscured the concept of *honour structure*.

- ▶ If you haven't got an ace or a queen to partner your king, perhaps partner can supply one – then your king is a guaranteed trick. It is important to recognise that an element of HCP valuation is *probabilistic*.

High Card Points

- ▶ That is increasingly true of queens and jacks. Their value is even more dependent on their situation; a lone queen or jack ('quack') is liable to perish unnoticed without company.
- ▶ But a queen could find a king in partner's hand – that builds a certain trick. And a jack; with a king and a queen, that makes one trick into two.
- ▶ And lastly, if we use our honour cards to clear suits – cash winners drawing the opponents' cards – eventually our small cards become winners. Honours create tricks for low cards – eventually.
- ▶ Before we address the practical implications, let's recognise where HCPs come into their own.

High Card Points

▶ No-trumps:

1. Partnership totals of 25, 33 and 37 HCP are good indications of game, slam and grand slam in no-trumps.
2. Employing a HCP-point range for NT openings and rebids is a cornerstone of constructive bidding.

▶ Initial actions:

1. When you make an opening suit-bid you don't know where you'll end up; a minimum holding of high-cards, which can take tricks in any strain, is valuable information to partner.
2. Likewise when doubling an opponent's opening bid. Without the safety of a good suit as trumps, all-round strength in high cards is important.

▶ Competition:

1. When the opponents threaten to secure the contract, knowledge of HCP is an important indicator of 'who owns the deal'.

High Card Points

- ▶ HCPs work less well when there are trumps, shortages and long suits. Let's concentrate on improving our use in appropriate situations, no-trumps and balanced hands
- ▶ Say you have 13 HCP and a balanced hand – you're dealer, you play a weak no-trump, what do you open?
- ▶ Yes, 1NT – no points for that...
- ▶ But partner invites you to game – in no-trumps via a raise to 2NT or perhaps in a suit – do you bid it? Are all 13 HCP hands equal?

High Card Points

- ▶ Let's look at two 13 HCP hands, which is better?

▶ [A]

♠ K54
♥ AJ63
♦ K85
♣ Q72

▶ [B]

♠ K5
♥ AJ63
♦ K854
♣ Q72

High Card Points

▶ [A]	▶ [B]
♠ K54	♠ K5
♥ AJ63	♥ AJ63
♦ K85	♦ K854
♣ Q72	♣ Q72

- ▶ [B] is better than [A]
- ▶ The better distribution (with two 4-card suits and a doubleton) means [B] is more likely to develop tricks from its long suits (or to take a ruff in a suit contract other than spades).
- ▶ Note 4-3-3-3 is a particularly sterile shape to hold.

High Card Points

▶ Another two:

▶ [A]

♠ A5
♥ KJ63
♦ Q854
♣ K72

▶ [B]

♠ K5
♥ AJ63
♦ K854
♣ Q72

High Card Points

▶ [A]	▶ [B]
♠ A5	♠ K5
♥ KJ63	♥ AJ63
♦ Q854	♦ K854
♣ K72	♣ Q72

- ▶ [A] is better than [B]
- ▶ The only difference between the two hands is the location of the **primary** (A or K) and **secondary honours** (Q and J). Other things being equal, we would like our secondary (or minor) honours in our (partnership's) long suits to help build slower winners and our primary honours in shorter suits where they will usually still take fast tricks.

High Card Points

- ▶ Keeping with those two, consider them opposite the same hand in a contract of 4♥

- ▶ [A]

♠ A5

♥ KJ63

♦ Q854

♣ K72

♠ 84

♥ Q9542

♦ A1093

♣ A5

- ▶ We would expect to lose only a spade, a heart and one diamond (how?) so 4♥ should make

- ▶ [B]

♠ K5

♥ AJ63

♦ K854

♣ Q72

♠ 84

♥ Q9542

♦ A1093

♣ A5

- ▶ Hmm... Now we want the ♠K to score to avoid losing two tricks there and there's still a diamond, a club and perhaps a heart...

High Card Points

▶ Now you're getting the hang of it:

▶ [A]

♠ A5

♥ KJ63

♦ Q854

♣ K72

▶ [B]

♠ A5

♥ KJ63

♦ KQ54

♣ 872

High Card Points

▶ [A]	▶ [B]
♠ A5	♠ A5
♥ KJ63	♥ KJ63
♦ Q854	♦ KQ54
♣ K72	♣ 872

- ▶ [B] is better than [A]
- ▶ **Honour structure** is critical in a hand. We would like our high cards to be located in our (partnership's) longest suits to help build tricks there. Conversely, short-suit honour holdings should be downgraded or (almost) entirely discounted e.g. QJ doubleton, K singleton.

High Card Points

► And two more:

► [A]

♠ A5
♥ KJ63
♦ KQ54
♣ 872

► [B]

♠ A5
♥ KJ63
♦ KQ104
♣ 1092

High Card Points

▶ [A]	▶ [B]
♠ A5	♠ A5
♥ KJ63	♥ KJ63
♦ KQ54	♦ KQ104
♣ 872	♣ 1092

- ▶ [B] is better than [A]
- ▶ **Suit texture** is as important as honour structure. Intermediate spot cards (8s and 9s) and tens (assigned no HCP value) bolster high cards and create powerful trick-taking combinations, allowing finesses to be repeated. AJ10, KQ109, KJ10, Q109 etc. are all undervalued in terms of HCP. With appropriate honour structure and location of primary/secondary honours, hands become far stronger than simple HCP counts suggests.

High Card Points

▶ A final pair:

▶ [A]

♠ A5

♥ A1093

♦ AJ104

♣ 1092

▶ [B]

♠ A5

♥ KJ63

♦ KQ104

♣ 1092

High Card Points

▶ [A]	▶ [B]
♠ A5	♠ A5
♥ A1093	♥ KJ63
♦ AJ104	♦ KQ104
♣ 872	♣ 1092

- ▶ [A] is better than [B]
- ▶ The HCP scale is only approximate: aces are undervalued, queens and jacks overvalued. Some go as far as counting $4\frac{1}{2}$ HCP for an ace and a little less than standard for minor honours.

High Card Points

- ▶ You may have spotted we have carried the better hand forward each time. Now we'll put the hand we started with next to the last winner.

- ▶ [First]

♠ K54

♥ AJ63

♦ K85

♣ Q72

♠ 86

♥ K8742

♦ Q96

♣ KJ3

- ▶ There's a club, two diamonds and spade to lose for sure – that's four. Half the time we can add a second spade. If we're unlucky, perhaps a heart as well. 2♥ is quite enough.

- ▶ [Last]

♠ A5

♥ A1093

♦ AJ104

♣ 1092

♠ 86

♥ K8742

♦ Q96

♣ KJ3

- ▶ A (likely) spade and a club loser for certain but our aces, honour structure and texture give excellent chances of avoiding diamond and heart losers. We might escape a second club some of the time too. Perhaps we won't bid 4♥ but ten tricks is a lively possibility.

High Card Points

- ▶ Are all 13 HCP hands equal?
- ▶ No. That much is obvious; we should consider
 - **Distribution** is important, even on balanced hands; 4-3-3-3 bad, 4-4-3-2 better, 5-3-3-2 best
 - **Primary honours** (A/K) are better in short suits, **secondary honours** (Q/J) should have cards for company
 - **Honour structure**; they are all better *together*
 - **Suit texture**; the more tens and nines we have the better – and again, even tens and nines are stronger in combination
 - **Aces** are really valuable, more so than their 4 HCP suggests
- ▶ Are we any closer to knowing what we are measuring?

High Card Points

▶ [A]	▶ [B]	▶ [C]	▶ [D]
♠ AJ54	♠ QJ54	♠ K54	♠ 54
♥ K1092	♥ QJ52	♥ K1092	♥ J102
♦ QJ2	♦ QJ2	♦ K82	♦ K82
♣ QJ	♣ KJ	♣ K95	♣ AK1092

▶ Introductory quiz: which is the weakest? Which is the strongest?

▶ [A] 14 HCP = 12.10 KNR*

▶ [B] 13 HCP = 9.35

▶ [C] 12 HCP = 12.05

▶ [D] 11 HCP = 13.00

* <http://www.jeff-goldsmith.org/cgi-bin/knr.cgi>

High Card Points

- ▶ What have we got then? The point count for honour cards reflects their role in:
 - ▶ Taking tricks
 - ▶ Building tricks for other honour cards
 - ▶ Turning small cards into winners (either by getting the lead back [control] or getting rid of the opponent's cards [clearance])

High Card Points

- ▶ What should we do with this knowledge?
- ▶ Count your points with a pinch of salt: HCPs are a first-measure of how good your hand is. Remember where they are useful: no-trumps, no-fit and no-destination (yet).
- ▶ Don't be afraid to upgrade or downgrade your no-trump descriptions – whether openings, overcalls, rebids or acceptances.
- ▶ Don't be afraid of low doubletons and unprotected suits; very often the best hands within a given HCP range are the ones with low doubletons – because the honours are together and in the long suits.
- ▶ Abandon useless conventions such as 1NT – 2♠ to show a balanced 11 HCP. Use your new-found skill and judgement to decide whether you're worth an invite or not (would it surprise you to learn many pairs don't play an invite at all...?).

High Card Points

▶ Partner opens 1NT [12-14] what do you respond?

▶ [A]

♠ Ax

♥ xxx

♦ AQ10xx

♣ J9x

▶ [B]

♠ Ax

♥ 109x

♦ AQxxxx

♣ 10x

▶ [C]

♠ J10x

♥ Ax

♦ KQ10x

♣ J109x

▶ [D]

♠ Kx

♥ Kx

♦ AJ10xx

♣ 1098x

▶ [E]

♠ xxx

♥ xx

♦ AK10xxx

♣ Kx

High Card Points

- ▶ 3NT on all of them...
- ▶ “Since responder evaluates aggressively to avoid putting needless pressure on opener, the partnership will reach some 24-point games. There will generally be a 5-card suit, a wealth of intermediate cards, good honour structure, and/or some less obvious plus features. These hands [the previous five] would raise 1NT to 3NT, for better or worse.”

Eric Kokish

Surviving and Thriving in the Weak No-Trump World

High Card Points

- ▶ So, a high-card-point is a probabilistic measure of trick-taking. A numerical approximation of expectation in a complex game environment [gulp].
- ▶ And that's even before we start to think about how things might change as more information comes to light, that is, as the auction progresses.
- ▶ Can $A=4$, $K=3$... account for all that?

High Card Points

- ▶ So far we've only addressed static valuation, that is based solely on the 13 cards in front of us. But valuation is *plastic*, it changes as new information comes to light.
- ▶ This idea – or at least the awareness and the term – isn't new. Ely Culbertson first coined it.

Culbertson Discloses New Plastic Valuation Method

By TOM O'NEIL.

New York, Dec. 21 (AP).—Ely Culbertson disclosed today his new method of "plastic valuation" in Contract Bridge, which he says will enable thousands of ordinary players to graduate into the expert class.

A mental picture of a composite hand of partners is the highlight of the Culbertson system of 1933.

To make the picture a player counts winners or losers in his hand, whichever is simpler. For an opening bid with an ordinary hand, it is easier to count winners. On the basis of the requirements for an opening bid partner counts the losses in his hand. The rest of the auction gives further inferences for revision of winners and losers so that a player can visualize what would be the strongest combination of 13 cards out of 26.

Used By Master Players.

Culbertson describes this as the method used by all master players. He retains the mathematical methods of honor count and playing trick count as a fundamental basis for bids and the composite picture.

A forcing takeout is recommended on a three-card suit to the ace, if need be, when a hand contains 3½ honor tricks. Hitherto a suit had to be strictly biddable to be used for such a purpose.

Here is Culbertson's own description of the four no trump convention, designed to take advantage of the increased bonus for grand slams:

"If over a forcing takeout or a jump raise in a suit one of the two partners bids four no trump, he is showing two aces and a king of a suit which has already been bid by either himself or his partner. If he does not have this holding he may have three aces, but the bid must mean one of these two things. If the response is now five no trump, this shows the two missing aces. If the response is an im-

A no trump overcall of a pre-emptive bid of four of a suit is forcing.

An opening bid of one no trump vulnerable requires four honor tricks.

A total of six honor tricks, instead of 5½, is now regarded as the safety margin for a game bid. That is, the 4-5-5½ count has been changed to 4-5-6.

These are now regarded as minimum biddable suits: A J 3 2 and K Q 3 2 in major and a 4 3 2 in minors; Q J 10 2 in either majors or minors. These are rebiddable suits: A K 10 3 2, A Q J 3 2 and A J 9 4 3 2.

Stronger requirements for opening the bidding in third and fourth positions are retained.

VARIED XMAS PROGRAMS FOR BOYERTOWN CHURCH

Boyertown, Dec. 21 (Special).—Christmas exercises in St. John's Lutheran Church. Rev. David F. Longacre, pastor, will be conducted according to the following schedule:

Tonight at 7:30, Senior Luther League. The topic will be "Christmas in Picture, Song and Story;" leader, Miss Elizabeth Haas; speaker, Mrs. Effenger M. Erb; solo, Mrs. Harvey D. Ritter; prayer and reading, Mrs. Walter Davidheiser and Mrs. George A. Kunkle. A Christmas cantata, "Glad Tidings of Great Joy," will be presented by high school students, under the direction of Music Supervisor Miss Ida M. Reinert.

Thursday, Dec. 22, at 7:30 p. m., the Intermediate Luther League will present the topic, "Christmas Around the World." A Christmas program will be presented by the following: Helen Schmoyer, Helen Schaeffer, June Rose, Arlene Shroy, Linwood Stauffer.

MODEST MAIDENS



"I asked him if I was the girl of his dreams, and he said he's got insomnia!"

CHOIR CHRISTMAS PARTY
The members of the First Reformed

ITALIAN GROUP ELECTS
G. G. Chinnice was elected president

High Card Points

- ▶ To be fair to Ely, he was trying to put into words the thought processes of 'expert' players. The ones used to direct constructive auctions to reach high-level contracts, either by discovering aspects of partner's hand or showing one's own.
- ▶ It wasn't easy then and, though bridge terminology has become better established, it's not easy now.
- ▶ There is one powerful idea I do want to share.

High Card Points

▶ Say partner opens 1♠; which hand is better?

▶ [A]

♠ Axx

♥ Kxx

♦ xxxx

♣ xxx

▶ [B]

♠ Kxx

♥ Axx

♦ xxxx

♣ xxx

High Card Points

▶ [A]	▶ [B]
♠ Axx	♠ Kxx
♥ Kxx	♥ Axx
♦ xxxxx	♦ xxxxx
♣ xx	♣ xx

- ▶ [B] is better than [A]
- ▶ The ♠K is a proven value. Aces are (pretty much) guaranteed to be useful too. In [A] the value of the ♥K is unknown – partner may have a singleton or length but no heart honours; the king could be worth nothing at all
- ▶ This principle is known as 'in and out valuation'.

High Card Points

▶ What we can we do with this?

▶ Well, we can *try*...

▶ ♠ KQ976
♥ 3
♦ KQ84
♣ AJ6

After 1♠ – 2♠; can we make game? The sensible approach is to bid another suit as a *game-try*.

▶ 3♣ – why?

▶ Responder will value ♦A or ♥A, after all, they're aces! You want her to look favourably upon the ♣K and ♣Q. And if she is unsure, she can make a return game-try of 3♦ or 3♥ (accept first decline, the second).

High Card Points

- ▶ To be honest, game-tries are not worth very much. Very often it's better to blast game and hope to make it – you give less away. Also, if you come to rest at the 3-level, you may go off anyway.
- ▶ But slam-tries, they are much more useful because, below game, we are not any higher than we want to be. Say we beef-up the last hand and this time see a limit raise, $1\spadesuit - 3\spadesuit$...
- ▶ \spadesuit KQJ76
 \heartsuit 3
 \diamondsuit AQ8
 \clubsuit AJ64
- ▶ Can we make slam? Now $4\clubsuit$ says opener is interested but can't take control (with 4NT for example).

High Card Points

▶ ♠ KQJ76
♥ 3
♦ AQ8
♣ AJ64

▶ ♠ A1052
♥ AQJ4
♦ 63
♣ 953

Game is safe but you wouldn't want to be higher. Over 4♣ responder has such a bad holding in clubs that she should just bid 4♠. The danger with 4♥ is that opener might expect help in clubs.

▶ ♠ KQJ76
♥ 3
♦ AQ8
♣ AJ64

▶ ♠ 10532
♥ A654
♦ K3
♣ K53

Now responder can bid 4♦ (useful clubs, useful diamond) with a clear conscience. Though it is unlikely responder doesn't have an ace to accept the try, opener should proceed with 4NT and bid the slam.

High Card Points

- ▶ We have gradually moved from considering HCP and balanced hands into the zone of shapely hands.
- ▶ That means it's time for...



The Losing Trick Count

- ▶ The Losing Trick Count (LTC) is a valuation method that measures features that are important in trump contracts.
 1. Aces are even more valuable
 2. ...Kings about the same
 3. ...Queens get demoted
 4. ...Jacks aren't worth anything at all
 5. Shortages have value. Either for control (you ruff in) or extra tricks (you score trumps separately).

The Losing Trick Count

- ▶ Making the LTC work is initially a bit counter-intuitive. That's because you are counting losers – and you want the absence of those (winners).
- ▶ Thus MORE losers is BAD.
- ▶ FEWER losers is GOOD.
- ▶ So when we do our counting, a low number is better than a high number.

The Losing Trick Count

- ▶ A caveat: the LTC count of 'losers' is a measure of how good a hand is – don't take it literally...
- ▶ Just as 12 HCP isn't guaranteed to take 12/40 of the 13 tricks – about 4 – the count of losing tricks isn't the number of tricks that hand will lose (and win the remainder).
- ▶ One last health warning: the LTC is a measure for FIT hands. That means the partnership must have at least an 8-card fit. Even then, it works best when both players know of a 9-card fit. The LTC doesn't help much before a fit comes to light, for example, whether to open the bidding.

The Losing Trick Count

- ▶ How it works – it's really very simple.
- ▶ A 'loser' – in the LTC sense – is a card that is not an ace, king or queen.
- ▶ It is the count of small cards that won't take tricks. There will be a maximum of 12 in one of these:

♠ XXX
♥ XXX
♦ XXXX
♣ XXX

- ▶ But it's not all bad news for the poor card-holder: you can't have losers where you don't have length and there are only three that can be A/K/Q.

♠ XXXXX
♥ XXXXX
♦ X
♣ XX

Has 9 losers. But only once a FIT has been found (in hearts or spades).

The Losing Trick Count

▶ How many losers?

♠ KJ976

♥ 43

♦ AQ8

♣ K76



♠ KJ976

♥ 43

♦ AQ8

♣ K76

1. The ♠J is a loser – the LTC doesn't count jacks.
2. There are only two in hearts – this is the way the LTC gives value to shortages (here the doubleton). Effectively LTC gives the doubleton a king-value.
3. This 13-count is an average opening hand. Wider experience shows that that 7 losers is typical for an average opener.

The Losing Trick Count

- ▶ That a regular opener is a 7-loser hand is crucial to using the LTC. Just as a 16-count is a 'king better' (one trick) than an opening measured in HCP and there worth a jump rebid, a 6-loser hand is also trick better. In an LTC world, this will almost always be support.



- ▶ What is the equivalent for a responder?
- ▶ 9 Losers

The Losing Trick Count

► Are these hands equal?

► [A]
♠ Ax
♥ Axx
♦ Axxx
♣ Axxx

► [B]
♠ Kx
♥ Kxx
♦ Kxxx
♣ Kxxx

► [C]
♠ Qx
♥ Qxx
♦ Qxxx
♣ Qxxx

- Clearly not, some sort of adjustment is needed
- A king is the standard non-loser but aces are better and queens are worse – each by $\frac{1}{2}$ loser. So if the hand contains more aces than queens, subtract a $\frac{1}{2}$ loser, if more queens than aces, add $\frac{1}{2}$ loser.
- That means [B] with just kings needs no adjustment and is 7 losers. [A] is 7 less $4 \times \frac{1}{2} = 5$ losers and [C] 7 plus $4 \times \frac{1}{2} = 9$ losers. In practice, with mixture of aces and queens, the adjustment is less dramatic.

The Losing Trick Count

- ▶ Let's practice...

♠ 976

♥ 10

♦ AKJ876

♣ KQ6

♠ 976

♥ 10

♦ AKJ876

♣ KQ6

- ▶ Raw count, 6 losers, any adjustments?
- ▶ No. The hand has the same number of aces as queens so 6 losers it is. Six is a 'trick better than an opening hand' (with diamonds agreed, or a black suit if partner has five or more) but after 1♦ – 1♥; we haven't got a 3♦ rebid.

The Losing Trick Count

▶ Again...

♠ 976
♥ KJ87
♦ 6
♣ K9652



♠ 976
♥ KJ87
♦ 6
♣ K9652

- ▶ 8 losers, no A/Q adjustments.
- ▶ Let's say partner opens 1♥, what do you respond?
- ▶ 3♥. As 9 losers is a minimum responding hand, this is a 'trick better than minimum' and is a raise to three.

The Losing Trick Count

- ▶ Another raise

♠ 97
♥ KJ875
♦ 6
♣ K9652



♠ 97
♥ KJ875
♦ 6
♣ K9652

- ▶ Now we have 7 losers – but only 7 HCP.
- ▶ Should we raise 1♥ to 4♥?
- ▶ The world says yes. But there is a problem.

The Losing Trick Count

► And another

♠ A97
♥ KJ75
♦ K6
♣ Q652



♠ A97
♥ KJ75
♦ K6
♣ Q652

- This is another 7-losers hand – but with 13 HCP.
- Should we raise 1♥ to 4♥?
- No, we can't bid 4♥ with both – it will badly hurt our slam bidding. What we need is a way of distinguishing our game-raises based on distribution from those with high-card strength and the same loser-count.

The Losing Trick Count

- ▶ More warnings.

♠ K54
♥ AJ63
♦ K85
♣ Q72

- ▶ That's a regular 13-count (we saw it earlier) but it is an 8-loser hand. It would be obtuse to pass! But when it comes to supporting partner's hearts, it is a poor hand.
- ▶ Because most at the club play a weak NT that conveniently isolates most 'LTC-poor' hands. Just because partner opens doesn't mean they promise a 7-loser hand.

The Losing Trick Count

- ▶ The same for responder.

♠ 54
♥ QJ63
♦ Q854
♣ Q72

- ▶ That's 9½ losers in support of hearts, diamonds or clubs. It is even worse if partner has spades but this is a routine 1NT response to 1♠. After all, this might be a simple HCP transaction where we simply want to play in 3NT opposite opener's 18+ HCPs.
- ▶ Just because partner responds doesn't mean they promise a 9-loser hand – they might be considerably worse.

The Losing Trick Count

- ▶ What should we do with this knowledge?
- ▶ This is an introduction to LTC but actually, there isn't much more. Useful valuation methods gain from simplicity so don't over-complicate.
- ▶ Use LTC for support bids: count properly, using the A/Q adjustment, and raise according to your 'base' as opener (7) or responder (9). If you have nothing extra, support at the minimum level, if you're better – fewer losers – jump.
- ▶ If you can't get your partners on board (because they're not here!) then refer to the LTC in your own close decisions in whatever you use now. The earlier 3♥ raise on 7 HCP might be too much for some HCP-counters.
- ▶ Seriously think about how more aggressive raises influence your bidding:
 1. Use 1major – 4-major as a pre-emptive raise
 2. Use splinter-bids for slam-orientated support hands with shortage
 3. Use 2NT as a strong balanced raise after 1-major opening
 4. And, if you're up for it, consider similar in competition
 5. Perhaps easier than that, adopt 5-card majors...

The Third Way

- ▶ Both HCPs and the LTC are constructive measures. They work best when our side's combined assets is above half – meaning our side can make something. Use them to gauge game and slam. They are less appropriate in knowing how high to bid when our side's best score is a minus.
- ▶ Fortunately judging this is refreshingly simple: it depends on how many trumps the two sides have.
- ▶ This became a cause célèbre in the 1990s as 'The LAW' – capitals as per Larry Cohen's book publicising the relationship. In fact, Jean-René Vernes did the statistical leg-work back in the 1950s.

The Law of Total Tricks

- ▶ The sum of the number of tricks EW can take in their best fit plus the tricks NS can make in theirs equals the sum of the lengths of those best-fits.
- ▶ Thus if EW have an 8-card fit in hearts and NS an 8-card fit in spades then there are $8+8=16$ tricks available. If the high cards are approximately even, NS should bid $2\spadesuit$. They will either make it or, if they go down, EW can make $3\heartsuit$.
- ▶ In the same example, if EW think they can make $4\heartsuit$ NS should NOT sacrifice in $4\spadesuit$ – they simply don't have enough trumps. When the law holds, if EW are making 10 tricks, NS have only six and are down four; even non-vulnerable, $4\spadesuit^*-4$ is -800
- ▶ In practice (without peeking) the size of opponent's trump-fit is uncertain. However our side's combined length is easier to estimate. The length of that fit provides the *security level*.

The Law of Total Tricks

- ▶ When we are bidding obstructively we shouldn't bid any higher than the length of our combined trump-fit.
- ▶ We may break that rule when the vulnerability encourages sacrificing or we think we are unlikely to be doubled.
- ▶ Lastly we should get to our security level – the 'level of the fit' as quickly as possible.
- ▶ How do we know when partner is bidding to put the opponents off and when she is bidding to make?
- ▶ That's the rub – and for the future...

Credits

- ▶ Thanks to Jonathan Green for the HCP A/B hands. Suffolk player and retired bridge teacher, he wrote an article for the county magazine *Table Talk* about valuation. I lifted the hands and added commentary.
- ▶ *The Secrets of Winning Bridge* by Jeff Rubens is a classic (though not strictly for beginners) and delves into the valuation problem (chapters 1-4). 'In and out' valuation comes from there as do ideas about the point-count being a measure addressing attributes of trick-scoring and trick-building. Likewise, simple LTC with the A/Q correction.
- ▶ *Surviving and Thriving in the Weak No-Trump World* by Eric O Kokish appeared intermittently in *International Popular Bridge Monthly* in 1987-90. A rare devotee of the weak no-trump, EOK's system is freely available on the Internet.
- ▶ *To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks* by Larry Cohen is a good read. His follow-up books over-elaborated but the first is good. Also see 'I Fought The Law Of Total Tricks' by Anders Wirgren and Mike Lawrence for balance.