

IN THE last issue of *English Bridge* we saw how it was possible to gather in evidence offered by the defenders' bidding (or lack of it) and so place missing high cards. This time we consider the shape of defenders' hands. In some ways this is more reliable than counting points. Defenders have been known to open a 12-14 point 1NT with 15 points. (Sorry partner, I miscounted.) However lots of clues are provided by the irrefutable fact that each defender started with exactly thirteen cards!

In the first example your 2NT opening bid is raised to 3NT. North leads the ♠2 to South's ♠Q. You win with the ♠A and cash the ♠A K, but North discards the ♥2 on the second round. Can you now make four diamond tricks?

♠ A J	♠ 10 3
♥ A J 10 7	♥ 9 5
♦ Q 4 3 2	♦ A J 9 6
♣ A K Q	♣ 8 7 5 4 3

North led from a four-card spade suit (remember the ♠2 lead). He also has only one club. Surely he would not have chosen to lead a spade from ♠Kxxx if he had a five-card suit, so his shape seems to be 4-4-4-1. South could have the ♦K singleton, but your most promising play assumes his singleton is the ♦10, 8 or 7.

Start by leading the ♦Q. North must cover with the ♦K, otherwise your task is easy. When you take this with the ♦A South follows suit with the ♦8 and the diamonds remain as follows:

West: 4 3 2	North: 10 7 5	East: J 9 6
-------------	---------------	-------------

Return to your hand with the ♣Q and lead the ♦2, finessing the ♦6 when North follows with the ♦5. As expected South shows out and it is now a simple matter to cross to your hand again with the ♥A for a final diamond finesse and your ninth trick.

Sometimes counting shape can pay astonishing dividends. The next hand appears to rest entirely on smoking out the heart position, but counting points will get you nowhere this time:

♠ K Q 6 5 4 3	♠ A J 10 9 7
♥ J 8	♥ K 10 2
♦ K 7	♦ A 8 3
♣ K J 2	♣ A Q

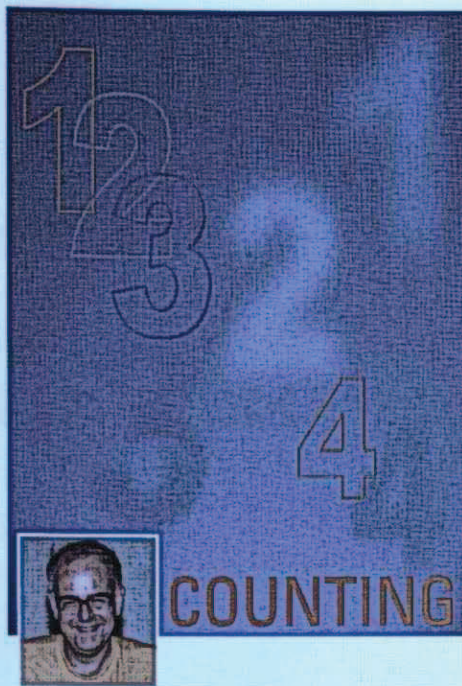
West	North	East	South
1♠	4NT	6♣	No

North's non-vulnerable 4NT shows a minor two-suiter.

After this short but sharp bidding sequence North leads the ♦Q, won by your ♦K. You draw one round of trumps, both defenders following suit. What next?

You might as well find out what you can so continue with the ♠AQ, overtaking with your ♠K and cashing the ♠J. What do you discard from dummy?

Discard a heart, or even trump it, but if you throw a seemingly useless diamond you will regret it! South discards a heart on the third club.



Andrew Kambites shows how counting improves your bridge...

Now cross to dummy with the ♦A and lead the ♦8. South follows suit to the ♦A but lets go another heart on the ♦8. You trump it and....?

WRONG. Count North's shape! He started with one spade and six cards in each minor suit. There is no room for him to have a heart, so your heart finesse is doomed to failure. However that is only the bad news! The good news is that if instead of ruffing the ♦8 you discard a heart North will win and can only concede a ruff and discard, allowing you to ruff in dummy and jettison the other heart in your hand.

Discovery play, which we met in the previous edition when counting points, is also possible when counting shape. In the next example, if you are in 7♦ you cannot afford to mess about with the side suits in case you run into a ruff. But you can improve on this in 7NT. The lead is the ♠J.

♠ A K Q	♠ 8 5
♥ 8 3	♥ A K Q J
♦ A 10 9 6 3	♦ K J 4 2
♣ A 8 7	♣ K Q 5

Start by cashing the ♠AKQ, ♥AKQJ and ♣AKQ. It will be surprising if you learn nothing that will help you decide who (if anyone) is likely to hold diamond length. Indeed it may well be a certainty!

South discards a heart on the third round of spades, North follows to two hearts and then discards a spade and North follows to just two rounds of clubs. If North started with 6 spades, 2 hearts and 2 clubs he must have exactly 3 diamonds. Cash your ♦A and finesse dummy's ♦J with complete confidence. All you need is the determination to seek out as much evidence as possible, and then to realise that if you discover how many cards a defender has in three suits

you know for certain how many he has in the fourth.

When you play in a suit contract it is often easy to draw trumps in order to unearth opponents' shape in the side suits. Sometimes it is even possible to discover the trump distribution with complete safety. In the final example you arrive in an excellent slam.

♠ A	♠ 7 6 4 2
♥ J 10 9 6 5	♥ A 8 7 4 3
♦ K Q 10	♦ A J 5 2
♣ A K Q J	♣ None

West	North	East	South
1♥	4♠	5♥	No
6♥			

North leads the ♠K and you are not particularly surprised when South ruffs your ♠A with the ♥Q. South returns the ♦9 and you are relieved when your ♦K takes the trick unmolested. Can you now find out who holds the ♥K?

Perhaps you will be surprised to be told that the contract is now a certainty unless South started with ♥KQ2. Start by cashing your four clubs, discarding diamonds. If North ruffs you overruff and your contract is lay-down. In fact North follows to two clubs and then discards two spades. Now cash diamonds until North shows out. Again North cannot ruff without revealing all. By now you know that North started with 8 spades, 2 clubs and a singleton diamond. He must have the remaining 2 hearts, so run the ♥J.

PAIRS QUIZ by Bob Rowlands

Dealer East. Love All			
W	N	E	S
-	-	4♣ ⁽¹⁾	?

⁽¹⁾ Showing a strong 4♥ opening

What do you bid with:

- a) ♠KQ103 ♥None ♦AQ92 ♣AK743
 b) ♠KJ83 ♥6 ♦AJ72 ♣Q1093
 c) ♠AJ5 ♥J93 ♦KQ4 ♣AQ106

Answers:

a) 4♠ - Showing a strong take-out or hearts. Doubling 4♣ first, whatever the meaning of such a double, would only confuse the issue.
 b) Double - It is a useful agreement that this shows a weak take-out double of their real suit. This allows partner to compete if he wishes but without the risks entailed by doubling 4♥.
 c) No Bid - Since take-out hands either double or cue-bid, it follows that strong balanced hands pass at their first turn and then double when the opponents correct their real suit. Partner will of course realise that you are unlikely to have a strong holding in their suit, so he can remove the double if he wishes.

Overheard...

Husband: "Why didn't you open the bidding 1♦?"

Wife: "Because you had already opened 3♠."

From Norfolk CBA's Talking Bridge