

## Counting as a defender

Counting is one of the very important things that you do at bridge.

- You first learned about counting your points in order to bid and rebid.
- Next you learned to count your tricks, and possible tricks, to see where you could develop tricks, by trumping losers, after the opening bid is made.
- Next to be a good bridge player, you must start counting points in opponents hands during the play of the hand. Did an opponent have a chance to open the bidding and they did not? If so, then they have less than opening count.
- Did they overcall? This too takes a minimum amount of points; usually opponents will not overcall with less than about 8 points.

Counting Declarer's points and lengths is KEY to good defence. Towards this end, once dummy becomes visible STOP and count how many points PARTNER possibly has. Subtract your HCPs, Dummy's and the points that Declarer has shown from 40. This will give you a good idea of how much partner can contribute to your joint effort. It is easy if Declarer has bid NTs.

Dummy:

♠Qxx  
♥K10x  
♦Kxxx  
♣Jxx

You:

♠KJx  
♥Qxx  
♦xxx  
♣Q10xx

After 1NT-2NT//3NT you ask and determine that 1NT showed 12-14 points. To give you the best chance, assume 13 HCPs in the Declaring hand. By subtracting 13, 9 (Dummy's HCPs) and 8 (your HCPs) from 40 we can infer that partner has 10 HCPs (+ or - 1). And once Declarer shows a max he now has 14 (or a very good 13, say with a 5-card suit).

Similarly, after 1NT-2NT//3NT you ask and determine that 1NT was a strong NT (showed 15-17 points). To give you the best chance, assume 16 HCPs in the Declaring hand. By subtracting 16, 9 (Dummy's HCPs) and 8 (your HCPs) from 40 we can infer that partner has 7 HCPs.

### Counting Declarer's distribution

There are five ways of counting declarer's distribution:

1. The bidding

The bidding tells you more about the makeup of declarer's hand than anything else. Listen, infer and know the opposition's system to make the correct inferences. A simple example:

Even playing 4-card majors a suit opening will usually be a 5-card suit, so assume this until you know differently.

You are West and hear:

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1♠    |
|      | 1NT   |      | 2♥    |
|      | P     |      |       |

You can assume South is 5-4 in the majors.

If the bidding were to go:

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1♠    |
|      | 2♣    |      | 2♥    |
|      | 2NT   |      | 3♣    |
|      | 3♥    |      | 4♥    |

We know South is probably: 5413 (delayed support for clubs). What is the ♥ fit? It is only a 4-3 fit. If North had 4-card support he would have raised immediately. And if South had 5 hearts he would have bid 3♥ instead of 3♣. So you know how many trumps Pard holds, and when you see Dummy you will know Pard's distribution. Counting distribution is easy isn't it?

Some auctions are not so simple:

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1♠    |
|      | 1NT   |      | 2♠    |
|      |       |      |       |

Pard has skipped over all other suits so doesn't have another 4-card suit - simple.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1♠    |
|      | 2♥    |      | 2♠    |
|      | P     |      |       |

South hasn't been able to bid another suit (holding less than a game-force hand) – more difficult.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1♠    |
|      | 2♣    |      | 2♥    |
|      | 2NT   |      | 3♠    |
|      | 4♠    |      |       |

South now has 6 spades and 4 hearts

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1♥    |
|      | 1♠    |      | 2♦    |
|      | 2NT   |      | 3♦    |

South is probably 5-5 in the red suits, but maybe 6-5 (Hs & Ds) but could be 5-6 (♥s & ♦s) in a hand not strong enough to reverse.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1♦    |
|      | 1♠    |      | 2♥    |
|      | 2NT   |      | 3♥    |

South's hand is strong (reverse) and MUST have 6♦s & 5♥s. If he was 5-5 he would have opened 1♥.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1♥    |
|      | 1♠    |      | 3♥    |

South must have at least a 6-card ♥ suit, never 5.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1♥    |
|      | 2♣    |      | 2NT   |
|      | 3NT   |      |       |

Opener may or may not have 5 Hs, he is probably 5332. North certainly doesn't have 3-card support.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1♥    |
|      | 2♣    |      | 2NT   |
|      | 3♥    |      | 3NT   |

Opener has a 4-card ♥ suit, and North has 3-card support.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1♠    |
|      | 1NT   |      | 3♥    |
|      | 3NT   |      |       |

Assume South is 5-4 in the majors.

Example 1:

Dealer East, vul v vul

♠ 76  
♥ KQ73  
♦ A72  
♣ 9752

♠ 864  
♥ A1064  
♦ QJ98  
♣ Q10

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1♠    |
|      | 1NT   |      | 4♠    |
|      |       |      |       |

South must have an excellent 6-card suit or 7-card suit, and must be strong.

You lead the ♦Q, small from Dummy and the king from Pard. He returns a ♦. How are the Ds split? Pard must have a doubleton, so Declarer has 10xxx. Declarer wins and takes three top trumps, Pard discarding the ♥9 on the third round. So Declarer started with ♠AKQJxx. Pard cannot be showing attitude in Hs as you can see the top three cards, so he must be helping you to know the distribution of the hand. He must be showing 2 or 4 hearts (signalling hi-low). If Pard has two hearts then declarer must have three. Therefore he would be: 6340 and Pard would own ♣AKJxxxx. Instead of playing a ♦ back he would have tried a top club. Therefore: Pard has 4 hearts and Declarer is: 6142. Therefore when Declarer leads a heart you must go up with the ace, and exit with a club. You eventually win two more diamonds.

If Declarer had eliminated the clubs and led a ♥ you would have had to lead into his ♦s

Example 2: Dealer North, NV v NV

♠ 762  
 ♥ QJ105  
 ♦ K72  
 ♣ KQ3

♠ AK54  
 ♥ 64  
 ♦ 853  
 ♣ J1065

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      | P     |      | 1♥    |
|      | 3♥    |      | 4♥    |

West leads ♦Q. Declarer wins with the king in Dummy and runs the ♥Q to partner's king. Partner returns the ♦10 to Declarer's ace. A ♥ to the jack, partner playing the nine, therefore he doesn't have the 8.

Declarer ruffs a ♦. What is Declarer's red suit holding? Now a ♣A, and a ♣ to the Dummy. On Dummy's last top ♣ Declarer discards a spade. Now Declarer leads a spade from Dummy. What is your plan?

Declarer's distribution is 4522. So Declarer has three spades left, leaving a doubleton for Pard. If Declarer has the ♠Q then he will always win that trick. But if Pard has queen doubleton you must duck, and hope. Declarer originally held ♠J10xx.

Other counting methods available:

2. Partner's leads
3. Partner's signals
4. The fall of the cards
5. Common sense

### ***Logic for counting***

This can be divided into two categories:

1. The bidding has shown Partner has a certain card or shape

♠ A8  
 ♥ J952  
 ♦ Q93  
 ♣ AKQ6

♠ 973  
 ♥ Q106  
 ♦ KJ102  
 ♣ 942

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      | 1♣    |      | 2NT   |
|      | 3NT   |      |       |

2NT = 11-12

Partner leads the ♠Q taken by Dummy's ace. Declarer cashes ♥AK and a third one to your ♥Q. Do you return Pard's suit?

East should work out that:

Pard doesn't have the ♠K (Declarer has it). Declarer also has shown ♥AK so who has the ♦A? Pard does because you have seen enough high cards from South. So you lead a small ♦ and Pard obliges you by winning with the ace and returning the suit – yes.

2. I cannot be sure Pard has a certain card or shape, but I can tell that unless he has it there is no possibility of beating the contract!

Say you are defending 3NT, you can work out that Declarer has 8 top tricks, and if he has the ♦A then he will make his contract; therefore, defend as if Pard has it:

|          |         |
|----------|---------|
| ♠ J3     |         |
| ♥ AK3    |         |
| ♦ QJ1042 |         |
| ♣ A82    |         |
|          | ♠ Q1042 |
|          | ♥ 742   |
|          | ♦ K8    |
|          | ♣ J543  |

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1NT   |
|      | 3NT   |      |       |

North/South are playing a Weak 1NT (12-14).

West leads ♥Q, ducked. Pard continues with the jack and Dummy wins. ♦2 is played from Dummy. With 6 HCPs in your hand and 15 in Dummy, Pard + Declarer have 19 HCPs. Pard has shown ♥QJ so has another honour, what is it? You need to work out that Declarer's hand is:

♠AK5 ♥95 ♦9763 ♣KQ76 or more important that Pard has the ♦A and has heart tricks. You must go up with the ♦K and knock out the ♥ stopper before Pard gets in with the ♦A.

You may think this is difficult to jump up with the king, but if Declarer had the ace would he not try running the queen?

Sometimes this logic can be reversed. You might work out that Declarer has no chance unless he has the ♦A in this hand.

**Responder becomes declarer**

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| 1♣   |       | 1♠   |       |
| 2♣   |       | 2♥   |       |

East is known to be 5♠ + 4♥ (or 5-5)

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| 1♣   |       | 1♠   |       |
| 2♣   |       | 3♠   |       |

East will have 6 or 7-card suit.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| 1♣   |       | 1♠   |       |
| 2♣   |       | 2♥   |       |
| 2NT  |       | 3♣   |       |
| 3♠   |       | 4♠   |       |

East is 5413 and Declarer is playing in a 5-2 fit.

With two or three 4-card suits Responder should bid the lower suit first to ensure of finding a fit.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| 1♣   |       | 1♥   |       |
| 2♥   |       | 2NT  |       |
| 3NT  |       |      |       |

East MAY have 4♠s but will NOT have 4♦s otherwise would have bid 1♦. And will not have 5♥s.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| 1♦   |       | 1♠   |       |
| 2♠   |       | 2NT  |       |
| 3NT  |       |      |       |

East has 4♠s and will not have 4♥s as he would have bid them at his 1<sup>st</sup> opportunity.

West will only have a 3-card ♠ suit.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| 1♠   |       | 2♥   |       |
| 2♠   |       | 2NT  |       |
| 3NT  |       |      |       |

East obviously has a 5-card ♥ suit. However a bid of 2m, over 1♠, would not guarantee 5.

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| 1♠   |       | 1NT  |       |

This bucket bid can hold many different hand types from 5 ♥s in a weak hand, or 6-card minor in a weak hand, to a balanced weak hand.

Example 3:

|         |         |
|---------|---------|
| ♠ 53    |         |
| ♥ K1086 |         |
| ♦ K753  |         |
| ♣ AJ2   |         |
|         | ♠ 42    |
|         | ♥ J42   |
|         | ♦ AJ94  |
|         | ♣ 10543 |

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1♠    |
|      | 2NT   |      | 3♥    |
|      | 4♥    |      |       |

N/S are **not** playing Jacoby: West leads ♦2. What is Declarer's distribution?

5413 since West as probably led from a 4-card suit. It is possible to be from Hxx. Declarer tries the K but you win and return a ♦. Declarer follows and Pard wins. So, South has a 5422 distribution.

### Tips for defenders

Always give partner count and attitude signals so he can count the hand, too. Don't worry about Declarer counting your signals, it is best to have an understanding with Pard, than worry about Declarer *overhearing*. However some messages help declarer more than partner, so it's often best to withhold a signal if you have ALL the high cards. But, **beware of falsecards**, especially those that won't fool declarer, but may mislead partner. If declarer cashes an ace-king and you hold QJ2, follow with the two, then the jack. If you play the queen on the second round, declarer will know he's still missing the jack, but partner won't. Partner will think Q2 was your original holding, and this may cause him to miscount other suits.

**Watch partner's signals carefully**, but don't read a deep meaning into every card. Recognize the situations where:

- Partner may have decided it's wise not to give you (and declarer) an honest count signal.
- He doesn't hold the right spot cards to give an accurate signal.
- He may see the defence differently than you do - for example, you want him to show attitude, but he may have reason to believe you wanted a suit-preference signal.

**Be aware that declarer will falsecard.** Trust partner's signals rather than declarer's bidding and carding.



**Find a time to add up what you know.** Think while declarer or partner is thinking or when it's your lead. If possible, avoid long thought when it's your turn to follow suit. Make your decisions early and be ready to follow smoothly when declarer or dummy leads. Plan plan plan early rather than late.

Here's a defensive quiz where you can use the opening lead and the auction to come up with the winning play. The Opposition are playing a strong 1NT (15-17) so the 1NT rebid shows 12-14.

*Dummy (RHO):*

♠K9765  
♥Q10  
♦J95  
♣J62

*You:*

♠J1082  
♥A65  
♦A742  
♣A3

| LHO | RHO  |
|-----|------|
| 1♦  | 1♠   |
| 1NT | Pass |

Partner leads the ♣4 (fourth-best leads) to your ♣A and declarer's ♣5. It's often right to return partner's suit, but you'll change your mind if you stop to add up the evidence. At this point, you should be able to deduce the exact suit distribution in declarer's and partner's hands. Give it a try, then check the answer below.

The club spots tell you that partner and declarer each have four clubs, so declarer must have four diamonds for his 1♦ opener (with five diamonds and four clubs, he would have rebid 2♣ instead of 1NT). You can also infer that partner and declarer each have exactly four hearts, and that partner's hearts are probably weak (he surely would have led hearts if he held a five-card suit or four to an honour).

Declarer therefore has one spade and partner has three spades with at least one honour. Double check your theory by adding up the high-card points – you and dummy have a combined 20 points and declarer's 1NT rebid showed 12-14 points, so there's room in partner's hand for 6-8 points.

You must shift to a low spade at trick two. Partner, who holds ♠A43 ♥8432 ♦83 ♣K974, wins the ♠A and returns a spade. You eventually win three spades, two red aces and the ♣AK for down one. Declarer's hand is ♠Q ♥KJ97 ♦KQ106 ♣Q1085. Not an easy hand to work through but it shows how useful counting is for the defence.

### **Count, Count, Count**

**Count everything**, all the time, without fail: cards, points, distribution, suits and tricks.

**It's not difficult.** Don't be hesitant because it seems difficult; it isn't. 13 is really not a big number.

Tricks often take 4 cards of a suit out at once, so it goes 13 - 9 - 5 left outstanding. You start play looking at 26 of the 52 cards, so how much do you really have to count to determine where the rest are? It isn't counting that turns beginners off; it is remembering what they have counted and using the information for defence.

There are exactly 40 high card points in every hand. When dummy comes down, you can see 26 cards and you heard all the bidding, both by opponent and partner. You're only concerned with a total of 16 top cards: 4 Aces, Kings, Queens and Jacks, and some of them will be in dummy and in your hand so you can see them before the first trick is played.

You know the HCP ranges for openings, responses, pre-empts, etc. All you need to do is some very simple arithmetic to place HCPs in the hidden hands. When you've done that, you can begin to visualize what cards might be in the hidden hands. After a couple of tricks, some of the missing high cards will have been played, so where could the rest be?

You learn to count everything with concentration - with better concentration comes better results and more enjoyment of the game. Be confident; you can do it.

### ***Counting distribution***

Figure out the probable distribution before play starts:

"Declarer bid two suits - at least 9 cards in those two suits - and therefore has at most 4 cards in the other two suits" ... or "Declarer rebid his Spades and raised Clubs, showing 9 black cards and at most 4 red ones. If declarer is 2 - 2 in the red suits, then my partner has . . ." etc.

### ***Counting tricks***

"Declarer has 5 apparent trump tricks plus the A, K of Diamonds on the board in a 4 ♥ contract. Where are the defensive tricks going to come from? Declarer has a good 5 card Club suit in the dummy, so how many losers can he ruff if he gets it set up? What cards am I going to discard as he runs it?"

"Declarer took this bid from us, figuring that down one for minus 100 is better than minus 140 for our Three Spade contract. How many tricks do we need to beat him 200 and where can they be?"

### ***Knowing the high cards in each suit***

Remember it... and the next highest ... and the next.

When four cards of a suit go on each trick, it's not hard to remember what's high.

### ***Counting the number of cards played in each suit***

"Hearts and Spades have gone around once. Diamonds have gone twice and there is still 2 in Dummy; partner has given me a high-low, showing 2, I have two, so declarer still has one.

I can lead a Diamond for partner to ruff and we can set this contract!"

## Claiming

It speeds up play when all the players count, as many hands can be claimed. This lets everyone play more bridge in a shorter time. Good players will expect you to allow claims when there is no further play to a hand, and they will expect you to claim when you have a clear picture of the remaining tricks. It's common bridge courtesy and is allowed for in the Rules of Bridge. But claim correctly:

|   |
|---|
| taking out trumps and discarding this loser on that winner etc. |
|---|

If you feel uncomfortable when opponents claim because you won't spend the mental energy to concentrate and count, then you are not concentrating enough.

## Counting HCP

In the 1<sup>st</sup> 90 seconds before Declarer plays to trick 1, the Defenders should be counting. Let us focus on our counting skills and see what we can do on every hand, whether we declare or defend. As we learn, we need practice before the skill becomes 2<sup>nd</sup> nature. During our practice phase we might find erratic results and inaccuracy – keep going! Don't stop. The better your counting skills, the better you will be at the table.

What do we count?

Where's our data?

- High Card Points – consider the bidding
- Declarer's/Partner's shape – information gained from the bidding and lead
- Losers
- Tricks for Declarer
- Tricks for Defence
- Bidding
- Opening leads/New Suit lead
- Information from Dummy
- Defensive Signals
- The play of the hand (Discovery) – distribution from signals

Counting begins with a clear understanding of the bridge language (bidding and signals). We add judgment:

1. inferences that stand the test of time – to build our estimates.
2. Then we adjust our count as the hand progresses. This is the tough part – we have to stay focused and active for 11-12 tricks, even with a boring hand. Our goal is to help our side count what matters so we get our best result on every hand. Let's look at some examples.

Warning – counting can be exact when we are able to discover facts during play, or approximate when we make assumptions about bids and signals. Either way we are building information based on inference and deduction to guide our play. We start with a sound estimate from the bidding, dummy and opening lead, then refine the count as the play proceeds:

- Know Opponents' system. Use the bidding to create an approximate picture of the hands you don't see.

- Counting HCP: There are several sources of information to help us form a HCP count of the unseen hands. When we are declarer we look to count the opponent's hands. When we defend we are counting declarer and partner's hands.

While bidding is the most obvious source of HCP information, there are several others to consider. We can locate Honours from:

- Bidding
- What they bid and what they don't bid
- Leads
- What they lead and what they don't lead
- Information from Dummy
- HCP and Shape
- Attitude, Count or Suit Preference Signals
- What partner signals and what partner doesn't signal
- Finesses and Discovery Plays
- Find other honours safely to eliminate options
- During the bidding you should be thinking along the following lines:  
 "LHO opened so s/he has at least 12 HCP (some open on 11 or less), partner passed so s/he is unknown but I suspect less than 8 HCP. RHO responded at the 1 level so RHO has at least 6 HCP. I hold a balanced 10 HCP so partner has a most 12 HCP, but he would certainly bid with the right shape and most any 8 HCPs. My best bid is...."  
 Keep these monologues running throughout the hand.