Quick Review - Hand Evaluation

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Playing any bridge system, we all know that the value of a hand is more than just the value of its honors where A=4, K=3, Q=2, and J=1. A system where the total number of points in a deck is 40 or the 4321HCP method used by the ACBL where the average hand has 10HCP and to open a hand at the one level bid requires about 12HCP.

Aces particularly in suit contracts are worth 4.5 points not 4; however, an opener's hand without an Ace should be reduced by one full point for no aces; a similar reduction should be made for all hands with no Ks or no Qs (Opener and Partner). 10's have value, particularly in No Trump contracts, about 0.25 points and Qs and Js are overvalued.

Knowing these facts leads one to the Milton-Work hand evaluation method where we have the following: A=4.5, K=3.0, Q=1.5, J=0.75 and 10=0.25.

Using the MW values a deck also has an average of 10MW points and to open a hand at the one level requires about 12MW points where again the average hand has 10MW points.

Let's look at a simple example playing 2/1 with 1NT=15-17HCP and a balanced hand.

Hand 1: ♠KQxx ♥KJx ♦QJxx ♣AQ - YOU

Hand 2: ♠J10x ♥Qx ♦K10xx ♣J10x - PARTNER

Using the 4321HCP method you have 18HCP with a lot of Q's and J's, do you bid 1NT?

Using the MW method, you have only 16.5 points which adjusts for the Q's and J's.

Say you open the hand 1NT; for a bidding convention the ACBL allows one to bid 1NT based upon no more than +1 point above a range and no less than one point below the range with standard ranges limited to 5HCPs.

What about your partner's hand?

Using the 4321HCP method partner has 7HCP and would pass your 1NT bid.

Using the MW method partner has 7.25 points and would also pass the 1NT bid.

What happened?

Both methods are simple but ignore the value of honor doubletons, isolated honors, and distribution.

In No trump and suit contracts Queens and Jacks are worth 0.5 less that the 2 points and 1 point assigned using the 4321HCP method (e.g., 1.5 and 0.5, respectively), but Jx=0 and Qx=1. However, J10x=2.0 points or a 10 with a Q/J=+1.0 point and K10=3.5 points.

The Optimal Point Count (OPC) Method developed by Patrick Darricades, discussed in his books: (2019) "Optimal Hand Evaluation" and (2020) "Optimal Hand Evaluation in Competitive Bidding", both by Master Point Press correctly evaluates the two hands:

Hand 1 has 17.5 points and Hand 2 has 8.5 points (Qx=1+2-J10s=4 and K10=3.5) so that partner would invite game by bidding 2NT and the 3NT contract would be reached.

Considering honor doubletons and isolated honors, the evaluation of a balanced NT hands becomes straight forward after **deducting a point for flat 4333 distributions.**

Hand evaluation for suit contracts is more complicated because now one must also consider suit length and suit quality.

Points for Suit Length

5-card suit with at least QJ or K +1.0 6-card suit +2.0 but with no K/QJ = +1.0

7-card suit (or longer) 2 points for each card from the 7th onward

Finding any 8-card Fit

8-card fit +1.0 9-card fit +2.0 10-card fit +3.0

+1 for honor(s) in suits(s) with a fit when an honor value is <4 points

Dummy Points for Shortness for Partner

Number of trumps	4	3	2
Void	4	3	2
Singleton	3	2	1
Doubleton	2	1	0

Distribution Lack of Fit Points for Opener

Void +4.0 2 doubleton +2.0 One doubleton 0.0

Quality Suit Points

3-honors in 6-card suit +2 In 5-card suit +1

Let's look at another example playing 2/1.

Hand 3: ♠AQxx ♥xxx ♦QJxx ♣KJ - YOU

Hand 4: ♠Jxxxx ♥KQxx ♦Qxx ♣x – PARTNER

Using the 4321HCP method you have 15HCP and Partner has 8HCP or 8MW points.

The bidding went: Hand 3 opened 1♦ and Hand 4 (partner) bid 1♠. Hand 4 next bid 3♠ and Hand 4 passed!

What went wrong?

Partner did not re-evaluate his hand for Fit and Shortness!

Partner has 6 "fit points in spades" + 7HCP + 2 points for the doubleton or 15 fit points, NOT 8, and after partner's response of 3♠ should have bid 4♠.

This was hand 20 played on Monday 05/26/2025 at my table where the pair sitting N-S bid as about and made 4♠.

North asked his partner why she did you not bid game? Her response was "I only had 8HCP"!

The pair ignored "fit points" as did 6 out of 13 other pairs who also played the hand on Monday by not bidding 4♠.

CONCLUSION

While pairs may use the 4321HCP or the MW point count for an initial estimate of hand value in NT and suit contracts after considering the value of 10's with associated honors, suit length and suit quality.

After an initial suit bid, partner must next consider fit points and distribution.

After partner bids, opener must next add lack of fit values and shortness to his initial estimate of hand value.

Example

North holds the hand: ♠AK1097 ♥KJ109 ♦6 ♣1087

South hand: ♠42 ♥AQ74 ♦A7532 ♣63

North has 11HCP and South has 10HCP. As North would you open the hand?

North has 11HCP + 1 Length point in spades + 1 for Quality spades suit + 1 for 2 10's = 14pts

And South 10HCP + 1L in diamonds – 1 for doubleton spades honor = 10pts

The bidding goes 1♠ - 1NT; 2♥

Now north has a fit in hearts and adds 2 fit points +1 more for honor Q of hearts or has 14+2+1=17pts and bids 4♥.

The deal follows: We were E-W, and the hand was passed out at our table.

		♠	AK1097		
		♥	KJ109		
		♦	6		
		♣	1087		
♠	53		N	♠	QJ86
♥	865		W E	♥	32
♦	KQ10		S	♦	J984
♣	QJ542			♣	AK9
		♠	42		
		♥	AQ74		
		♦	A7532		
		♣	63		

Instead of bidding 1NT some may use the **2/1 Rule of 14**

Which states: One may respond with a new suit if the HCP + the length of the longest suit is at least 14.

Hence, some may bid 2♥ and not 1NT using the Rule of 14!

Question – Suppose opener has bid a major and partner has a choice between making a 2/1 bid in a minor or supporting the major, what do you do?

Example

South (dealer) holds the hand: ♠73 ♥AKQ74 ♦32 ♣K942

Partner North holds: ♠Q5 ♥8653 ♦A10975 ♣A6

The bidding went:

S	W	N	S
1♥	Pass	2♦	2♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

The deal follows:

		♠	Q5		
		♥	8653		
		♦	A10975		
		♣	A5		
♠	9864	N		♠	AKJ102
♥	92	W	E	♥	J10
♦	KQ			♦	J864
♣	J10753	S		♣	Q8
		♠	73		
		♥	AKQ74		
		♦	32		
		♣	K942		

Defending 3♠, South cashed the ♥AK then switched to ♦3. North won the ♦A, cashed ♣A and led the ♣K, but declarer won South's ♦2 exit in dummy. He played the ♠AK, felling North's ♣Q and claimed 8 tricks for down one!

N-S missed their 4♥ game! What went wrong?

Rather than making a 2/1 bid, North must show support by bidding 3♥ with 10HCP +1Lpoint + 2fit points + 1 for two doubletons or 14 fit points and partner would bid 4♥ with 14 points = 12HCP+1L +1 quality heart suit.

Tip always support partner when you know you have at least an eight-card fit.

Example

You hold ♠AK1032 ♥Q87 ♦AJ4 ♣J6

Partner holds: ♠J64 ♥4♦KQ652 ♣K532

Partner opens 1♠, what do you bid?

Using only HCP some may evaluate the hand as only 9HCP and bid 2♠. Looking at "fit points" you must add 1pt for 3-card support + 2 points for the singleton + 1L point in diamonds for a total of 13 fit points and bid 4♠.

RESPONSE'S BIDDING FIT POINTS LINE

0----------6	7----------9	10----------12	13++++++++
Weak	Moderate	Invitational	Game Force

OPENER'S REBID FIT LINE

12----------15	16----------18	19----------22	23++++++++
Weak	Moderate	Game	Slam Zone

Example

When opening major many pairs use the jump bid in the major to show an invitational hand with 4-card support and 10-12 points and partner is allowed to Pass.

The disadvantage of the jump bid is that partner has no way to ask the question: Do you have 10-11 points or 12 points? It is always a guess!

While many bidding conventions have been suggested to solve this problem (e.g., Reverse Bergen or Bergen), not playing this hand evaluation with fit points is critical.

You hold ♠J32 ♥AJ532 ♦7 ♣AQ65

Partner holds: ♠85♥KQ64♦A763 ♣J32

You have 12HCP and Partner has 10HCP, the bidding goes 1♥ - 3♥ - ? Now what using HCP only?

You hold 2 aces=9pts + Q=2.0pts with Ace +J with Ace=1.0pt + Jxx= 0.5 pts + 1Lpt= 13.5pts.

Partner has A=4.5 +Jxx=0.5+KQ=5 + doubleton=2pts+ 4H's with KQ=3fit pts= 15 total fit pts!

Partner bid 4♥.

If partner had bid only 3♥ (mistake), opener would next add 2 pts to his 13.5pts for the singleton diamond and save partner by bidding 4♥.

Final Example

Hand 1 ♠Q107 ♥KJ72 ♦A10976 ♣5

Hand 2 ♠AK42 ♥10963 ♦Q ♣AK2

Hand 1 has 10HCP and hand 2 has 16HCP.

Do you open Hand 1? Yes, you have 4.5 for Ace +5 for KQ +2 for Q10+ 1L= 12.5pts

Bid 1♦

Hand 2 has 9 for 2aces +6 for 2Kings + 0.5 for Q = 15.5pts

Hand 2 responds 1♥

Hand 1 now adds 3 for singleton club + 3 for heart fit = 12.5+ 6 =18.5 pts; bids 3♥

Hand 2 next bids 4♠ or kickback for hearts

Hand 1 responds 5♣ = 1 keycard

Hand 2 bids 5♦= queen ask for hearts

Hand 1 with ♥Q bids 6♥

The deal follows where North is dealer!

		♠	9		
		♥	AQ		
		♦	J853		
		♣	1098743		
♠	AK42		N W E S	♠	Q107
♥	109653			♥	KJ72
♦	Q			♦	A10976
♣	AK2			♣	5
		♠	J8653		
		♥	84		
		♦	K42		
		♣	QJ6		

The hand was played on Tuesday June 10, 2025, in the villages (Hand 21) and not one E-W pair bid the slam!

Results follow we were sitting N-S

1	6	4♥	W	♠9	6	480	4.50	7.50
2	8	4♥	W	♠9	5	450	10.50	1.50
3	10	4♥	W	♣10	6	480	4.50	7.50
4	12	4♥	W	♠9	6	480	4.50	7.50
5	14	4♥	W	♣10	6	480	4.50	7.50
6	1	4♥	E	♠3	6	480	4.50	7.50
7	3	4♥	W	♣10	6	480	4.50	7.50
8	5	3♥	E	♣Q	5	200	12.00	0.00
9	7	4♥	W	♠9	6	480	4.50	7.50
10	9	4♥	W	♠9	6	480	4.50	7.50
11	11	4♥	E	♣10	6	480	4.50	7.50
14	2	4♥	W	♣10	6	480	4.50	7.50
15	4	4♥	W	♠7	5	450	10.50	1.50

For more examples and a quick overview with additional detail, follow the link:

https://www.bridgewebs.com/ocala/Can%20you%20Open.pdf