Hand Valuation aka Jeff Rubens
By Neil H. Timm

Jeff Rubens in his book (1969) "The Secrets of Winning Bridge" states that hand valuation is difficult since it must be able to assess the trick-taking potential of your hand in combination with partner's which depends upon (1) Control cards (Aces and Kings), (2) Fit with Partner, (3) Unguarded (isolated) and associated honors and (4) Intermediate honors where the information needed depends upon the high card combinations you hold, your suit distribution, and the bidding.

In general, your very first bid is a "blind" evaluation of the trick-taking potential of your hand since there is no useful information from the bidding. He goes on to show that the 4-3-2-1-point count method is only valid with balanced notrump hands and that the Losing Trick Count (LTC) method is only valid for two balanced hands with an equal number of As and Qs; otherwise, he recommends with more A's than Qs to **subtract** 0.5 for each extra Ace and to **add** 0.5 loser for each extra Queen (ALTC).

In the first three chapters of his book (pp.1-35), he discusses (1) The Principles of Honors with Length, (2) The Principle of Concentrated Strength (i.e., isolated, and associated honors), and (3) The Principle of In - And - Out Valuation.

His first principle states that **other things being equal, honors in long suits are more valuable than honors in short suits. The longer the suit in which the honor is located the more valuable the honor.** To evaluate the strength of Aces and Kings, he considers four hands:

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4
♠AKxxx	♠AKxxx	♠AKxxx	♠Kxxxx
♥AKxxx	♥Axxxx	♥xxxxx	♥xxxxx
♦xx	♦Kx	♦Kx	♦AK
♣x	♣x	♣A	♣A

Using then 4-3-2-1-point count method each hand has 14HCP; except for the location of honors the hands have identical HCPs with its LTC=5-losers or his ALTC= 4-losers.

He assumes partners have the same hand: ♠Qxx ♥Qxx ♦Qxx ♣Qxxx with 8HCPs, LTC=8-losers or ALTC= 10-losers.

Note LTC Tricks=24-13=11-tricks or ALTC=24-14=10-tricks for the hands.

He asks what is the real trick taking potential of each hand and what do we observe?

We see that the hands are constructed so that honors are moved from long suits to short suits which reduces the trick taking potential of the hands from game at about 50% for hand (1), 30% for hand (2), 12% for hand (3), and 6% for hand (4) per Rubens!

He goes on to state that honors in long suits are more valuable than honors in short suits and suggests that the bidding may go: 1♠ 2♠ ?

With hand (1) opener would clearly next bid 2♥ and with hand (4) opener would **pass.** With hands (2) and (3) openers may next 3♠, respectively (invitational) and not show their weak 5-card heart suit aka Rubens.

However, Jeff Rubens does not quantify his observations! Let me try to do that.

Rules for Honors and Length (Optimal Point Count - OPC)

A=4.5 pts and -1 for singleton honor

Deduct -1 for a hand with no ace, opener only, -1 with no K and -1 with no Q

3-Ks +1 and 4 Ks +2

10 with Q/J = 1pt   10 with a K = 0.5 pt   J10x = 2 pts   Jx=0   J10 = 1

Honor values are K=3 Q=1.5 and J=0.5 (isolated) but full value 2/1pts (associated)

5-card suit with QJ or K minimum add +1 point; 6-card +2.

7+card add 2 pts for each card from 7th onward

Doubleton honors AQ, AK, KQ, KJ subtract -1 point

Qx and Jx doubleton -0.5 pts so with Jx = 0 and Qx = 1

Appling these rules we have the following valuations for each opening hand.

Hand (1) - 16 pts; 2 aces 9, 2 Kings + 6, Length +2 and -1 no Q

Hand (2) - 16 pts; 2 Aces 9, 2 Kings +6; Length +2 and -1 no Q

Hand (3) -14 pts; 2 Aces 7.5, 2 Kings +6; Length +1 and -1 no Q

Hand (4) - 13 pts; King +3, Length +1, AK=7.5-1=6.5, Ace Singleton=3.5 and -1 no Q

Looking next at Dummy Fit Points we must ADD

8-card fit +1 point   9-card fit +2pts   10-card fit +3pts

+1 for honors in a suit with a fit when **total honor combination** values sum to < 4 pts

Distribution Trump Fit Points

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

Distribution Points

Void: 4 pts **Singleton:** 2 pts **One/Two Doubletons**: 0/1 pt

4333 Distribution: -1 pt **Singleton NT Contract**: -1 pt

Semi-Fit Points with doubletons

+1 pt for Kx/Qx/J10 opposite partners 5-card suit

After bidding the total **HLDF Quality Points** between the two hands are:

Hand (1) = 28.0 Hand (2) = 26.0 Hand (3) = 22.0 Hand (4) = 21.0

The probability for Game for Hand (1) is about 60%; Hand (2) is about 40% and for Hands 3 & 4 it is less than 20% -consistent with Ruben's recommendation; but quantified where OPC where games are in the window 26, **27,** 28 with Optimal Total Fit Points.

What have we also learned from Jeff Rubens' example hands?

Concentrated honors in long suit gives a hand Offensive Power, as do short suits in in unbalanced hands, while honors distributed over several suits located in doubletons and tripletons gives a hand Defensive Power. The Offensive to Defensive Ratio (ODR) is better with Hand 1 than with Hand 4.

His second principle states that **other things being equal, honors in combination (i.e., in the same suit) are more valuable than isolated honors (i.e., in different suits).**

To illustrate he uses two hands

Hand (1) ♠xxx ♥xxx♦AK10x ♣KQx

Hand (2) ♠Kxx ♥Qxx♦Axxx ♣K10x

Both hands have 12HCPs; however, he would only open hand (1) while he considers Hand (2) second a clear PASS in the first and second seats.

Why? Honors together are more valuable than isolated honors!

Using the Optimal Point Count Method, we have the following valuations.

Hand (1) has 13 pts (4.5+3.0 +0.5 +3+2) and Hand (2) has 12.5 pts (3+1.5+4.5+3.5).

His third principle states that **other things being equal, it is better to have your secondary honors in partner suit(s) with your primary honors outside.**

To illustrate he uses three hands in support of a 1♠ bid which he ranks from high to low:

Hand (1) ♠KQx ♥Axx♦xxx ♣xxxx

Hand (2) ♠AQx ♥Kxx♦xxx ♣xxxx

Hand (3) ♠AKx ♥Qxx♦xxx ♣xxxx

Using Optimal Point Count Method, the fit valuations are:

Hand (1) = 11.5 fit pts (KQ=5+1 for 8-card fit +4.5 for A)

Hand (2) = 10.5 fit pts (AQ=6.5+1 8-card fit + 3 for K)

Hand (3) = 10 fit pts (AK=7.5+1 8-card fit +1.5 for Q)

The ranking is consistent with that suggested by Rubens.

He goes on to consider two more hands in support of spades where you hold

Hand (3) ♠Ax ♥KQ10x♦Kx ♣K109x

Hand (4) ♠Kx ♥AJ10x♦QJx ♣A109x

The bidding goes:	Partner	You
	1♠	2NT
	3♦	3NT
	4♠	?

Partner has 6-spades and 4-diamonds.

Using his principle of In and Out Value he states you must PASS with Hand (3) because it has primary "in" values and secondary "out" values whereas Hand (4) has secondary "in" values and primary "out" values – both hands have 15HCP, balanced suit distribution, exactly 2-spades with sold stoppers in the unbid suits.

For hand (4) he recommends a cue bid 5♣ followed by another 5♥ cue bid to suggest slam interest. Using Optimal Point count Method, we have their fit values:

Hand (3) = 17 fit pts and Hand (4) = 18 fit pts

Rubens does not give in his book the structure of opener's hand for the bid of 1♠ bid.