Hand Evaluation Part II - Shape

Let's think about individual suits. Any suit with at least 4 cards in it has a chance of having a length trick. That's why we only introduce suits of length 4+ when trying to find trump.

Idea #1 - **Only suits of length at least 4 are given consideration for length points**

What are those chances? Well assuming there's no fit
Chance of 1 length trick

You Have	Partner has 3	Partner Has 2	Partner Has 1	Partner Has 0
4	36%	0%	0%	0%
5	n/a	84%	62%	33%
6	n/a	n/a	98%	92%
7	n/a	n/a	n/a	100%

So adding a card to a suit greatly increases your chances of getting a length trick. Of course you need to be able to lead it enough times to enjoy it.

Still I think we can agree to Idea #2 - **The longer your long suit is, the more valuable it is.**

And I'm going to propose idea #3 - **More length in one suit is better than the same length in 2 suits**.
That's a bit of a mouthful so let's put these ideas in practice with the 3 balanced shapes.

Intuitively I think we would rank them as follows:

1. 5332
2. 4432
3. 4333

Why is that? It's because the 5 card suit relative to the 4 card suit is more powerful than the 4 card suits are to the 3 card suits. So having two 4 card suits is not a good as having one 5 card suit.
Obviously having only one 4 card suit is worse than having 2 of them.

But can we put a number to that? Here's my proposal:

1. Consider 4432 to be average
2. Add 0.5 HCP for the 5332 shape
3. Subtract 1 HCP for the 4333 shape

Unbalanced hands and the rule of 20

We've all heard about the rule of 20, which says take your 2 longest suits and add the lengths to your HCP and consider opening if it's at least 20. This is functionally equivalent to this idea:
Take the lengths of your 2 longest suits and subtract 8 from them. Add that # of HCP.

So with 9 cards in 2 suits, rule of 20 says 20-9=11 HCP needed to open. This is the same as 9-8=1, add 1 HCP and open all 12 counts.

The problem with this concept is that it's only considering 2 suits. And it's not differentiating them. For example the rule of 20 says the following shapes are the same strength:
5422, 5431 & 5440.
Similarly so are the following shapes:
55xx, 64xx, 73xx, 82xx

So in order to improve on the rule of 20, we need to consider both the difference in length between the 2 longest suits and the distribution of the other 2 suits.

One suited hands

Applying idea #1, we will not use the rule of 20 for single suit hands.
Instead we will add length points and then consider the distribution of the other 3 suits.
Length points are 1 for a 6 card suit, 2 for a 7 card suit. For 8 card suits and longer, Points are rarely the right way to think about the hands. For starters I would add 4 for an 8 card suit, but you really need to start thinking about tricks.
Now let's think about your other 3 suits. Since you don't have a second 4 card suit your patterns are limited:

Six card suits	6322	6331	
Seven card suits	7222	7321	7330
Eight card suits	8221	8311	8320

I propose idea # 4 **the more balanced the non 4 card suits are, the worse your hand.**

How to put that into points?
I would say
6322 is average
6331 is above average and gets a 1 point upgrade
7222 is below average and gets a half a point downgrade.
7321 is average
7330 is above average and gets a 1 point upgrade
8221 is average
8311 is above average and gets a 1 point upgrade
8320 is very above average and gets a 2 point upgrade
Again, using points for 8 card suits is probably not a good idea.

2 suited hands

For 2 suited hands let's start with the alternative formation of the rule of 20. Adding points for lengths greater than 8.
Let's further adjust that by the length difference between the 2 longest suits,

Length Differential	Adjustment
0	0
1	0
2	0.5
3	1

Now let's consider the 2 shorter suits

Length Differential	Adjustment
0	0
1	0
2	0.5
3	1

Hey that's the same!

Basically, if the length differential is 0 or 1, you are the most balanced you can be for that shape. If the length differential is 2 or 3 you are more unbalanced and deserve an upgrade.

3 Suited hands
There are only 2 shapes here, 4441 and 5440. 4441 suffers from the lack of any 5 card suit. It's probably equivalent to the 4432 hand if you are playing NT and should get a full point added if you find a fit.
The 5440 hand doesn't suffer from those drawbacks. Add one point for the 54 length and then 1-1.5 points for the 4-0 split in the short suits and you get an upgrade of 2 to 2.5 points
I would say 2 points until you find a fit and 3 points once you do if the fit is in your 5 card suit, and 4 points if the fit is in your 4 card suit.

Now all of these point estimates are guidelines and you should play with them to your satisfaction. However the general ideas that more balanced=less power and that that applies both to the long suits and to the short suits should be incorporated into your evaluation.