

In-and-Out Hand Evaluation

By Jeff Rubens

I was rereading a classic book on bridge - "The Secrets Of Winning Bridge" by Jeff Rubens. There's a wealth of material in there and I encourage you to go ahead and read it if you get a chance. A subtle and powerful idea that he introduces early on is "in-and-out valuation". That is what I wish to talk to you about today.

What is this valuation? Basically the idea is honors in suits in which your partner has length are "in" and honors in suits in which your partner does not have length are "out".

"In" honors are valuable regardless of their rank.

"Out" honors are suspect unless they are the ace.

Or as he put it

"It is better to have your secondary honors in partner's suit(s) and your primary values outside."

He begins to bring this into focus by considering the following two hands

- A. ♠Kxx ♥Axx ♦xxx ♣xxx
- B. ♠Axx ♥Kxx ♦xxx ♣xxx

If your partner opens 1S then using this principle hand A is better than hand B.

We can make this even more extreme by changing it from the K to the QJ.

- C. ♠QJx ♥Axx ♦xxx ♣xxx
- D. ♠Axx ♥QJx ♦xxx ♣xxx

Given that partner has a 5 card spade suit, you could easily find only 2 or 1 card in any other suit. The fewer cards your partner has, the higher your honor needs to be in order to have likely potential use.

Getting to 25 HCP games with a fit can become easy over time. Getting to the good 23 HCP games involves the use of this technique. Game tries can be used to help partner evaluate the "in-and-out" nature of their hand.

With hand A I accept all game tries.

With Hand B I only accept if partner has some hearts

With Hand C I accept most game tries (but not ones that show a 6th spade)

With hand D I will only accept a length showing game try in hearts.

To give you some idea of the value of in vs out points, consider the following hand:

♠AKx ♥AKxx ♦xx ♣xxxx

After the auction 1C-1S-1N, your partner rebids 2H.

Another especially fruitful time to consider in and out points is after your partner makes a 2 suited bid like Michaels.

E. ♠Kxx ♥KJx ♦xxx ♣xxxx

F. ♠xxx ♥xxx ♦KQJ ♣KQJx

After 1C-2C-P,

E and F have the same shape and E has 7 HCP while F has 12. But E is far more likely to make game. Since your partner has at most 3 cards in the minors at best all of your HCP there will take 1 trick. And since RHO opened, they've got to have points somewhere and they're likely to be in the majors.