

Wastage or The Power of Honors Working Together

The three main ways we have of taking tricks in bridge are length, high cards and ruffing (i.e. shortness). Shortness is different in that we do not want honors there, since we would rather ruff to take those tricks. When these are working together these are stronger than when they are working apart. Consider:

Honors Together

♠AKQJ ♥xxx ♦xxx ♣xxx OR

♠Axxx ♥Kxx ♦Qxx ♣Jxx

Honors In length

♠AKQJxx ♥xxxx ♦xx ♣x OR

♠xxxxxx ♥AKQJ ♦xx ♣x

Honors not in shortness

♠KQxx ♥Jxxx ♦xxxx ♣A OR

♠KQxx ♥Jxxx ♦Axxx ♣x

That last one is often harder to understand intuitively, since we “know” we have no losers in the club suit if we find a fit somewhere else. How can that be “bad”? The answer is of course nuanced. It’s not bad, but it’s not as good as having it with your length.

Let’s show you with an example:

1.	♠KQ962 ♥A53 ♦2 ♣A432	2.	♠KQ962 ♥A53 ♦A ♣5432
3.	♠KQ962 ♥A53 ♦2 ♣A432	4.	♠KQ962 ♥A53 ♦A ♣5432
	♠AT73 ♥KQ7 ♦653 ♣KQ9		♠AT73 ♥KQ7 ♦653 ♣KQ9
	♠AT73 ♥KQ7 ♦KQ9 ♣876		♠AT73 ♥KQ7 ♦KQ9 ♣876

All of these have the same # of combined HCP and shapes. But your outcomes are wildly different.

In 1 you have an excellent chance of making 6 spades. So long as spades are 3-1 or clubs 3-3 you will make it, losing only the diamond.

In 2 your diamond loser has gone away, but clubs are no longer working together with that ace so you need the club finesse in order to make the contract in addition to the reasonable suit splits.

On 3 you have a diamond and 2 clubs to lose. But should manage to make 4 almost all of the time. And if you manage to find the diamond ace onside and they haven't knocked out your club ace you'll get to pitch 2 clubs on diamonds and make 5.

On 4 you start out with 3 club losers and if the 4th club gets led by East then there's a chance for a trump promotion. You'll need to guess how high to ruff in the dummy.

This does not apply just to slams. We can do a similar thing with game tries.

This time we're going to keep the North hand the same. A 17 Count with 5-4 in the majors.

♠KQ876 ♥KJ84 ♦5 ♣AK7

Consider these 9 HCP 4333 dummies for 4S:

- A. ♠AJ32 ♥Q76 ♦762 ♣Q54
- B. ♠AJ32 ♥Q76 ♦Q62 ♣854
- C. ♠AJ32 ♥762 ♦Q62 ♣Q54
- D. ♠A432 ♥762 ♦KQ2 ♣854
- E. ♠5432 ♥762 ♦AKQ ♣854

A. We have all of our HCP working together and none in our shortness so only 2 losers, the red aces

B. Changing the club queen for the diamond queen gives us another loser in clubs. If the hearts split 3-3 we can pitch it on the 13th heart, that's only a 36% chance of making 5 but 4 seems safe. Note how the diamond queen is now essentially useless.

C. If instead we change the heart queen for the diamond queen we have devalued not only the queen, but also the KJ in opener's hand. Now we have 1-3 losers in the heart suit instead of just 1. The odds still favor making 4, but it's now 25% chance of 5, and only a 75% of 4. Note the diamond queen is still useless

D. If we take both queens away and the spade jack to turn one of them into the diamond king then this hand has essentially the same chances as C. This is because the diamond KQ are no longer useless, you will be able to discard the club loser on one of them.

E. If we move all of the HCP into diamonds we now have the following:

1-3 spade losers, 1-3 heart losers and 1 club loser. We can pitch 1 loser on the extra 2 diamonds but not 2 since the long heart isn't being considered a loser right now. 4 spades is going to be tough to make and conceivably (though unlikely) you are going down in 3.