

THE POWER OF TENS

17 Oct 2017

Let's assume that we are playing a 15-17 1NT opening.

The questions are: *What do you need to invite game in No Trump? And what do you need to bid 3NT directly?*

Some might say that they invite with 8-9 HCP, and they bid game directly with 10+.

Of course, there's such a thing as a bad 8, and usually it pays to pass those hands.

Conversely, there are good 9-counts, and with those we can bid game directly.

What makes a hand "bad" or "good"?

Bad Characteristics

- Square hand (4-3-3-3)
- Potentially wasted values (such as Qx or singleton Q)
- Isolated values (Qxx is puny; Q more useful with accompanying honors)
- High cards in short suits

Good Characteristics

- 5-card suits (maybe suit can be established)
- High cards in long suits (all the better to establish said suits)
- Working honors (a suit with multiple honors, such as Q109x, has great potential, and only uses up two HCP's)
- Intermediates (Tens especially, but Nines too)

Check out the characteristics of this hand:

♠ K 6 2; ♥ A Q 2; ♦ 9 5 2; ♣ 9 5 4 2

What a lousy 9-count! It's square, the long suit is empty, and there is an alarming absence of intermediates. Don't bid game directly with this one!

♠ K 10 6; ♥ A Q 10; ♦ 10 9 5; ♣ 10 9 5 4

What a difference! Bolstering the hand with all those Tens has made a huge improvement. It still has the deficiency of squareness, but otherwise it is a magnificent 9-count! So, go to game!

First, let's see how that weak 9-count plays. South opened a 15-17 1NT, game was invited and declined, so the contract is 2NT.

	♠ K 6 2 ♥ A Q 2 ♦ 9 5 2 ♣ 9 5 4 2	
♠ J 4 3 ♥ J 3 ♦ K Q 6 3 ♣ J 7 6 3	North West East Declarer	♠ Q 10 8 5 ♥ 10 9 5 4 ♦ J 10 ♣ K Q 10
	♠ A 9 7 ♥ K 8 7 6 ♦ A 8 7 4 ♣ A 8	

Declarer can count 2 Spades, 3 Hearts, 1 Diamond, and 1 Club. He will hope that Hearts are 3-3, and when it turns out that they are not he will no doubt be held to just 7 tricks. Forget about game, even just inviting game with this rotten 9-count gets us too high!

Next, we'll beef up the North hand with a fistful of Tens. In this case, North, appreciating the power of Tens, goes directly to 3NT. Look how well it plays!

	♠ K 10 6 ♥ A Q 10 ♦ 10 9 5 ♣ 10 9 5 4	
♠ J 4 3 ♥ J 3 ♦ K Q 6 3 ♣ J 7 6 3	North West East Declarer	♠ Q 8 5 2 ♥ 9 5 4 2 ♦ J 2 ♣ K Q 2
	♠ A 9 7 ♥ K 8 7 6 ♦ A 8 7 4 ♣ A 8	

What a difference! Those lovely Tens are working overtime! The black Tens protect Declarer from the enemy suits, and the red Tens help Declarer to build tricks in her own suits. It will be 10 tricks on most lines of play. An unmitigated triumph for those Tens, the most underrated cards in the deck. And let's not overlook the supporting role of those Nines, either.

We said earlier that, with a poor 8-count, opposite a 15-17 1NT, we are better off not inviting game. Let's see how this works in practice by taking a look at this hand:

♠ K 9 3; ♥ A 4 2; ♦ J 9 3; ♣ 5 4 3 2

This is not just a poor 8-count, it's truly terrible!

- It's square
- Honors are isolated
- No honors in 'long' suit
- No Tens!

Obviously, we won't invite game with this hand. So, we leave Partner to play 1NT which she makes with two or three overtricks. A missed game. How did this happen?

♠ K 9 3
♥ A 4 2
♦ J 9 3
♣ 5 4 3 2
North
West East
South
♠ A 10
♥ Q 10 3
♦ A Q 10 6 5
♣ A J 7

Should North have invited after all? No! The fault is with South. Technically speaking, she is in the 15-17 1NT range. But this hand is just *too good*. Look at all the plus points:

- Five card suit (and it's a good one!)
- Honors working together
- Three Tens
- Three Aces

With that South hand, the values suggest opening 1♦, and then, if North bids 1♥ or 1♠, South can rebid 2NT. Sure, that sequence shows 18-19, but this 17-count is better than most 18's.

The moral of the story is:

It's not enough to downgrade hands with bad features; it also pays to upgrade hands with good features.