

THE POWER OF TENS

17 Oct 2017

Partner opens a 15-17 1NT and you hold: ♠ 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!

But how about this hand: ♠ 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.

TO OPEN OR NOT TO OPEN

24 Oct 2017

Hand A

♠	K Q J
♥	Q 9 3 2
♦	Q
♣	Q 5 4 3 2

Hand C

♠	A 3 2
♥	A 4
♦	8 7 5
♣	K J 9 8 7

Hand B

♠	K Q J 3
♥	10 9 5
♦	2
♣	A Q 10 4 3

Hand A is an ugly 12-count, not really worth opening. But make a few changes and it transforms into **Hand B**, which is a thing of beauty. Both hands have the same distribution and HCP, but what a difference!

Pair up Hands A and C and you get 10 tricks in Clubs or 7 in No Trump. But pair up Hands B and C and you are cold for a Club slam! This all goes to demonstrate that there is more to hand evaluation than HCP alone.

Have you ever been dealt this hand? ♠ 6 5, ♥ A J J J 3, ♦ 4, ♣ A J J J 4
No, neither have we. But, in reality, doesn't this 14-count have the same playing strength as this 10-count? ♠ 6 5, ♥ A J 10 9 3, ♦ 4, ♣ A J 10 9 4 Yes, of course it does, so opening the multi-Jack 14-count is a no-brainer!

Post Script: Here's how Hands B and C might get to 6♣:

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♣	Pass	2♣	Pass
3♦	Pass	4♣	Pass
4♦	Pass	6♣	All Pass

An auction for enthusiasts of Inverted Minors. That 3♦ was a Splinter, and it shows something extra. Showing extras with just 12 HCP? Sure, that new Hand B is a real beaut! 4♣ was Roman Key Card (1430) and 6♣ is ice-cold!

TWO CLUB OPENINGS

31 Oct 2017

What if the Opponents Interfere?

We open 2♣ and LHO bids a suit. What now? Here's a good treatment:

- Double is weak (less than 4 HCP).
- Bidding something is natural and positive (say 7+ HCP), and shows 5+ cards in the suit. The suit should be at least half-decent.
- Pass shows a few values (because no Double), but no suit worth bidding.

Next, suppose Partner opens 2♣ and RHO doubles. Now, redouble with a rotten hand, or pass with a few values, or bid something with 7+ and a half-decent suit.

Is 2♣ Forcing to Game?

2♣ 2♦, 2NT can be passed, also transfer auctions. But suppose that the auction starts 2♣ 2♦, 2M. Forcing to game? Most experts play them as not-quite-forcing-to-game, allowing this to be passed: 2♣ 2♦, 2M 3♣, 3M.

Minor Suit Auctions

- Major suit 2♣ auctions work like a well-oiled machine
- Minor suit 2♣ auctions work poorly, so avoid them whenever possible!

If you held ♠ A 10 8, ♥ A K Q J 10 8 6, ♦ --, ♣ A 8 4, you would open 2♣ without hesitation, but switch the red suits and you would be better advised to open 1♦. You might even open 1♦ with ♠ K Q J, ♥ Q, ♦ A K 8 7 6 2, ♣ A Q J, even though you have 22 HCP. Yes, you might get passed out in 1♦, but if so you might not have game anyway. Anyway, the plan should be to open 1♦, then rebid with a jump to 3♣ ... that's a much better start than 2♣ 2♦, 3♦, which wastes too much bidding space.

Five Takeaways

- In response to a 2♣ opening, consider using the 2♦ Waiting method. If you don't care for that, use 2♥ as an immediate negative.
- Have you and your Partner agreed on what to do when the opponents interfere over your 2♣ opening?
- Are you and your Partner on the same page when it comes to your No Trump ranges in 2♣ auctions?
- After a 2♣ opening, can your auction stop in three of Opener's major?
- Remember to open 2♣ with a minor suit hand as rarely as you dare.

THIRD SEAT

7 Nov 2017

The start of a Drury auction:

<i>You</i>	<i>LHO</i>	<i>Pard</i>	<i>RHO</i>
Pass	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♣	Pass	??	

Now: 2♠ I do not believe I can make game opposite a passed hand
4♠ I have extras, so I'm taking a shot at game.
2♦ I have an opening bid alright, but I'm not sure about game. Tell me more. Now you will bid 2♠ (minimum Drury values), or 3♠ (max)

Those are the basics and enough for most situations. There are lots of spare bids available if you want to make things more complicated. For example:

- Pass 1♠, 2♣ 2NT asks for shortness
- Pass 1♠, 2♣ followed by a new suit is a game try (could be help suit, short suit, side-suit, you choose – we like shortness ourselves).

Drury in Competition

No reason why the following should not be Drury:

Pass	Pass	1♥	1♠	Pass	Pass	1♥/♠	Dbl
2♣				2♣			

How about this one?

Pass	Pass	1♥/♠	2♣
		Dbl	

Our suggestion is for this to be a Negative Double, not Drury.

Five Takeaways

- In third seat, we have a tendency to open light, especially when we have a good suit that we would like Partner to lead.
- Just because we open in third seat, it does not mean that we are sub-strength. Sometimes we have a real opener! Partner uses Drury to find out which it is. Drury only applies when Partner opens a major.
- When you open one of a major in 3rd seat, and when your LHO doubles or overcalls 1♠, are you and your Partner on the same page? Suggestion: Drury is still on.
- There is a Two-Way version of Drury for those who are that way inclined.
- In 4th seat we tend to be guided by the Rule of 15. And Drury is available for keeping things low.

WEAK TWOS

14 Nov 2017

Range? Let's say 5-10.

Suit Quality?

The classic Weak Two was based on a suit headed by two of the top three honors, or three of the top five. Nowadays, 'suit quality' is something of an oxymoron. QJxxxx is plenty good enough for many (and even less is OK in certain situations).

Five-Card Suit?

Is it OK to base a Weak Two on a 5-card suit? That's up to you and your partner. Our suggestion is:

- (a) Yes, if the hand has a decent suit and some shape (anything but 5332)
- (b) But not when we are vulnerable.

Seven-Card Suit?

Is it OK to base a Weak Two on a 7-card suit? We don't consider this taboo, just uncommon. You hold in first seat: **Q876543, 8, K4, 543**. At unfavorable vulnerability, even in this day and age, opening 3♠ would be a bit too much for many players. But it would be a terrible waste of a 7-card Spade suit to tamely pass. So, why not try 2♠? If we were non-vulnerable we'd open 3♠, though.

Four-Card Major?

Do you or don't you? Opening 2♥ with **A543, KJ7654, 54, 2** comes with a risk, namely that we play in 6-1 Hearts rather than 4-4 Spades. 6-2 major games tend to be safer than 4-4 major games, especially if the 6-card suit is in the weaker hand. So, unless the 4-card is strong and the 6-card is weak, we don't feel too guilty about a Weak Two on these hands. Others may disagree.

Outside Values?

Having an outside Ace is quite common, but having two outside Aces (or an Ace and a King) is far from ideal, and could lead Partner astray in a competitive auction. Ideally, we have most of our stuff in the long suit, but then again we don't just hang around waiting for ideal hands.

Is a Void Permissible?

Is it OK for a Weak Two bidder to have a void? Absolutely! Why on earth would we not want to bid with: **832, KJ9862, --, Q1043**?

ROMAN KEY CARD BLACKWOOD

21 Nov 2017

The King Ask

♠ A K Q J 10 9 8	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
♥ 7	2♣	2♦
♦ A	2♠	3♠
♣ A Q J 10	4NT	5♦
	5NT	??
	??	

Some points to remember:

- The King Ask is an attempt to reach a grand slam, and using it *guarantees* that we have all five Key Cards (the 4 Aces and the trump King).
- Be sure to agree with your Partner whether your King Ask is looking for the *number of Kings* or *specific Kings*. Just for the record, specific Kings is the more popular method and is superior. Persuade Partner that this is so.

The Queen Ask

The 5♥ and 5♠ responses include trump Queen information. But the 5♣ and 5♦ responses do not. That's why they invented the Queen Ask!

♠ A K J 9 8	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>	♠ Q 7 2
♥ K	2♣	2♦	♥ A 8 6 3
♦ A	2♠	3♠	♦ 8 6 4 2
♣ A Q J 10 9	4NT	5♣	♣ K 3
	??	??	

East's 1430 response tells West that her side has all the Key Cards. It would be nice to know about the ♠Q and the ♣K, and East's best move now is to bid 5♦, which is the cheapest non-sign-off, and, as such, is designated as the Queen Ask. The responses are:

- Return to trump suit (5♠) denies the trump Queen.
- Off-suit bids show the trump Queen *and* the King of the bid suit
- Bidding 5NT shows the trump Queen but denies any side-suit King.

On the actual deal, East bids 6♣, and West can bid 7NT.

A Trump Queen Wrinkle

If our 9-card trump fit includes the Ace and King, but is missing the Queen, then we are only about 50% likely to pick up the trump suit for no losers. But suppose we have a 10-card fit. Now the Queen is hardly needed, as, say, AKxxx opposite xxxxx plays for no losers about 90% of the time. So, if we change the above East hand to ♠ 7 5 4 3 2, ♥ A 8 6, ♦ 8 6 4, ♣ K 3 then the auction would be identical, with the extra-long Spades providing a 10-card fit, and acting as a substitute for the ♠Q.

TRANSFERS – PART 1

28 Nov 2017

After a strong 1NT opening, transfers have two major benefits:

- They usually get the strong hand to be Declarer, which is an advantage in the play of the hand.
- Transfers allow for more precise auctions.

Super Accepts

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

N-S Vul

	South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♥	Pass	Pass
2♠	Pass	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♣	Dbl	All Pass	All Pass	All Pass

	South	West	North	East
1NT	Pass	2♥	Pass	Pass
3♠	All Pass	All Pass	All Pass	All Pass

Which of these two auctions do you prefer? If you are sitting E-W you rather like the first auction. East boldly balanced with 2NT, South belatedly got around to bidding 3♠, and West unsportingly doubled for +200.

N-S missed an opportunity here. South has four of Partner's Spades, and can "super-accept". Instead of bidding 2♠ at his second turn, he can venture to the three-level, (fairly) safe in the knowledge that his side has 9 trumps and is unlikely to come to much harm in 3♠. This freezes E-W out of the auction and N-S go for -100. That's a good result for N-S as their opponents have 10 easy tricks in Clubs or Diamonds.

Super-accepts come in various flavors (assume Spades are the suit in question):

- Always super-accept with 3♠
- Super-accept with 2NT to show a good hand (and four Spades, of course), and with 3♠ to show a poor hand.
- Super-accept in a side-suit to show something or other in that suit (some show a doubleton, some show values in that suit, or whatever).

Our suggestion is (b), which is simple and effective. By the way, there is no reason not to play super-accepts if the auction starts 2NT 3♦ or 2NT 3♥.

After a super-accept, a **re-transfer** might be required, as in 1NT 2♥, 2NT 3♥, 3♠ Pass. That 3♥ bid was not natural, it was getting the strong hand as Declarer.

TRANSFERS – PART 2

5 Dec 2017

Minor Suit Transfers (MST)

To play MST, first tweak Stayman so that it does not guarantee a 4-card major. That being so, 1NT 2NT can be used artificially (for MST) along with 1NT 2♠. Here are your new responses to 1NT, incorporating MST's:

- 2♣ is still **Stayman** (but, remember, it no longer guarantees a 4-card major).
- 2♦ and 2♥ are still **Jacoby Transfers**
- 2♠ is an **MST** to Clubs
- 2NT is an **MST** to Diamonds

As you can see, there is a gap between 2♠ and 3♣, and similarly between 2NT and 3♦. How to use this gap? There are two schools of thought, with not much to choose between them. As usual, we suggest the natural and intuitive method:

- 1NT 2♠, 2NT says "I don't like Clubs", and 1NT 2♠, 3♣ says "I like 'em"
- 1NT 2NT, 3♣ is "Don't like Diamonds", and 1NT 2NT, 3♦ is "I like 'em"

♠ 7
♥ 6 5 3
♦ A 9 8 6 5 4
♣ 9 4 3

A miserable hand! When Partner opens 1NT our plan is to play in 3♦. So, we respond 2NT, and will either pass Opener's 3♦ reply, or convert her 3♣ reply to 3♦.

♠ 7
♥ 6 5 3
♦ A Q 8 6 5 4
♣ J 10 3

This hand has possibilities for 3NT if Opener says that she likes Diamonds. So Responder bids 2NT, and will venture 3NT if Opener replies 3♦. But if Opener does not like Diamonds then 3♦ will be the contract.

♠ Q 7
♥ K 5 3
♦ A 9 8 6 5 4
♣ Q 3

There's no reason to mess around with MST's on this board. 3NT is where this one belongs and Responder should just bid it directly.

♠ 7
♥ K 3 2
♦ A Q 10 6 5 4
♣ A J 10

Slam is a possibility, and the auction might start 1NT 2NT, 3♦ 3♠. By agreement, 3♠ shows a singleton, and if this persuades Opener that her hand is slam-suitable then she can make a forward-going move.

♠ 7
♥ 4 3
♦ J 10 4 3 2
♣ J 10 6 4 3

Responder wants to play this miserable minor two-suiter in three of a minor. So he bids 2NT. Now, if Opener bids 3♦ she likes 'em, and 3♦ should be playable. If Opener bids 3♣, she doesn't like Diamonds, and hopefully likes Clubs better.

SIGNALING

12 Dec 2017

Attitude Signals

	♠ Q 7 3	
♠ A K 10 8 4		♠ J 9 5
	♠ 6 2	

It's a suit contract, West has bid Spades and leads the ♠A. Dummy plays the Three, of course, East the Five, and Declarer the Two. East played the lowest available Spade, so he cannot be about to high-low and thus cannot have a doubleton. So, as there is no defensive ruff, West declines to cash another high Spade, and looks elsewhere for tricks.

Now, suppose that Declarer is a tricky fellow, and on that first round of Spades he plays the Six instead of the Two. Why? Well, look at things from Declarer's point of view. Now, East's Five looks like it might be high from Five-Two, and that East is signaling a doubleton. In that case, Declarer has three Spades, and there is a Spade ruff for the taking. How was West to know? Actually, he wasn't, your clever play of the Six gave him a guess, and if you give the opponents enough guesses to make even the best of them will guess wrong sometimes.

Figuring out the spots, and which card is most likely to lead the defense astray, is pretty boring stuff for most people. Fortunately, there is a clever trick which involves minimal brainwork and which will be worth hundreds of matchpoints (all against the good players) a year. It is:

Declarer makes the signal that he would have done as a defender

Yes, it's that simple! In the above diagram, Declarer wants West to continue Spades, as that will set up a Spade trick in Dummy, which can be used for a pitch. So she "encourages" by playing high, in this case the Six, giving Declarer that losing option.

Let's look at another layout and see if this dastardly Declarer trick really works.

	♠ 8 4 2	
♠ Q J 10 9		♠ 7
	♠ A K 6 5 3	

The auction went 1NT-3NT and West unwittingly attacks Declarer's strong suit. Declarer ducks the first trick in the hope that West will persist, thereby speeding up the establishment of the suit. As he wants

West to continue, Declarer will "encourage" by playing the Five. West will notice that the Three is unaccounted for, and may well place his Partner with some holding such as K73. Yes, the system works!

Count Signals

Here's a common situation. You are defending 3NT, dummy is on your right, holding ♣KQJ105. Just like this, in fact:

	<i>Dummy</i>	
	♣ K Q J 10 5	
<i>Partner</i>		<i>You</i>
???		A 7 3
	<i>Declarer</i>	
	???	

Dummy has some other cards, all of them worthless. In other words, Dummy has no entries outside Clubs. Declarer would like to knock out the ♣A and then rattle off the rest of the suit, scoring four tricks. You must stop him by holding up the Ace. If you win the first round, that's just giving up (unless Declarer has a singleton). If you win the second round and Declarer has three Clubs, that's not good either. And it's also not a good idea to win the third round, only to discover that Declarer started with two Clubs. If that happens, then Declarer will have scored two Club tricks, when the defense could have held him to one. So, the task at hand is to take the Ace at the right time ... not too soon ... and not too late. Enter count signals.

- A. Declarer leads the Two, Partner plays the Four. That's easy! Partner has played the lowest missing Club and therefore has an odd number (1 or 3). So Declarer has 4 or 2. If it's 4, you cannot shut out the Clubs, so hopefully it's 2 and you duck the first Club and win the second.
- B. Declarer leads the Two and Partner plays the Eight. That Eight looks big, and high-low shows an even number. If Partner has 4 Clubs, then Declarer is singleton and you should grab your Ace ... if Partner has 2 Clubs, then the Ace must wait until the third round. Which is it? If Partner has 4 Clubs, they are 9864, and with such a holding he would play the *Nine*, following the rule that we always make the signal as clear as possible. So Partner has 2 Clubs (84 or 86), and you must hold up to the third round.
- C. Declarer leads the Six and Partner plays the Four. Where's the Two? At first glance, it seems that Partner is playing high-low from 42, but not so fast! If Declarer is a tricky fellow he may have concealed the Two and led the Six from 62. Now you are in a bit of a fix. When the second Club is led from the board you must make a decision ... do you play the Ace guessing that Declarer started with 62 and false-carded with the Six on the first round? ... or do you duck again guessing that Declarer is playing up-the-line from 986? Good luck on that one! The safe play is to hold up a second time, that's less costly if it's the wrong guess.

Count signals can certainly help the defense, but Declarer would be negligent if he failed to false card in these situations. There's no need to work out all the spot combinations, just delay playing your lowest spot, and hope something good happens (like the defense misguessing in Example C), which it often will!

OVERCALLS

19 Dec 2017

Four-Card Overcalls

It's customary to have at least 5 cards in the overcall suit, but take a look at this hand (let's assume a 1♦ opening): ♠ A Q 10 8, ♥ A 2, ♦ K 10 9 7, ♣ 7 5 3

That's a nice 13-count, but what should we do after that 1♦ opening bid? We cannot make a Take-out Double, with only two cards in an unbid major ... and though we have Opener's Diamonds under control, our hand is not strong enough for a 1NT overcall. Not to worry, this hand is perfect for a 4-card overcall! The magic ingredients for this bid are:

- Diamond length and strength over the opening bidder.
- Good trumps
- Some values (this may not be such a great success on a 9-count)

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

South West North East

1♦ 1♦
 1♠! Dbl 2♠ All Pass

Declarer makes 9 tricks.

As soon as East opens 1♦, South can be pretty sure that a Spade contract will play well, provided that Partner has at least three of them. Similar logic can be used in non-overcall situations, for example:

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

South West North East

1♦ Pass 1♠ Pass
 2♠ All Pass

Yes, South raises with only 3-card support, but there is a small doubleton in Hearts, which looks dangerous in NT but which will usually provide a ruff in the short hand in a Spade contract.

1NT probably makes 7 tricks, 2♠ will probably make 8.

DOUBLES

26 Dec 2017

Penalty Double

A hundred years ago, 100% of doubles were for penalty. Now, with the advent of numerous conventional treatments for Doubles, that number appears to have been reduced to about 1%.

Anyway, it's fair to say that we don't double enough, particularly when our opponents are playing in part scores. Nobody likes to see their scorecard bespattered with ugly results such as -570 and -730. But aggressive (and well-judged) doubling provides big dividends, and helps keep the opponents in line in competitive situations. Occasionally the opponents will be doubled into game and make it, but that's the price to be paid for lots of other boards where we score juicy numbers such as +200, +800, etc.

South West North East

1♥ 1♠
 1NT Pass 2♣ 2♦
 ??

Your hand is: ♠ A 10 8 7, ♥ 6 5, ♦ K J 10 7 6, ♣ 8 2. You double, of course, and then when they run to 2♠ you double that. Here is the full deal:

	♠ 6 5 ♥ K J 10 9 2 ♦ 5 2 ♣ A Q J 3	
♠ J 2 ♥ Q 8 7 4 ♦ 4 3 ♣ K 9 7 6 5	<i>North</i> <i>West</i> <i>East</i> <i>South</i>	♠ K Q 8 4 3 ♥ A 3 ♦ A Q 9 8 ♣ 10 4
	♠ A 10 9 8 ♥ 6 5 ♦ K J 10 7 6 ♣ 8 2	

Looking just at the E-W hands, 2♠ might not seem such an awful contract. After all, E-W have a combined 21 HCP, and a 7-card fit, with most of the high trumps. Added to that, they are only at the two-level. What could possibly go wrong? Well, on this deal, as South can clearly see, everything will go wrong, hence the Double. If South leads the Spade Ten, then this could be the greatest massacre since February 14th, 1929. Below are the factors which make this a safe Double.

- Spades over their Spades
- Diamonds over their Diamonds
- South has two valuable Tens (each of which is probably worth a trick)
- It looks like both sides have nothing but 7-card fits, so the Law of Total Tricks is working against whoever declares this hand.
- South expects to score four tricks on defense, surely North (who opened the bidding) can supply a few.