

Hand Evaluation -part 1.

Losing Trick Count

Losing Trick Count (LTC) is a method to evaluate trick taking potential of **two hands combined**.

LTC should be used in conjunction with **common sense** and the standard HCP point-counting system of 4-3-2-1.

In its basic form LTC requires the following:

A. Count your losers

B. Add your partner's losers

C. Subtract the total from 18.

The result will **give you the level** at which you can expect to play with the fit suit as trumps.

There are three basic rules of LT counting:

1. Only the **first three cards** in any suit can be losers.
2. Only the **A,K and Q** are winners.
3. **'Droppable honors' are losers** (i.e. a singleton king or a doubleton queen).

Example 1.

♠ A K 8 – one loser

♥ J 8 5 4 – three losers

♦ K Q 6 – one loser

♣ 7 5 2 – three losers

Total: 8 losers and 13 HCP

Example 2.

♠ A Q 6 3. – one loser

♥ Q 8 – two losers

♦ K Q 8 4 3 – one loser

♣ 9 5 – two losers

Total: 6 losers and 13 HCP

Example 3.

♠ A K 8 6 4 2 – one loser

♥ ----- no losers

♦ K Q 6 4 3 – one loser

♣ J 8 – two losers

Total: 4 losers and 13 HCP.

We only **count LT when we have a fit.**

The power and the beauty of the LTC: it is able to evaluate the **long** suits, the **short** suits and the high-card **points** to produce **one simple answer**.

Hand evaluation – Part 2.

Law of Total Tricks (LTT) is a hand evaluation method in **competitive** auctions.

The Law says: The total # of cards in each partnership's longest suit is equal to # of "total tricks" that either side can win in a suit contract.

Examples.

Example #1.

North			
♠ AQT32			
♥ KQ3			
♦ T9			
♣ AT3			
South			
♠ KJ8			
♥ 64			
♦ QJ542			
♣ 542			
West	North	East	South
♠ 54		♠ 976	
♥ AT985		♥ J72	
♦ AK63		♦ 87	
♣ J8		♣ KQ976	
West	North	East	South
1 ♥	1 ♠	2 ♥	2 ♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

East-West have 8 hearts and North-South have 8 spades.

LTT: 8 hearts + 8 spades = 16 total trumps.

That number happens to be the **combined number of tricks** that can be made in 2♥ and 2♠. Playing 2♥, West would make exactly 8 tricks after losing 2 spades, 2 hearts and a club.

In 2♠, North would also win 8 tricks against best defense, losing a heart, 2 diamonds and 2 clubs.

8 heart tricks for EW + 8 spade tricks for NS = 16 "total tricks".

Example #2.

North			
♠AJT32			
♥Q3			
♦A93			
♣T83			
South			
♠KQ8			
♥64			
♦JT542			
♣542			
East			
♠976			
♥J72			
♦87			
♣KQ976			
West			
♠54			
♥AKT985			
♦KQ6			
♣AJ			
West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠	2♥	2♠
4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

NS still own an 8-card spade fit, but EW have 9-card heart fit.

LTT: 8 spades + 9 hearts = 17.

Playing 4♥, West will win 10 tricks against best defense, losing 2 spades and a diamond.

If North were allowed to play 2♠, he would only win 7 tricks; East-West would score 3 clubs, 2 hearts, and 1 diamond. **10 tricks + 7 tricks = 17.**

This is equal to the total number of spades and hearts in the deal.

Example #3: Sitting East, you hold:

♠973
♥KQ32
♦J2
♣QT72

The auction:

Partner	Opp 1	You	Opp 2
1♥	Pass	2♥	Pass
Pass	2♠	?	

The Law says: bid 3♥.

The full deal:

	Opp 1	
	♠AQT6	
	♥987	
Partner	♦JT85	You
♠54	♣K9	♠973
♥AJ654		♥KQ32
♦A976	Opp 2	♦Q2
♣A6	♠KJ82	♣QT72
	♥T	
	♦K43	
	♣J8543	

The opponents hold 8 spades and your side holds 9 hearts.

LTT: $8 + 9 = 17$, so **the Law says** there should be 17 total tricks available.

Therefore, if the opponents can make 2♠ (8 tricks), then your side should make 3♥ (9 tricks).

LTT says: Bid Your Number of Trumps

This is most common issue at the 2- and 3-levels.

With 8-card fit, its **safe to compete** to the 2-level.

With 9-card fit its **safe to compete** to the 3-level.

Contract will either make, or be a good sacrifice against whatever opps can make.

1. **Get to the right level quickly.** In the above auction, East bids 2♥ first, which allowed the **opponents to compete** in spades. Playing **Bergen raises**, a bidding convention based on LTT, East could have shown 4-card support **immediately**.
2. **Bergen raises** allow a major-suit jump raise (i.e. 1♠ - 3♠) with 0 points, because of the Law's premise of a 9-card fit.
3. Do not compete above LTT level unless you have extra shape, points, or vulnerability in your favor.

South could bid 3♠ over 3♥ in the above auction.

This is much more attractive if North-South are NV.

If vulnerable, 3♠ doubled is -200 which is obviously a worse score than defending 3♥.

Example #4:

	North	
	♠ AQT32	
	♥ K3	
West	♦ T93	East
♠ 54	♣ T83	♠ 9
♥ AQT985		♥ J742
♦ AK6	South	♦ 872
♣ AJ	♠ KJ876	♣ KQ976
	♥ 6	
	♦ QJ54	
	♣ 542	

20 total trumps in hearts and spades but only 18 total tricks. 4 ♥ is cold for EW, but NS can only make 2 ♠. NS however may sacrifice in 4 ♠ with 10 combined trumps.

Example #5:

	NORTH	
	♠ A 6	
	♥ 9 7	
	♦ K 9 6 4	
	♣ A Q 9 3 2	
WEST		EAST
♠ Q J 10 9 2		♠ K 8 7
♥ 10 8 5 4		♥ A J 6 2
♦ A Q		♦ J 10 8 5 2
♣ 10 4		♣ 6
	SOUTH	
	♠ 5 4 3	
	♥ K Q 3	
	♦ 7 3	
	♣ K J 8 7 5	

This was a deal from a team game in World Championship. The Italians gained a useful swing by making 4 ♣ on the NS cards at one table and 2 ♠ as EW in the other.

Here LTT = 18 (10 in clubs and 8 in spades).

Bergen Raises

Opener's Bid	Responder's Bid	Meaning
1♥ or 1♠	3♣	showing 7-9 points and exactly 4-card trump support
	3♦	showing 10-12 points and exactly 4-card trump support
	3♥/3♠	showing 0-6 points and exactly 4-card trump support
	3♠ over 3♥	splinter
	2NT	Game-forcing raise (Jacoby 2NT)

*When opponents interfere over 1♥/1♠ then **Bergen raises are off**, responder bids are **natural**.*

What about over double by opponents? Bergen is On.

Hand evaluation – Part 3.

Suit Quality Overcall Test (“SQOT”)

Just how good must the five-card suit be to justify the overcall?

Cluttering up the auction for the opponents is good, but not at the cost of going for a large penalty or giving misleading information to partner.

SQOT: Add the # of cards in your suit to the # of honors in that suit.

(A,K,Q,J =one, T=one but only with another honor).

SQOT Rule:

Overcall safely if the SQOT is at least as high as the # of tricks you are bidding for.

Exercise: Which of the following heart suits are worth a

a) 1♥ overcall over 1♦, b) 2♥ overcall over 1♠, c) 3♥ overcall over 2♠?

(1) ♥KJ752 SQOT =7

(2) ♥QJT83 SQOT=8

(3) ♥A97632 SQOT =7

(4) ♥AKJ9 SQOT =7

(5) ♥AT97632 SQOT =9

(6) ♥Q976532 SQOT = 8

Answers:

(1). Overcall 1♥ over 1♦, but not 2♥ over 1♠, and not 3♥ over 2♠.

(2). ?