Adjusting for a Queenless Hand

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A question has been raised by some about the **Optimal Point Count (OPC)** for deducting 1 point for a **Queenless** hand, i.e., how can the following two hands be given the same value of 14 H points?

♠AKxx	♠AKxx
♥AKxx	♥AQxx
♦xxx	♦xxx
♣xx	♣xx

As the first hand is sure to produce 4 tricks while the second hand can only be expected to produce 3 ½ tricks.

Well, that the second hand "can only be expected to produce 3 ½ tricks" happens to be an optical illusion as that is only true when partner holds no honor opposite A Q x x. In **all other cases**, that assertion is not statistically valid, as the second hand will produce the same number of tricks as the first hand with two Aces and two Kings. Illustration:

♥A Q x x opposite: ♥J x x or: ♥J 10 x

will produce the same 2 tricks as A K x x.

Just as replacing one King with a Queen or Q 10 will produce 4 tricks:

♠A K Q x or ♠A K x x
♥A x x x ♥A Q 10 x

And: ♠A Q x x opposite: ♠K x x or: ♠ K J x

Will produce the same number of tricks as:

♠A K x x opposite: ♠Q x x or: ♠Q J x

Furthermore, the following combination:

♠A K x x is worth more than this one: ♠A K x x
♥ A Q J x ♥A K x x

as the first one will produce 4 ½ tricks, the second one 4 tricks. A difference in value that is precisely translated by the 1 point deduction from the second hand, Queenless.

Conclusion: the 1-point deduction for a Queenless hand is justified and is statistically valid: in most cases, A Q x x produces the same number of tricks as A K x x.

And this applies to all contracts, including suit contracts. Illustration:

♠KQxx	♠Axxx
♥AJxxx	♥Kxxx
♦xxx	♦x
♣x	♣xxxx

The above hands can be bid to 4♠, with an auction such as:

1♥	1♠
2♠	3♦(short-suit trial bid)
4♠	

East has 12 ½ HDF pts (-1 for no Queen) which justifies his 3♦ trial bid, on which West can now add 2 pts for no "wasted honor points". More importantly, the handicap represented by not having a Queen should not just be assessed as compared to an A K x x holding but to the overall hand's value. Illustration – compare the two hands below:

♠Ax	♠Ax
♥AKxxxx	♥AKxxxx
♦AKQ	♦AKx
♣xx	♣xx

The hand on the left has 24 ½ HLD pts and will produce 9 tricks, while the hand on the right, without a Queen, produces only 8 tricks and the Optimal point count appropriately assesses this hand's value as 21 ½ HLD pts (-1 pointst for no Q), 3 pts less than the first hand, the value of 1 full trick.

As a final example, N. Squire's often quoted example hand (from his book on « The Theory of Bidding ») may best illustrate the need to deduct

1 point for a Queenless hand (as well as some other features of the Optimal point count). The deal N. Squire showed was the following:

♠Axxx	♠Qxx
♥Axx	♥Qxxx
♦Kxx	♦Axx
♣Kxx	♣Axx

Two hands counted for 26 HCP (Goren/Work), but that will not produce more than 8 tricks - which led him to conclude that “Aces are clearly overvalued”.

But N. Squire’s point count is misguided as the West hand only has 13 pts (9 pts for 2 Aces, -1 for no Queen, -1 for being 4 3 3 3) while the East hand only has 10 pts (9 pts for 2 Aces, 3 pts for the two isolated Queens, -1 point for being 4 3 3 3, -1 pointt for no King). Total of 23 pts, not 26. The Optimal Hand Evaluation point count totally debunks the silly assertion that Aces counted 4 pts are overvalued when, in fact, they are undervalued. What are overvalued are Queenless hands or Kingless hands.