

Why does the “Law” and Bergen Bids Fail?

By Neil H. Timm

The “Law of Total Tricks” is seriously flawed and fails because it follows a univariate model of bidding rather than a multivariate model. It depends on one variable, the total number of trumps between two bridge hands when bidding requires a multivariate model that depends on many more variables.

One must consider many variables when bidding that include: (1) honor points (2) length points (3) distribution points, (4) semi-fit points (5) fit points, (6) distribution with trump fit points, (7) wasted honor points, and (8) misfit points. Yes, the location of suit shortness, honor suit quality, and distribution are the key factors one must also consider. These variables cannot be evaluated in a non-competitive auction if the bidding simply goes for example 1M-4M.

Recall that to make a game in a suit contract requires 10 tricks with about 26, 27, or 28 total points for success where the probability is about 45%, 50-55%, and 65%, respectively. Thus, on average to make 5 tricks requires about 2.7 points/trick on average (27 points).

Playing 2/1 suppose the opening bidder has the following hands in spades:

- (1) ♠AQ987 and partner holds ♠K10542 -10 trumps and a 5-5 hand
- (2) ♠AQ987 and partner holds ♠K1054 - 09 trumps and a 5-4 hand

Using the 4-3-2-1-point count method hand (1) has 11HL points and hand (2) has 10HL points; both hands will produce only 5 tricks. So, to make a game with 10 tricks, 5 tricks must come from the other cards in the hand that are ignored by the “Law”.

The 10th trump in hand (1) will not produce an additional trick even with the 5-5 trump fit. Both hands are well below the required optimal 13.5 required points for success (5 tricks x 2.7 points/trick=13.5) when counting only trump!

We next look at two complete examples:

Hand A with 10 trumps

Opener	Partner
♠AQ1054	♠J9872
♥A83	♥7
♦J74	♦KQ6
♣92	♣QJ84

Hand B with 9 trumps

Opener	Partner
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♠AQ1054	♠J987
♥A83	♥7
♦J74	♦KQ65
♣92	♣QJ84

Both hands have 3 losers. However, using the “Law” if one bids game in (A), it goes down one trick while in (B) many may not reach game although one makes 4♠. The 5th spade in (A) does not add an additional trick!

Because correct bidding accounts for about 80% of bridge hands, you must employ the best hand evaluation methodology as suggested in Timm, Neil (2022), *The Optimal Modified 2/1-Club System*, Trafford Press.

Using the Optimal Point Count (OPC) method with hand (2), opener has 7.5HL points and partner has 3.5H + 1 Semi-fit point + 1 Fit point = 6.5HF points for a total of 14HLDF points (D=0). Because a trick equates to 2.7 points and 2.7 x 5=13.5 in total; the OPC method accurately evaluates the total number of tricks that the hand may make: yes 5!

What about hand (1)? Opener again has 7.5HL points; however, in this case partner’s hand has 4.5HL points + 1 Semi-Fit point + 3 Fit points = 8.5HLF points or a total of 16HLDF points where again D=0. The OPC method in this case over-values the hand by 2.5 points due to the duplication of Length and Honor points and ignores D points in the remaining suits with a trump fit.

To see this let’s look at example (A) above. Opener has 12.5HL points and partner has 14.5HLDF points with 2D points for the singleton. 27 total points with 3-losers.

Opener in (B) also has 12.5HL points and partner also has 14.5HLDF points with again 3-losers! The 10th trump in (A) added NO VALUE to the hands and did not produce an additional trick.

What about the following hands?

Hand C with 10 trumps

Opener	Partner (1)	Partner (2)
♠Q105	♠J98	♠KJ9
♥AK832	♥Q10764	♥Q10764
♦74	♦QJ6	♦6
♣KQ9	♣98	♣9864

Using the “Law” partner (1) may bid 4♥ after the opener bids 1♥. For down 3!

Partner (2) would bid 2♥ with the same number of trumps and after opener bids 3♥ responder (partner) will bid 4♥. Or following the “Law” some may bid four directly!

With the same number ten trumps in both cases, what do we observe?

In (1) partner has only 9**HLDF** points but in (2) partner has 12.5**HLDF** points. The difference in the hands is that in (2) one has shortness with the singleton and the **♠K** adds more value to the hands than the **♦QJ**. Yes, attributes that are not considered by the “Law” which only considers the total number of trumps.

What about Bergen bids? Let’s modify Hand C to have only 9 trumps.

Hand D

Opener	Partner
♠Q105	♠J98
♥AK832	♥Q1076
♦74	♦QJ6
♣KQ9	♣A87

After opening 1♥, playing Bergen bids with 10-12H points, partner bids 3♦ = limit raise in hearts. Or playing Reverse Bergen partner bids 3♣, again limit raise where both bids assume 4-card support and are forcing. The opener next bids 3♥ and partner passes. In this example partner has 10H points and the 3♥ contract is down 2.

These bids, like the law, fail because they again depend on only the number of trumps. They ignore the location of suit shortness, honor suit quality, and distribution.

To quote Paul Brum in his March 20, 2021, article Bye Bye Bergen on bridgeexperts.com: The major drawback of Bergen raises is that they are pretty much incompatible with 2/1 game force (GF). If partner opens a major and you have clubs or diamonds, you must bid 2♣/2♦ as GF bids or 1NT forcing! And if you play 1NT as semi-forcing as suggest for example by Larry Cohen your problem becomes even worse.

With the Modified Optimal 2/1-Club system a major suit opening requires 12-17**HLD** and the only forcing bid is 1NT=13+**HLD** points or 2NT=16+**HLD** points. Partner in hand (D) has only 10**HL** points and would bid 2♥ and opener would pass.