

# Hand Evaluation

Single Advanced Lesson – June 6, 2016 Last Revised: Mar 06, 2017

## Hand Upgrades, Downgrades

Assume we are counting a hand as follows.

- Total points (default) are HCPs + length points
- Dummy points, used when raising partner, are HCPs + shortness points
- NT points, when bidding NT, are HCPs only, with consideration for length

There are many factors that make your hand better or worse than the standard point count system indicates. Here is a hand that has no extra upgrades S Qxx H Kxx D Axxx C KJx. Some would suggest subtracting a point for a 4333 shape and no upgrades

In general things that make your hand better include having .....

- 9 trumps on your side versus 8
- Intermediate cards, especially 10s S Qxx H K109 D Axxx C KJ10
  - Compare AJ543 with AJT9x
- Good fitting cards w partner: Partner bids 1 H S xxx H Kx D Axxx C KQJx
- Long suits S Q H Kxx D AQxxxx C KJx
  - especially with honours; compare above w T8xxxx
- High cards concentrated in your long suit(s) ;much better chance to establish suit
  - S Qxx H xx D AKJxxx C Kx
- A 2<sup>nd</sup> long suit (4 or more cards) w honours
  - S KQxx H xx D AKxxx C Jx
- Singleton vs two doubletons S KQxx H x D AKxxx C Jxx
- Quick tricks (Aces, AK) S Qxx H AKxx D Axxx C xx
- High honours (Aces great, Ks good) w partners short suits; partner bids hearts, then diamonds
  - S Axx H Qxxx D Kx C Axxx
- Position of your opponent's high cards.

- If your right-hand opponent bids showing strength, hence has high cards, that you sit behind, your hand increases in value. If your left-hand opponent bids showing strength, your high cards are in front of this opponent, your hand decreases in value. And more likely to help are high honours in RHO's bid suit. If RHO opens 1S, and you have Kx in spades, your K is likely to be worth a trick, with the Ace likely on your right
- Holding length in the majors, especially spades. You can outbid the opponents at the same level, ie 2H/S over 2C/D.

And additionally, in suit contracts ...

- Having more controls, less Quacks      S Axx H Kxx D Axxx C Kxx
  - Do you open this hand in 1st seat? S QJ H Jxxx D KJx C KJxx ?  
5 Quacks, 0 Ace/T , doubletonQJ?      Pass with this 12 point ugliness
  - Do you open this hand in 1st seat? S AKT9x H KJxx D xxx C x ?
    - You have 11 HCPs, 1 for 5th spade = 12 AND great sp suit, good 2nd suit, singleton, all honours working .      Yes indeed.
- Shortness      S Qxx H x D AKxx C KJxxx

In NT contracts:


Lower honours are full value, especially with good intermediates

S Qxx H QJ109 D Axxx C KJ10

When 15 pts is not 15 pts.

The standard point count system is a great start in evaluating your hand. Then, you learn to use your judgement, as to whether your hand is better or worse than the pts indicate. Here is an example of a successful downgrade

Dealer: S

	♠ K J 4	
	♥ K 10 9 4	
	♦ 10 8 6	
	♣ J 6 3	
		
♠ A Q 6		♠ 8 7 5 2
♥ 7 6 5 3		♥ Q J 2
♦ K 9 7		♦ Q J 2
♣ A Q 2		♣ K 9 7
	♠ T 9 3	
	♥ A 8	
	♦ A 5 4 3	
	♣ 10 8 5 4	

What do you open with the West hand? Well 1NT, of course. But hold on, you have

- 15 HCPs and a balanced hand but ....
  - You have a "pancake", 3-4-3-3, the weakest distribution
  - You have no tens nor any 9s, great helpers in NT (and in suits too)
  - Your honours are all scattered vs concentrated (ie KQx or QJx)
  - Your only "long" suit hearts, has no honour at the top

So, subtract a point and bid 1C, planning to rebid 1NT over likely 1 suit response

- Lets look at a 14 point hand, where **you** would open a minor, then rebid 1NT probably
  - S QT9 H Axx D KQJT<sub>x</sub> C Q<sub>x</sub>

- Note that this hand has
  - 5-3-3-2 means you have a good suit to develop tricks, here the honours are v. good. (J7532, for example, is not nearly as useful)
  - Some of the honours (diamonds) are working together vs being scattered
  - Great intermediate card support. You have 2 tens. You have a great KtoT ♦sequence, 6 pts that will almost certainly generate 4 tricks

So, add a point and bid 1NT

- Which hand would you say is better??
- Conclusion: Consider upgrading/downgrading hands by a point if numerous aspects of a good/bad hand exist. Priorities for re-evaluation would be, in order .... 1) shape 2) intermediates 3) see list on page 1
- For example: Any hand that is 4 triple 3 should be considered for a point downgrade. Look at the other attributes and decide. With poor intermediate cards, go ahead and subtract 1, you won't regret it.

To confirm our theories, try playing with the West hand opposite a 4-3-3-3 hand with no points. Try each of the above two hands. Which hand made more tricks?

Re-evaluating your hand after a fit is found (from Bergen "Points-Schmoints")

- You hold S KQJxxxx H x D KQxx C x
- You open 1S w your 11 HCPs + 3 for extra length = 14 total pt hand
- Partner raises to 2S
- Now that you know you have a fit, re-evaluate your hand with the following rules
  - Add another 1 for each trump from the 6th on, so here add +2 for 6th, 7th
  - Add 2 for a singleton; hence  $2 \times +2 = +4$
  - Add 1 for a 2nd suit of 4+cards that contains good honours
  - Total = 14 (original) +2 +2x2 +1 = 21
  - Bid 4S
  - Partner has S Txx H Qxxx D Jx C Axxx, happy to be in game?
- Using loser count guidelines: You have a 4-loser hand, partner's single raise shows about a 9-loser hand.  $24 - (9+4) = 11$  tricks available

## Opening a hand in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> seat

- Always open any hand with 13 total points
- Rule of 20: Add your HCPs + the length of your two longest suits, if 20 or more, open
  - Example: With S KJxxx H KQxx D Qxx C x 11 HCPs + 5 + 4 = 20
- With <13 total points (12, occasionally 11), consider Rule of 22 (Rule of 20 + 2 Quick tricks), and upgrades above
- Quiz; you are in 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> seat, your opening bid ?
  - S K852 H A94 D Q82 C K75 Bid: \_\_\_\_\_
  - S KQ52 H A1043 D Kx C xxx Bid: \_\_\_\_\_
  - S 74 H AQx D xxx C KQ109x , Rt opp bid 1H Bid: \_\_\_\_\_
  - S A1074 H 54 D AK1094 C 76 Bid: \_\_\_\_\_
  - S Qx H Kxx D AQxxx C Kx , LHO opp opens 1S, RHO bids 2S  
Bid: \_\_\_\_\_
  - S AQJ1074 H KJ109 D xx C x , You open 1S, partner bids 2S  
Your hand re-evaluates to \_\_\_\_ pts; Bid: \_\_\_\_\_
    - Your partner has S K83 H Q54 D 9864 C A52 Bid: \_\_\_\_\_
    - Your partner has S 983 H 873 D QJ984 C K8 Bid: \_\_\_\_\_
  - S xxx H KQJ10x D AJ109 C x Bid: \_\_\_\_\_

## Opening light in 3<sup>rd</sup> Seat

Why open light in 3<sup>rd</sup> seat?

- You know that partner has already passed
- Your side may have the values to win the contract.
  - You protect the discipline of partner's pass in 1<sup>st</sup> seat. Partner may have passed with flat 12 or 11 points
- Pre-emptive value of keeping the opponents from finding their best spot
  - Over 1S or perhaps 1H, opponents may struggle to compete, as when they hold a flatish hand with less than 15 points
  - Do not open light with a minor, too easy for opponents to come in with a major overcall (8+ pts)
- Lead-directing; if opponents win the contract, partner will make the best lead

- Comfortable passing whatever partner responds. You are likely to pass from now on.

Quiz: What do you bid with each of the following hands in 3<sup>rd</sup> seat after 2 passes?

- S x H xxx D AQJxx C Kxxx Bid: \_\_\_\_\_
- S AJ9xx H xx D Axx C Qxx Bid: \_\_\_\_\_
- S xxx H KQJxx D xx C KQx Bid: \_\_\_\_\_

## Opening in 4<sup>th</sup> seat

In 4<sup>th</sup> seat, you could have passed for a pass-out board, so you expect to be plus on the board, otherwise why bid. The best advantage on a hand where both sides have half the deck is to own the higher ranking suits, especially spades. It is hard to bid to the 3-level in this scenario, so being able to compete to 2 Spades is a big advantage.

The **rule of 15** says "if your HCPs + your number of Spades =15, open the hand. For example...

With S KJxxx H Axx D xx C Q10x you have 10 HCPs + 5 Sp =15, open 1 Sp

With S Jx H Qxx D Kxxx C AJxx you have 11 HCPs + 2 spades = 13, Pass

Pre-emptive 2 or 3 bids should be beefier, most play it shows 10-15 HCPs (versus 5-10). Remember, if you have S xx H KQ10xxx D Qxx C xx what would partner need for you to make 2 Hearts, the answer is probably an opening bid, but he did not open! (So PASS)

Instead bid 2 Hearts on ..

S Axx H AQJxxx D x C Qxx (note you would bid 1 Heart in any other seat with this hand)

## Competing for a part-score; should I bid one more?

Frequently you will be fighting it out with the opponents for a part-score. When the points are fairly evenly distributed, neither side will have a game. Here are some general guidelines

- If you have a minimum holding for your bidding, don't bid one more, "the green card is your friend".
  - For example, you open 1H with S xx H AQJxx D Kxx C Qxx. Bidding continues 1S – 2H (partner) – 2S. Since you have nothing extra, Pass. Partner can bid 3H if she is a maximum, preferably including 4 trumps.
- Vulnerability is critical to your decisions here. If you bid 3H vulnerable and go down two, you lose 200, for a bottom, since opponents were making a part score of 140 at the most. Down two, **not** vulnerable, however, is  $-2 \times 50 = -100$ , which is probably less of a loss than what they can make, ie 2S making = 110.
  - Even vulnerable, you may bid to go down one, if you are quite sure they would have made their part score, and you are unlikely to get doubled. Again  $-100$  beats  $-110$ .
    - Note an upside of such a bid is opponents may continue on, say bidding 3S, and may go down.
  - For example, you open 1H with S x H KQJ10xx D Kx C QJxx. Bidding goes as above. You should compete to 3H, because you don't have much defense, and you do have a very good trump suit with a singleton in opp's suit. If you cannot make 3H (down 1 =  $-100$  vul,  $-50$  nvul, opps were almost certainly making 2S ( $-110$ )).
- Law of Total tricks: Your side should bid to the level of the total number of trumps you have. If you have 8 hearts between you, bid to 8 tricks in hearts, hence 2 Hearts. If you have 9 hearts, bid to 3 Hearts.

## Sacrificing

- Playing in a contract that you expect to go down, but losing less points than the opponents very likely game. For example, opponents bid to 4 Spades, vulnerable. Making this would be 620 pts. Your side has a diamond fit, and you bid 5 Diamonds, not vulnerable. Going down 3 doubled is -500 pts, a better score than -620, hence a good sacrifice. Note this is the most favourable vulnerability situation for a sacrifice.
- When to sacrifice
  - Large trump fit, usually 9 or more trumps
  - Shortness in opponent's suit, another shortness even better
  - Lack of defensive tricks in opponents contract, making likelihood of them making their game even better
  - Vulnerability is critical. If you are vul and opponents are not, you can only afford to go down one doubled (down1 = -200, down2 = -500 vs 4Major making = -420)
- Is my hand offensive or defensively oriented?
  - Lots of tricks playing in a suit, very few tricks on defense = offensive
- Both sides vulnerable. Bidding goes 1S – 2D (partner) – 4S and you have  
S Void H QJ10x D KQ974 C xxx Bid 5D
- Your side vulnerable, opponents not vul. Bidding goes 1H – 2C (partner) – 4H and you have  
S xxx H QJx D KQJ C xxxx Bid Pass
- Once opps have sacrificed, you now have to decide whether to double them or bid one more, ie 5H over their 5C sacrifice. This depends on the vulnerability and your hand.

## **WHAT A GAME!!**