

LOSING TRICK COUNT...USES & ABUSES

An Introduction

Most of us learned the Point Count method for evaluating Bridge hands when we started playing the game. Formulated by Milton Work, popularized by Charles Goren and a few adjustments by Alfred Sheinwold. Counting high-card-points (hcp) is reflective of how many tricks we might take; and for No-trump evaluation it is accurate enough, but it can be inadequate when a Trump Fit has been discovered.

The true benefit of using Losing Trick Count, is once you and your partner **DISCOVER a TRUMP FIT**, you can find the correct level to play based on the number of expected losers and not just hcp!

Losing Trick Count (LTC) also can be used as a method of evaluating the playing strength of a hand when deciding to open a hand that you are wavering to open or not. Here are some guidelines that might help.

1. **Open** with Less than 12 hcp with a LTC of 7, 11 hcp. with a LTC of 6 or 10 hcp with a LTC of 5 (and 6 with AJTxx, AQxxx, x, xx)
2. **Pass** with 12 hcp and LTC of 8 or greater
3. Aids in the decision of whether to **Preempt** a suit or Open the suit at the 1-level? See notes below.

NOTE: HCP is always used first to evaluate whether to open a hand but for the hands that are "on the fence" and with a good rebid, LTC can help you make that decision. In addition, you should never make a strong bid using LTC for your second bid unless you have the hcp. to support your bid and/or a Trump Fit has been found that can support your next bid (whether by hcp or LTC).

DANGER-DANGER

Caution: one of the most common abuses of LTC is using it too soon before a FIT is discovered. It is okay to stop short of game, play in a moysian fit or find NT. And escaping to NT when a suit is not stopped can never be right. The reason, and one of the pitfalls is that LTC cannot protect you from counting values or giving values to a hand that has no worth when the two hands are combined. DO NOT USE LTC if there is NO FIT!

There is no guarantee or protection, as in any system, when a:

1. partner counts their losers incorrectly
2. suit in both hands is unprotected
3. bad trump splits
4. counting same values

But even with those cautions, LTC is a great system to find those low point games and slams!

COUNTING YOUR LOSERS

The basics are:

1. There are only 3 losers in a suit (yes, a 12-card hand) 😊
 2. Count your losers and decide on an equivalent bid
 3. There are a few ways to go about using LTC, any of them work, just pick the one that is easiest for you to remember.
 - a. Add your partner's LTC response to your LTC and subtract it from 24. The difference is the **number of tricks** that you can expect to take.
 - b. Add your partner's LTC response to your LTC and subtract it from 18, the difference **gives you the contract level.** (based on 6 for book)
 - c. Subtract each of the bids from 12 and add the two together to get the **number of tricks** you can expect to take.
- Ace = 1 winner
 - King = 1 winner*
 - Queen = half a winner, or a whole winner when supported by a second Honor*
 - Void = No loser (therefore represents 3 winners)
 - Singleton = 1 loser (therefore represents 2 winners)
 - Doubleton = 2 losers (therefore represents 1 winner)

**if K or Q is a singleton, then it is 1 loser. Qx is 2 losers,*

CARDS	LTC	CARDS	LTC
AKQ	0	Qxx	3*
AQx	1	AK	0
Kxx	2	AJT	2
Kx	1	K	1
Qx	2	A	0
JTx	3	QJ	2
T98762	3	QJx	2*
AKQxx	0	KJx	2
Ax	1	Axxxxx	2
KQ	1	AQxxxx	1
KQxxx	1	QJT	2*

*Counting the Queen as a winner: The Queen can be given ½ value when supported by a touching honor and is not a doubleton. If there are more Aces in side suits, the Queen can be given full value. If the queen is in a suit that your partner has bid, it can be given full value. Side note: A revised system (NLTC) gives Qxx as 2 losers and full value to the queen regardless of support or Aces.

Why does LTC work? It takes in hcp and shape of both hands after a Trump Fit has been discovered. Thus, the more hcp you have OR the more shape your hand has will equal a lower LTC difference; Conversely, the fewer hcp you have or the more balanced your hand will equal a higher LTC difference.

OPENING

1. With 13+ points regardless of losers: **Make an Opening Bid**
2. With 12 points and 7 losers: **Make an Opening Bid**
3. With 12 points and 8+ losers: **Do Not Open the Bid, unless you have 3 quick tricks** (does not apply to 3rd/4th seat). Recall a quick trick is a card that will immediately take a trick, such as Aces or Aces and Kings together.
4. Preempts at the 2-level that meets the criteria of 6-10 hcp, 2 of top 3 honors, no voids and LTC is 8-9. Yes, this is a stricter method and often not adhered to by advanced players. A 7 LTC should only be opened at the 2-level with hcp at the lower end. If your hcp is 10, with a 7-loser hand, more than likely you are too strong and should consider opening at the 1-level. Vulnerability is always a factor and should meet the Rule of 1,2,3 (another workshop) 😊

Opener and Responder View to see how hcp and LTC Parallels.

OPENER			RESPONDER	
OPENING BID	LTC Equivalent	HCP Equivalent <small>Opener or Responder</small>	LTC Equivalent	RESPONDER'S FIRST BID*
Weak 2 (6-card suit)	7-8 losers	6-10	8-9	Minimum Hand
1-level	7-8	10-12	8	Invitational Hand
1-level	7	13-15	7	Game Bid
1-level	6	16-18	6	Game Bid/Slam
1-level	5	19-21	5	Slam
2C	4-3	22+	4-3	Slam
			*Responder's first bid is unlimited until their next bids and then we will know if it is game force and larger.	

RESPONDING with a NEW SUIT

1. With 12 or 13+ playing points regardless of losers: You may respond with a new suit at the 2-level
2. With 10-12 points and 8 losers: You may respond with a new suit at the 2-level if your system agreement is SAYC
3. With 10 points and 9+ losers: **Do Not** respond with a new suit at the 2-level but do respond! (Usually, the response will be 1N when there is no room to bid at the 1-level)

If you understand how LTC corresponds with the level,
you can make an educated raise.

OPENER'S SECOND BID (Losers shown in brackets)

OPENER	RESPONDER	OPENER 2 nd Bid	RESPONDER 2 nd Bid	LTC** Difference is # of tricks expected to win
1H (7)	2H (8-9)	PASS	-	$24 - 15/16 = 9/8$
1H (6)	2H (9)	3H	PASS	$24 - 15 = 9$
1H (6)	2H (8)	3H	4H	$24 - 14 = 10$
1H (5)	2H (9)	4H	PASS	$24 - 14 = 10$
1H (7)	3H (8-9)	PASS	-	$24 - 15/16 = 8/8$
1H (6)	3H (8)	4H	-	$24 - 14 = 10$
1H (5)	3H (8)	4H	-	$24 - 13 = 11$
2H (8-9)	4H (5-6)	-	-	$24 - 13/14/15 = 11/10/9$
*A weak responder can occasionally have a 10 LTC. **Chart uses the 24-count method				

RESPONDER BIDS NEW SUIT (Losers shown in brackets)

OPENER	RESPONDER	OPENER 2 nd Bid	RESPONDER 2 nd Bid	LTC** Difference is # of tricks expected to win
1D (7)	1S (8-9)	2S	PASS	$24 - 15/16 = 9/8$
1D (7)	1S (7)	2S	4S	$24 - 14 = 10$
1D (7)	1S (5)	2S	6S*	$24 - 12 = 12$
1D (6)	1S (9)	3S	PASS	$24 - 15 = 9$
1D (6)	1S (8)	3S	4S	$24 - 14 = 10$
1D (6)	1S (6)	3S	6S*	$24 - 12 = 12$
1D (5)	1S (8-9)	4S	PASS	$24 - 13/14 = 11/10$
1D (5)	1S (7)	4S	6S*	$24 - 12 = 12$
*Advise using Slam Bid system to check for controls. **Chart uses the 24-count method				

Remember once you find a Trump Fit, you can now use LTC to make your second bid.
Often with a fit, your hand becomes stronger!

DO NOT USE LTC until you find a Trump Fit!

In closing...a little thought to part of another lecture in which we talk about opening and responding and how your hands constantly evolve based on the auction. Basic point count does not provide a complete picture. Consider the following adjustments when evaluating your hand.

PLUS FACTORS	MINUS FACTORS
Good Supporting Intermediates	Short Honors
Shortness (suit agreement)	4-3-3-3 Distribution
High cards in long suits	Lots of Queens and Jacks
Mainly Aces and Kings	No aces

Let's look at some of these factors:

- **Supporting Intermediates:** Playing NT: KJ32 is weaker than KJT9. The first hand will only take two tricks 25% of the time while the second hand will take two tricks.
- **Short Honors:** Playing NT: Dummy has no entries other than Ace fifth of clubs. Would you rather have KQ or KQx? The lack of a small card means that you cannot run the suit: short honors can cause you transportation problems when you are the declarer. Another problem with short honor is the possibility of wasted values when your partner is short in that suit too. Would you rather have AK opposite QJ or AKx opposite QJ?
- **High Cards and High Cards in Length Suits:** High cards provide "quick tricks" and it is easier to promote a length suit when you have high cards in the suit and can keep control of the suit at an earlier point in the play.
- **Shortness:** Allows the declaring side to evaluate their hand differently and possibly reach game or slam on less hcp points.
- **4-3-3-3:** No ability to ruff in this hand and no suit with length for possible promotion.
- **Queens and Jacks:** Wasted values and often do not take tricks without supporting intermediates.
- **No Aces:** No quick tricks to gain control

Further Considerations:

- Hand evaluation is constantly evolving by your partner's bids and the opponent's bids.
- You should always be reevaluating your hand based on subsequent bids that are made after your opening bid, responder bids, overcall bids and rebids
- Point count is not a complete evaluation of your hand, use plus and minus adjustments to arrive at a more accurate hand value. Use LTC as an adjunct to help you get to the right level of a suit contract.