

Should You Bid One More?

Part 2

Using Losing Trick Count to bid game or slam (or not to) when the opponents are bidding too

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Adobe Bridge Center
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Losing Trick Count Recap

- Losing trick count (LTC) is a method of evaluating hands when considering game or slam in a trump suit
- Count up your losers and add to partner's estimated losers
- Compare the total with the targets for game or slam; if your total compares favorably, at least look for the game or slam
- LTC can be used with *any* bidding system

Count your Losers — the Basics

- Look at each of your suits in turn
- In each suit, any card in the top three, except an ace, king, or queen, counts as a loser
- Add a half loser for for any queen that does not have another honor (ace, king, or jack) with it
- The total for all the suits is your losing trick count (so far)

Common LTC Totals

- Opening suit bids: seven losers minimum, five losers for jump rebids and reverses, four for game forces, three common for 2♣ opener
- Notrump openings: strong notrump six (or seven); two notrump usually four
- Responding hands: Ten minimum and often nine; eight for invitational bids; seven for game forces
- Weak opening bids: Often eight losers for weak twos, seven for three level openings; at the four level, varies greatly

Losing Trick Count Targets

- With a good major suit fit (at least nine cards) and fourteen losers, bid game; with eight cards, usually bid it
- Game in a minor usually requires thirteen losers or better (and a bit of caution)
- With twelve losers or better, investigate slam... but check for cashing aces and ace-kings along the way

Refining the Losing Trick Count — Kings

- We try to adjust for the times kings are likely, and unlikely, to be valuable:
- A singleton king is a half loser, unless partner is quite strong or showed length, strength, or the ace in that suit
- A king-jack-ten combination is one and a half losers

Refining the Losing Trick Count — Queens

- Remember to add a half loser for an unsupported or singleton queen. But...
- A queen in partner's suit is not a loser
- A singleton or unsupported doubleton queen is a full loser unless partner probably has something there

Refining the Losing Trick Count — Jacks and Tens

- Jacks aren't usually formally considered, but king-jack-ten (see previous page) is just one and half losers, and so is ace-jack-ten
- Otherwise, consider jacks in “our” suits bonuses
- Similarly, tens are nice, especially in “our” suits... but don't formally count them

Refining the Losing Trick Count — Aces

- If your hand is particularly rich in aces and ace-king combinations, don't change your loser count but lean toward bidding more
- “Particularly rich” means more than would be expected for your high card count

When the Opponents Bid

- When the opponents bid — or otherwise show certain specific suits — our valuation of cards in their suits changes:
 - A king is a half loser, unless it looks very likely to be on the “right” side; it is a loser if singleton
 - A singleton or unsupported queen is a full loser unless there is good reason to believe it will score
 - Jacks and tens aren’t “bonus” cards any more

Limitations of the Losing Trick Count

- Hands with lots of high card points, but too many losers, often still make game. If it looks like game will make on power and you have a good trump fit, usually bid game.
- Losing trick count cannot tell you whether the opponents can beat your slam at the opening lead. You must also use control bidding, some form of ace asking, etc.
- Losing trick count is awkward to use when one hand is very shapely (e.g., with one long suit) or much stronger than the other. To help with this problem, you can use the “cover card” method.

Cover Cards

- The cover card method is an alternative way to use LTC. It can be used when partner has shown a very shapely or very powerful hand. It is usually used by the shorter trump hand only.
- Using this method, start with an estimate of partner's losers and then subtract losers you can "cover"
- There are three ways to cover partner's losers:
 - With high cards;
 - By discarding them on the run of your long suit; and
 - By ruffing

Cover Cards — High Cards

- When counting cover cards, include high cards that you are nearly certain will be worth tricks:
 - An ace is a cover card
 - A king is a cover card if you are sure the partnership has the ace, or if it is in one of “our” suits
 - A queen is a cover card only if the partnership is known to have the ace and king (plus some length), or if it is in one of “our” suits
 - Ace-queen is worth one and a half cover cards, and a guarded king is worth half a cover card, but use these with caution

Cover Cards — Long, Strong Suits

- A solid suit can be used to dispose of losers, and so can a nearly solid suit plus an entry.
- Count as cover cards every card in a solid suit, provided you can be nearly sure opener can get to your hand.
- If your suit is missing one high honor, count it as its length in cover cards minus one for the missing honor. Again, be careful that you have likely entries.

Cover Cards – Ruffing

- With good trump support, dummy can count shortness as cover cards
- A void is a cover card, two if you have very good trump support or partner is quite strong (but beware duplication)
- A singleton is one cover card
- Shortness (ruffing) cover cards are less certain than the other two methods; try to envision partner's hand before using them

What to do with your Count of Cover Cards

- Use cover cards when partner has shown a long suit (and you have support), a very shapely hand, or a powerful hand, and there is a trump fit of at least eight cards
- Start with an estimate, based on the bidding, of partner's losing trick count
- Subtract one from that loser count for every cover card
- The result is the number of tricks you expect to take

Warning: Don't Turn the Page!

The next pages show the deals we're about to play, so please don't look until you've played them

Hands for Play – Hand 1

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Hands for Play – Hand 2

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Hands for Play — Hand 3

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Suggested Reading

- *Modern Losing Trick Count* by Ron Klinger. (Note that the book is old, and uses bidding methods that may be unfamiliar to North Americans, but the principles are solid.)
- *Complete Book on Hand Evaluation in Contract Bridge* by Mike Lawrence (includes great deal on “in and out” valuation, the subject of this lesson)
- *To Bid or Not to Bid: The Law of Total Tricks* by Larry Cohen (the subject of lessons 3 and 4; there are many others but this remains the best)
- This slide deck is available on my website at www.dougcoachman.com/bridgelessons

Coming in Future Lessons

- The “Law” of Total Tricks
 - Part 1 — How and why it works
 - Part 2 — Adjustments to the Law, and other aspects of judgment in competitive auctions
- After that... tell me what you'd like to learn about!

About this Presentation

- Prepared and presented by Doug Couchman
 - Doug operates his own tutoring business, specializing in graduate admission exams (LSAT, MCAT, GMAT, and GRE)
 - He has been involved in bridge since the late 90s:
 - Former ACBL tournament director
 - Current member of the ACBL Masterpoint Committee and the Board of Governors
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