

# *Losing Trick Count*

An alternative way to evaluate the combined hand potential

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# What is Losing Trick Count (LTC)?

- A different way to estimate the combined trick taking potential of two hands
- Can only be reliably apply for *trump contracts* once an *adequate* trump fit has been established
- Adequate trump fit is defined as
  - At least 8 combined trumps between the two hands
    - If only 8, needs either the Ace and another secondary honor, or 3 or the top 5 honors
  - With 9 the A, or K and at least one of Q,J,10.
  - With 10 or more, any of A, K, or QJ.

# When to use LTC

- When deciding whether to bid on trying to get to possible games or slams
  - Including inviting game or slam
  - But only after an “adequate” trump fit has been established between the combined hands
- Deciding if a marginal hand should be opened or not
- Deciding whether to compete further or to sacrifice

# How Does It Work

Use Losing Trick Count to figure your trick taking potential once your partnership has established an 8 or more card trump fit:

1. Count your losers
2. Estimate partner's losers
3. Add these together and subtract the total from 24

The answer is the number of tricks your partnership will likely make.

# Step 1: counting “losers”

- Each side suit with 3 or more cards starts with worst case 3 “losers”
  - Count a loser for every A, K or Q missing in that suit
    - 532, 9743, 765432 are all THREE (3) loser count suit
  - 0 loser suit: AKQ, AKQ4, AKQ743
  - 1 loser suit: AQ2, KQ65, AK742
  - 1-1/2 loser suit: AJ10, KJ63, AJ8762
  - 2 loser suit: A82, K974, QJ874 (need the J to support the Q)
  - 2-1/2 loser suit: Q43, Q964, Q7542 (1/2 loser more with Q but no J support)
- Each side suit with 2 cards starts with worst case 2 “losers”
  - Count one loser for each A or K missing
  - 0 loser suit: AK
  - 1 loser suit: A2, K7
  - 2 loser suit: QJ or any other weaker doubleton

# Step 1: counting “losers” (continue)

- Each side suit with one card starts with worst case 1 loser
  - 0 loser suit: A
  - 1 loser suit; K or any other singleton
- Each side suit void counts as 0 loser
- Trump suit always has worst case 3 losers regardless of suit length
  - 0 losers: AKQ
  - 1 losers: AQ, KQ, AK6, KQ875
  - 1-1/2 losers: KJ, AJ5, KJ10752
  - 2 losers: A, K5, QJ6, K98752
  - 2-1/2 losers: Q, Q8, Q9642

# Examples (with S established as adequate trumps fit)

- S-Kxx H-Axx D-QJxxx C-Kx
  - 2 in S, 2 in H, 2 in D, 1 in C = 7 LCs
- S-KJxxx H-x D-AQJxx C-xx
  - 2 in S, 1 in H, 1 in D, 2 in C = 6 LCs
- S-Qx H-AKQxx D-xxx C-Qxx
  - 2.5 in S, 0 in H, 3 in D, 2.5 in C = 8 LCs
- S-xxx H-AQxx D-x C-KQxxx
  - 3 in S, 1 in H, 1 in D, 1 in C = 6 LCs
- S-xxx H-x D-x C-Axxxxxxxx
  - 3 in S, 1 in H, 1 in D, 2 in C = 7 LCs

# Step 2: Estimating Partner's Losers

Approx. No. of Points	No. of Losers	Typical Hand
12-15(-)	7	Minimum opening
15-18(-)	6	Strong NT
19-21	5	Jump Shift
22-24	4	Forcing opening
12 - 18	6-7	Takeout double
6-10	9	Simple raise
11-12	8	Limit raise
6-10	9	1NT response
7-16	6-9	Overcall



# Why is a typical 1 level opening usually about 7 LC

- Let say the 1 level opening is 12 HCPs, including 4 Ks
- The most common pattern of a typical no thrill 1 level opening has a shape of 5-3-3-2 or 4-4-3-2 (has a doubleton)
  - Kxxxx Kxx Kxx Kx = 2 in S, 2 in H, 2 in D, 1 in C = 7 LC
  - Kxxx Kx Kxx Kxxx = 2 in S, 1 in H, 2 in D, 2 in C = 7 LC
- Drop a K from those two hands, the HCPs drop to 9, and LC increased by 1 (to 8) (9-11 HCPs, a typical limit raise type responding hand)
- Drop a second K, and HCPs drop to 6-8, usually the simple raise or 1 level response range, and LC increased to 9
- Add a A from those two hands, giving the hand a 16, and the LC decreased by 1 (to 6)
- S-AKxxx H-x D-Axxxx C-xx is 6 LC. In spite of only 11 HCPs, it is often opened by most duplicate players.

# Step 3: Mapping LTC estimates to trick taking potential

- The **worst** possible combined LTC for two hands is 24 (12 for each hand)
- The likely trick taking potential for two hands combined is equal to 24 (the worst-case combined LC) less the combined hand LC estimates
  - Example
    - Opener holds S-AKxxx H-Kx D-QJx C-xxx = 7 LC (good enough to open 1S)
    - Responder holds S-QJx H-xxxx D-Axxxx C-A = 7 LC
  - Combined LC of the two hands is  $7 + 7 = 14$
  - S is an adequate trump fit (8 between the two hands headed by A,K,Q combined)
  - Likely trick taking potential between the two hands is  $24 - 14 = 10$ 
    - They should try to play 4S

# Why use LTC instead of the familiar point count?

- When using point count method to estimate the hand strength and combined potential, we have to subjectively make “playing” point adjustments to shortness (e.g. 2 “additional” points for singleton in a side suit)
  - Value of secondary honors, such as Q or J, in a short suit, (such as Qx), is hard to assign a proper adjusted “playing” point value
  - LTC is already giving weighting to shortness, and discounting the secondary honor, like the Q, in the Qx holding
- Intuitively, side suit holdings such as H-KQx D-xxx is less useful than H-Kxx D-Qxx in a S trump contract.
  - Point count evaluation treats those two holdings as equal in value.
  - LTC considers the first holding as 4 LC, the second 4.5 LC
  - Co-located honors carry more practical playing weight than two secondary honors split between two side suits

# LTC estimation caveats

- Just like point count, LTC is still just an estimation, not a guarantee
  - Evaluation judgment is still crucial
- Duplication can distort trick taking potential
  - e.g. singleton in a side suit in one hand facing QJx in the other hand
- Inadequate combined trump texture may distort the trick taking potential
- An eight-card trump fit with 4-4 or 5-3 between the two hands is often more “adequate” than something like a 6-2 or 7-1 trump fit
  - The more balanced split of trumps allow more opportunities to maximizing the use of the individual trumps for creating additional tricks needed.

# Let's try some exercises

- Partner opened 1S. You raise to 2S. Partner rebid 2NT, showing a balanced hand with likely 5 S and about 17-18 HCPs. What should you rebid holding
  - S-xxx Ax D-xx C-QJxxxx ?

***Partner's 2NT rebids shows 17-18 HCPs, at least 1 to 2 LC lower than the expected 7. Your hand evaluated to 3 in S, 1 in H, 2 in D, and 2 in C, for a total of 8. If partner has 5.5 LC, (between 5 and 6), your combined LC is  $8+5.5=13.5$ . Subtracting that from 24, and the answer is 10.5, odds on for 10 tricks. So, you can jump to 4S***

# Exercise 1 sample hand

## *Board 1*

North Deals

None Vul

LTC exercise 1

♠ A Q J 9 5

♥ K 2

♦ A J 6 3

♣ K 9

♠ K 10 7

♥ Q 9 6 5 3

♦ K 7

♣ 10 6 5



♠ 4 2

♥ J 10 8 4

♦ Q 10 9 8 2

♣ A 3

♠ 8 6 3

♥ A 7

♦ 5 4

♣ Q J 8 7 4 2

NS 4N; NS 4♠; NS 4♣; EW 1♥; NS 1♦; Par +430: NS 3N+1

# Another exercise

- You opened 1D holding S-AQx H-Kxxx D-KQ10xx x
  - Partner bid 1H. What should you rebid?

***Strictly speaking, your hand evaluated to  $1(S)+2(H)+1(D)+1(C)$  for a total of 5 LC. Partner has 6-9 HCPs for the 1H response and should be around 9 LC. So,  $24 - (5+9) = 10$ , and you should consider just bidding 4H. However, partner's 1H response might have been made with a heart suit as weak as Jxxx, in which case your side do not have the requisite combined trump texture to meet the "adequate" trump fit requirement. So, jumping directly to 4H may be wrong if partner happens NOT to have good enough H. So, invite with 3H and give partner SOME leeway***

# Exercise 2 sample hand

## **Board 1**

North Deals

None Vul

## LTC exercise 2

♠ A Q 3

♥ K 10 6 2

♦ K Q 10 7 3

♣ 6

♠ J 10 7 6

♥ 9 8 5

♦ A 6

♣ K J 5 3



♠ K 9 5 4

♥ A 4

♦ 9 8 5 4

♣ Q 10 8

♠ 8 2

♥ Q J 7 3

♦ J 2

♣ A 9 7 4 2

NS 4♥; NS 2♦; EW 1♠; N 1♣; Par +420: NS 4♥=



# Third exercise

- Partner opened 1D. You responded 1H, and partner jumped to 3H. You hold S-x H-K9xxxx D-Ax C-KQxx. What should you do?

*When partner invites 3H over your 1H response, partner is usually expected to have 6LC for H, one better than you might have expected from his typical 1D opening. 3H said if you have your expected minimum of 9 LC, typical with a 6-9 HCPs 1H response, stop. Otherwise, go on to 4. So, if you have better than 9 (like 8 or 8.5 LC), you should go to 4H. On this hand, you have 5 LC for H.  $24 - (5+6) = 11$ . So, you should be able to make 11 tricks in H. Make one try with 3S cue bid, and hope that partner can return a cue bid of 4C. Then, you can safely try 4NT KC. Any time partner invite you to go to 4H with his jump to 3H, and you do not pass 3H, you basically have accepted the invite to play 4H. The reason you do not bid 4H directly is because you think your hand is TOO GOOD to just bid 4H*

# Exercise 3 sample hand

## **Board 1**

North Deals

None Vul

### LTC exercise 3

♠ A 5 4

♥ A 8 4 2

♦ K Q 10 6

♣ A 2

♠ Q 10 7 6 3

♥ —

♦ 8 7 3

♣ J 10 9 7 5



♠ K J 8 2

♥ Q J 9

♦ J 9 5 4

♣ 8 4

♠ 9

♥ K 10 7 6 5 3

♦ A 2

♣ K Q 6 3

NS 6♥; NS 4N; NS 4♦; NS 3♣; NS 1♠; Par +980; NS 6♥=

# One more

- Not vulnerable versus vulnerable opponents, your partner opened 1H. The bidding then proceeded
  - 1H-1S-P-2H-P-4S-?
  - You hold S-x H-xxxx D-xx C-xxxxxx
  - Should you pass again, or sacrifice in 5H?

In spite of your zero count, you had a 9 LC hand for H. Between you and partner, you are supposed to have at least 9 combined H as trumps. If partner had a typical 7 LC for his 1H opening, you combined LTC would be  $7+9 = 16$ . Subtracting that from 24 gives an answer of 8 possible tricks playing in 5HX, going down 3 for -500, a good exchange if they can make 4S for 620 or more. However, there is always the chance that a 5H bid might drive them into 5 or even 6S. So, while the -500-point sacrifice might be worthwhile, you probably do not want to stir up the hornet's nest by bidding 5H.

# Exercise 4 sample hand

## Board 9

North Deals

E-W Vul

## LTC exercise 4

♠ Q J

♥ K Q J 7 5 3

♦ A 6 4 3

♣ 4

♠ 10 9 8 4 2

♥ A 2

♦ J 10 9 8

♣ A Q



♠ A K 7 6 5

♥ 10

♦ K Q 5

♣ K J 10 8

♠ 3

♥ 9 8 6 4

♦ 7 2

♣ 9 7 6 5 3 2

EW 6♠; EW 4N; EW 5♦; NS 2♥; EW 2♣; Par -1100; NS 7♥×-5

# Summary

- Learn to use the alternate method of Losing Trick Count to more accurately estimate the trick taking potential of the two combined hands for a trump contract
  - Prerequisite is that there must be an “adequate trump fit” established
  - Can only be applied for suit trump contract
  - Often more accurate than using HCP evaluation with somewhat subjective assignment of compensating playing points attributed to shortness and distribution

# References

- LTC at [bridgebum.com](http://bridgebum.com)
- The Losing Trick Count at [Blueberrybridge.com](http://Blueberrybridge.com)
- Losing Trick Count by Ron Klinger
- Losing Trick Count by Jennifer Jones at [goodreads.com](http://goodreads.com)