

# Improvers

- **Week 20**

- **Competing in the Auction**

# Competing in the Auction

- 1969
- Frenchman – Jean-Rene Verne
- Article with a new theory
- 'The Law of Total Tricks'
- Greeted in the Bridge world with Total Apathy!
- But Marty Bergen – a US international
- Tested the theory
- And found it worked

# The Law of Total Tricks

- 1979
- Marty Bergen established a partnership with Larry Cohen
- They based their entire bidding strategy on the Law
- Through the 1980's the most successful partnership in the USA
- 1992
- Larry Cohen produced a book called
- 'To Bid or not to Bid'

# To Bid or not to Bid

- Took the Bridge World by storm
  - Nowadays accepted as the standard for competing in the auction
  - All top players use The Law or are aware of its' implications
- 
- The Book is very heavy going!
  - But there is a Ron Klinger flipper
  - Which is easier to get your head round!



# The Law of Total Tricks

- 'The Total Number of tricks available in any one hand is equal to the sum of the longest suit held by each side'

# The Law of Total Tricks

- If 1 pair have 8 ♠'s
- And the opponents have 8 ♥'s
- There are 16 tricks available
- The other side can make 8 in theirs
- If 1 side can make 8 tricks in their suit
- 1 side can make 10 tricks in their suit
- The other can make 6
- So: 8/8, 9/5, 10/6, 11/5, 12/4

# The Law of Total Tricks

- If 1 pair have 10 ♣'s
  - And the opponents have 8 ♦'s
  - There are 18 tricks available
- 
- If 1 side can make 10 tricks in their suit
  - The other side can make 8 in theirs
  - If 1 side can make 11 tricks in their suit
  - The other can make 7
  - So: 9/9, 10/8, 11/7, 12/6

# The Law of Total Tricks

- If 1 pair have 11 ♠'s
  - And the opponents have 10 ♥'s
  - There are 21 tricks available
- 
- If 1 side can make 11 tricks in their suit
  - The other side can make 10 in theirs
  - If 1 side can make 12 tricks in their suit
  - The other can make 9
  - So: 11/10, 12/9, 13/8



# The Law of Total Tricks

- If 1 pair have 7 ♣'s
  - And the opponents have 7 ♦'s
  - There are only 14 tricks available
- 
- If 1 side can make 7 tricks in their suit
  - The other side can make 7 in theirs
  - If 1 side can make 9 tricks in their suit
  - The other can make 5
  - So: 7/7, 8/6, 9/5, 10/4, 11/3

# The Law of Total Tricks

- Like all good Laws
- An explanation of the obvious
- The more unbalanced the hands and bigger the fit
- The more tricks either side can make
- But this gives us a basis to judge
- Whether to compete or stop in the bidding

# Implications

- Profound
- Length is everything!
- If the total tricks are low we should not compete very much unless very strong
- If total tricks are high we should compete to a high level even with weak hands
- And perhaps sacrifice

# Calculating the Total Tricks

1♥

1♠

2♥

2♠

- The Auction goes
- Promising 4
- Promising 5
- Promising 4
- Promising 3
- Each side has shown 8 cards in their suits
- So total tricks is at least 16



# Calculating the Total Tricks

**1♥**

**P**

**2♥**

**P**

**P**

**?**

- The Auction goes
- Promising 4
- Promising 4
- 1 side has 8 cards
- The non bidders must have 7 somewhere
- So total tricks is at least 15 and likely 16
- The next player should compete

**1♥**

**1♠**

**2♥**

**2♠**

**?**

- Total tricks is 16
- If they can make 8 so can you somewhere
- If they can make 9 you can make 7
- 1 off would be a good score
- Bid a 5 card suit
- Or a protective \* without a 5 card suit
- Try to force them to 3
- Allowing opponents to play in 2 of an agreed suit is a losing methodology

# Exceptions

- Do not compete over the 2 level with Total Tricks = 16 or fewer when:
  - Opponents have not found an 8 card fit
  - Opponents are known under-bidders
  - Opener thought before passing at the 2 level - bidding on was an option
- Your hand is 4333 shape – better to defend

# Competing at the 3 level

**1♦**

**1♠**

**2♦**

**2♠**

**3♦**

**?a**

**?b**

- Total Tricks is 17 (9♦'s and 8♠'s)
- With 5 ♠'s ?a should overcall at favourable vulnerability
- With 6 ♠'s ?a should overcall at any vul
- With 4 ♠'s ?b should overcall at any vul



# Competing at the 3 level when weak

- With Total Tricks = 16 never bid 3 over 3
- With Total Tricks = 17 bid 3 over 3 with favourable or equal vulnerability
- With Total Tricks = 18 always bid 3 over 3

# Competing at the 4 level

**1♥**

**1♠**

**3♥**

**3♠**

**4♥**

**?a**

**?b**

- 1 side have 9 or 10 ♥'s
- The other have 9 or 10 ♠'s
- Assume  $9\frac{1}{2}$  each Total Tricks = 19
- If ?a has 6 ♠'s bid 4 at any vul
- If ?b has 5 ♠'s bid 4 at any vul
- If they bid 5♥ only bid 5 at fav vul

# Competing at the 4 level

- With  $\pi = 19$  bid 4 over 4 if you have 10
- With  $\pi = 20$  always bid 4 over 4
- With  $\pi = 19$  bid 5 over 4 if you have 10 and fav vul
- With  $\pi = 20$  bid always 5 over 4
- With  $\pi = 19$  never bid 5 over 5
- With  $\pi = 20$  bid 5 over 5 with 10 and fav vul

# Competing after pre-empts

- If partner opens 3 of a suit
- And you have a weak hand
- And 3 of partners suit
- Raise the pre-empt to 4
- Any time your pair have 10 of a suit
- Opponents must have at least 9
- Or 2 8's
- So you should compete to the 4 level
- And consider bidding 5 or 6 if necessary!



# Adjustments to the Law

- If your side has a double fit add 1
- If you have a void in opponents suit add 1
- If you have a good suit outside trumps
  - AKQxx or AKxxx
  - Add 1
- With freak distribution 6/5, 7/4, 6/6 etc
  - Add 1
- With Qx, Jx, Qxx, Jxx in their suit
  - Subtract 1

# Accuracy of the Law

- The Law is completely accurate 50% of the time
- The Law is within 1 trick 90% of the time

# The Law in Practice

- Compete to the number of trumps held by your side
- Never let opponents play in 2 of an agreed suit with a fit
- In a competitive auction jump to your maximum regardless of HCP
- With 2 suit fits for both sides compete more strongly and consider a sacrifice
- Because you have little or no Defence

# Summary

- Strong hands make more than the number of cards in the trump suit
- So, you can still bid game with fewer than 10 cards in the suit
- Weak hand make less than the number of cards in the suit
- But the Law means you are normally safe to bid to the number of cards held
- Going off can still be a good result



# Finally

- Remember:
- The Law is as much about when to stop as when to bid on
- With big fits compete
- With flatter hands only bid on with strength