Should You Bid One More?

Improving Your Judgment on How High To Go

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Why Use Losing Trick Count?

- Losing trick count (LTC) is a method of evaluating hands. It can be very helpful to both opener and responder when deciding whether to bid game and slam.

  - Use LTC only when considering suit contracts — for notrump, other methods including simple high card points are better. Also, use it only when a trump fit is known or expected.

  - Don’t use LTC to decide whether to open.

  - LTC is used primarily to help constructive auctions; it doesn’t help as much in judging whether to compete, except at high levels.

- This is a theoretical count; it isn’t actually the number of tricks you expect to lose but is a useful approximation that will help you judge whether to look for game or slam.

How to Calculate Losing Trick Count

- To get your first, rough count of losers, look at each of your suits in turn.

- In each suit, look at the largest *three* cards (or all the cards in that suit, if you have two or fewer).

- Count as a loser any card in that top three that is *not* an ace, a king, or a queen — in other words, any jack or lower that is one of the top three cards in the suit is considered a loser.

- Do this for each of the four suits and add up the losers; that's your losing trick count (to start with — we'll modify this total in a bit)

How To Calculate the Losing Trick Count

- The most losers in any suit is three. If a suit has four or more cards, you're considering only the top three for this purpose.

- Notice that the most losers you can have in a suit is limited by how many cards you have in that suit:

- If you have, for example, a doubleton in spades, then you can't have more than two spade losers.

- A singleton is either one loser or zero.

- A void is always zero losers.

How to Calculate the Losing Trick Count

- To reiterate: look at each suit in turn. Give yourself one loser for each of the top three cards, but don’t count as a loser any ace, king or queen.

- Add the losers for each of the four suits to get a total number of losers for the hand.

- That total will range from a minimum of zero, which would be a hand containing nothing but aces, kings, queens, and long solid suits, to twelve, which can happen only with a 4-3-3-3 hand with no ace, king, or queen.

Adjusting the Basic Losing Trick Count

- Aces, kings, and queens are all counted the same way. This is a weakness.
- To correct for that weakness we'll modify it to discount certain honor holdings.
- The first modification deals with queens, which are much weaker than aces but so far are not counted as losers:
- Starting with the basic losing trick count, add a half loser for any singleton queen, and for any queen in a doubleton or longer suit that *doesn't* have another high or touching honor. In other words, for an unsupported queen — either singleton, or with another card or cards all ranked ten or lower — add a half loser.
- This is a reflection of the fact that queens are much more likely to be valuable when they have other honors with them.

Adjusting the Basic Losing Trick Count

- Some people also add losers for unsupported kings, and even get down to counting quarter losers. We won't do that; what we have is precise enough, and too much detail would spoil some of the method's value, which is simplicity.

- In the next lesson we'll also make adjustments that reflect the bidding:

  - Increase the value of honors in "our" suits;

  - Decrease the value of honors in "their" suits.

  - Don't worry about this part for now.

Counting Losers — Example Hands

1. ♠ A3 ♥ KJT8 ♦ AK865 ♣ T9
2. ♠ QJ98543 ♥ 8 ♦ 32 ♣ K72
3. ♠ J3 ♥ AJ984 ♦ KQ5 ♣ Q52
4. ♠ — ♥ AQT432 ♦ AKJ86 ♣ AQ
5. ♠ 8753 ♥ K962 ♦ QJ7 ♣ Q9
6. ♠ A3 ♥ KJT8 ♦ AK865 ♣ T9
7. ♠ 9 ♥ KQT875 ♦ 92 ♣ K542
8. ♠ AKT ♥ Q ♦ KQJ943 ♣ K542

How to Use Losing Trick Count

- In order to use losing trick count you'll have to remember a few numbers:

  - How many losers partner's bidding suggests;
  - Add that to the losers in your own hand and compare the total with…
  - How many losers suggest there may be a good game or slam.

How to Use Losing Trick Count — the Targets

- There is a Losing Trick Count “target” for each level you can bid to, representing the loser total in both partnership hands combined that suggests that bidding to that level will be safe:

    - Bidding to the four level (game in a major) will usually be safe with 14 losers total. Fewer losers is good; more suggests that the contract won’t make.

    - The five level (game in a minor) usually requires 13 losers or fewer.

    - The six level (small slam) usually requires 12 losers or fewer.

    - The seven level (a grand slam!) usually requires 11 losers or fewer, although bidding to good grands is often done differently.

Calculating the LTC Targets

- A way to calculate these numbers if you forget:
    - Start with 24 (the maximum total losers in two hands), and…
    - Subtract the number of tricks you want to take, e.g., the four level requires 10 tricks;
    - The difference is the trick total target (in the example, 24 – 10 = 14).

LTC Estimates for Opener's Hand

- Minimum opening bids most commonly have seven losers.
- A strong notrump (15–17 or so) is most often six losers, but seven is fairly common too.
- Many of opener's jump rebids and other strong bids suggest five losers:
    - A reverse (e.g., 1♥ – 1NT; 2♠)
    - A jump rebid of opener's suit (e.g., 1♥ – 1♠; 3♥)
    - A jump raise of responder's suit (e.g., 1♥ – 1♠; 3♠)
    - A jump in notrump (e.g., 1♥ – 1♠; 2NT)
- Opener's jump shift (e.g., 1♥ – 1♠; 3♣) suggests four losers (and is game forcing); a 2NT opening also suggests four losers.
- A strong 2♣ bid is sometimes four losers, but often three or even fewer.

LTC Estimates for Responder's Hand

- A minimum responding hand will usually have nine losers, but ten is possible. This includes most single raises of a major suit.

- Invitational hands tend to have eight losers. This includes "limit" raises of major suits and most 10–12 notrump responses to minors.

- Seven loser responder hands usually want to drive to game (at least!) if a trump fit is found:

  - Use a forcing raise (e.g., Jacoby 2NT, splinter, inverted minor suit raise);

  - Make a strong jump shift (if you play them); note that these often have even fewer than seven losers.

Using LTC — Example auctions

Opener's hand: ♠ AQT8 ♥J ♦KQJ943 ♣K52

1. 1♦ – 1♠; ?
2. 1♦ – 1♥; 1♠ – 2♠; ?
3. 1♦ – 2NT (11-12); ?
4. 1♦ – 2♦(game forcing); ?

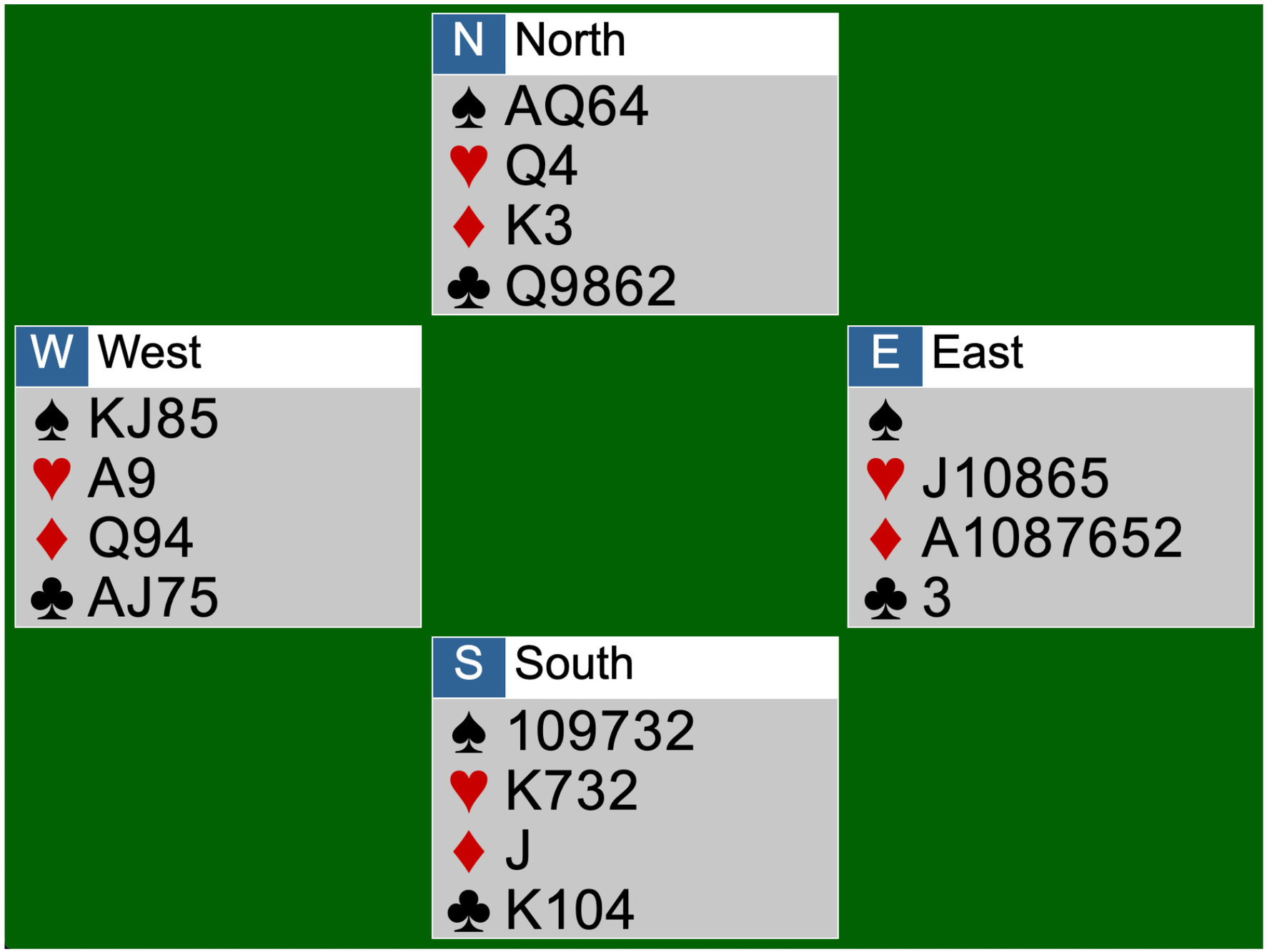
Using LTC — Example auctions

Responder's hand: ♠ K45 ♥ J ♦ QT873 ♣ 9752

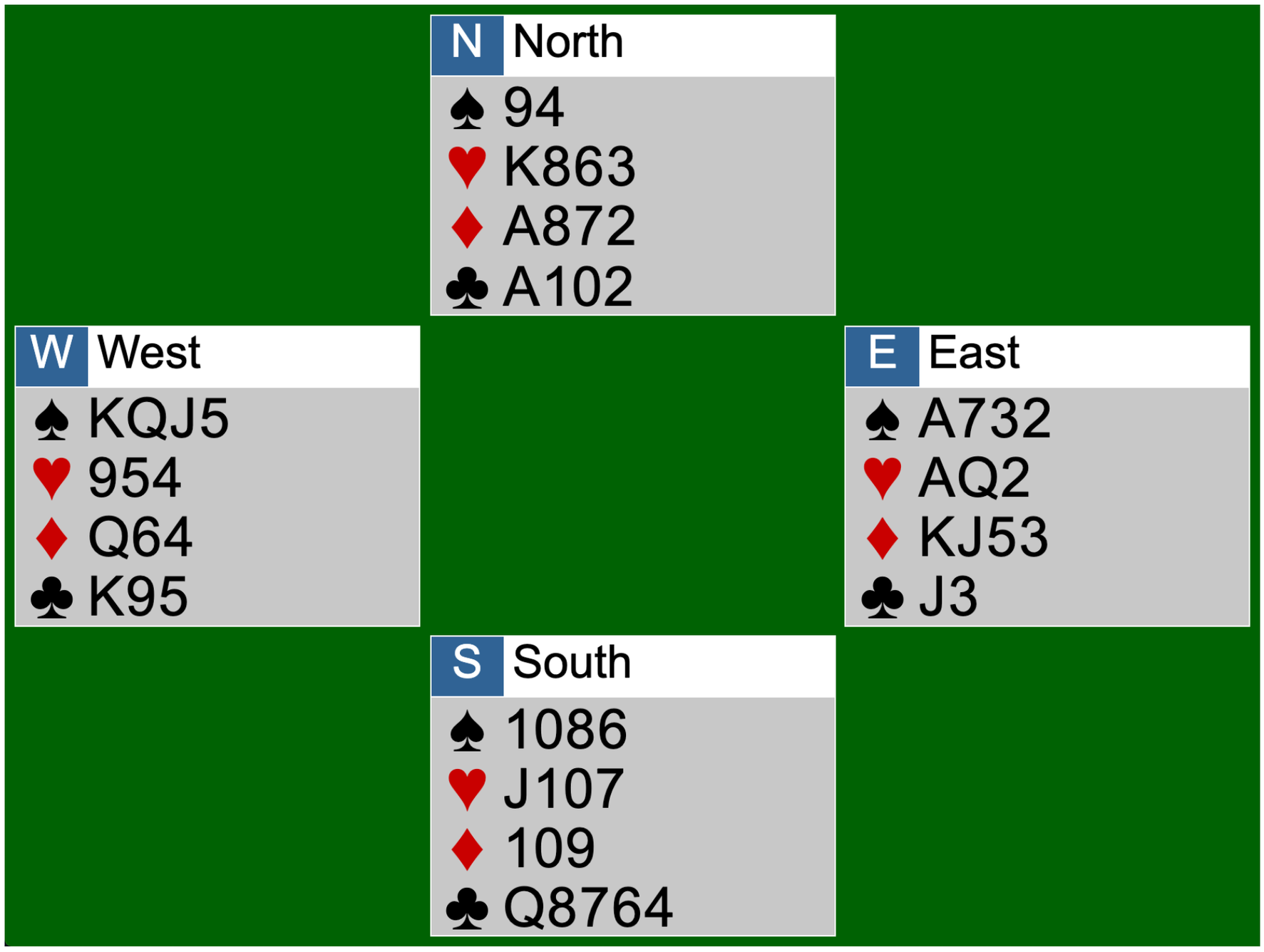
1. 1♠ – ?
2. 2♣ – 2♦ (waiting); 2♠ – ?
3. 1♣ – 1♦; 2NT – ?
4. 1♥ – 1NT (forcing); 3♣ – ?
5. 3♦ – ?

Hands for Play — Hand 1

Hands for Play — Hand 2



Hands for Play — Hand 3



Hands for Play — Hand 4

Suggested Reading

- *Modern Losing Trick Count* by Ron Klinger

- *Complete Book on Hand Evaluation in Contract Bridge* by Mike Lawrence (includes “in and out” valuation, the subject of lesson 2)

- *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)

- I will be making this deck available on my website at www.dougcouchman.com/bridgelessons.

Coming in Future Lessons

- More Losing Trick Count:
  - Adjusting for where your honors are: “In and Out” evaluation
    - When the opponents are silent
    - In competitive auctions
      - The cover card method
- 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

About this Presentation

- Prepared and presented by Doug Couchman
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    - He has been involved in bridge since the late 90s:
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