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(55) Hand Evaluation: Counting Points II - After Partner Bids

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Level: Intermediate / Advanced

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General

Now that we are working to develop our judgment in evaluating our hand in a more sophisticated way than just HCP we want to make use of this skill as frequently as possible. The most important times we will make use of this modern evaluation (and re-evaluation) skill are as we learn more information about other players' hands. Specifically, we will focus on re-evaluating our hand as we gain information from Partner – *After Partner Bids*.

Location of Honors

When we have honors in a side suit (not one of our long suits) these honors are only taking their own potential tricks. They are not setting up additional tricks by helping to turn small cards into winners – as they would if they were in a long suit. When partner opens a suit (or bids) we need to think about our honors in that suit differently.

We need to reconsider the value (upgrade) our points in partner's suit. We want to visualize these points as being a part of (atop) partner's long suit. Thus, we need to upgrade these points as if we were adding length points to partner's hand. The more points we have in partner's suit the easier it will be to set it up and thus the more we need to upgrade. It is also important to note that when we have lots of points in partner's suit we know the suit is setting up well and partner does not. That means that partner will be conservative and frequently underbid. Since we know that our side is likely to take more tricks than normal, it is our responsibility to upgrade our hand and bid more aggressively for our side.

Another thing to consider is what types of honors are best. We all know that Aces and Kings are the best type of points (the ones that are most likely to take tricks.) But we also want to reconsider our other values (Queens and Jacks) as we learn more information about partner's hand. Specifically, our Queens and Jacks are valuable in our long suits and in partner's long suits. Jacks are far less valuable in our short suits (we should downgrade them.)



Fits

When we are re-evaluating our hand after partner bids there is another aspect of our hand that is at least as important as the location of our honors – Fit or Size of Fit! (A fit is having at least 8 cards in a suit.) The common bridge saying is “*Fit is King!*” And this is for good reason. The larger and larger fit we have the more and more tricks that we can take without having as many HCP. Many of the modern bidding tools are designed to help us look for fits and to determine the size of our fit more accurately. The larger our fit, the more points we will add to our hand when we are re-evaluating. Similarly, when we have a misfit (shortness in partner’s suit) we will subtract points from our hand and be more conservative.

When we have a fit that is likely to play in a suit contract (not headed towards 3N) we have an additional adjustment we can make to our hand – these are called “*shortness points*” or “*support points*” or “*ruffing values.*” In order to upgrade for these shortness points we need to have the following aspects to our hand:

- A fit with Partner.
- Shortness in a side suit.
- Be the short side of the trump fit (In a 4-4 fit both sides count as the short side.)

Once we have all of these items we can upgrade our hand. We usually add points to our hand as:

- 1 point for a Doubleton,
- 2 points for a Singleton, and
- 3 points for a void.

But as our fit becomes larger and larger we gain more and more ruffing values. This is especially true for voids and singletons. Thus, in 9+ card fit situations many players add points as follows:

- 1 point for a Doubleton,
- 3 points for a Singleton, and
- 5 points for a void.

These adjustments to our HCP are just approximations to the playing strength of our hand because the actual usefulness will vary based on Partner’s holding opposite our shortness (how many wasted values they have.)

Note: Splinters are an extremely useful tool in modern bidding because by showing our fit, shortness, and values we can work with partner to more precisely re-evaluate our hands.

Conclusion

The most important thing we all need to remember is to keep listening to the auction. Partner’s shape is a very important part of proper hand evaluation. Try to determine partner’s primary suit, secondary suit, shortness, and completely visualize their hand (make an educated guess.) Remember it is not just our hand that is going to be taking tricks. We need to visualize the way the two hands fit together in order to practice good Hand Evaluation.