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(56) Hand Evaluation: Counting Points III – When the Opponents Bid

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Level: Intermediate / Advanced

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General

Just as Partner helps us Re-evaluate our hand when they bid (both fits and location of honors), so do the opponents when they bid. We want to make use of the information that the opponents give away to help us visualize their hands (and the effect on ours) – just as we did with Partner's.

Fitting Cards

When we have honors in the opponents' suit, it generally decreases the playing strength (offensive ability) of our hand. This is the case because when we have honors (HCP) in the opponents' suit, it leaves fewer honors for us to have in our suits or partner's suit. Additionally, the fact that we have points in the opponents' suit increases the chances that the opponent has points in our suit or partner's suit – making it more difficult for us to set up our tricks. Simply put, we want to have fitting cards with partner, not the opponents!

Positional Values

Another concern for hand evaluation is how our honors sit relative to the opponents' honors. The value of our tenaces (non-touching honors) goes up or down based on the location of the opponents' honors. The opponents' bidding helps us understand the location of their honors. If our RHO overcalls and we have the AQ of their suit, then the King is likely on our right (where we want it to be for the finesse to work) and we should upgrade our AQ to more like an AK. In contrast, if we have the AQ of a suit and our LHO overcalls, then the King is likely behind us (our finesse will fail) so we want to downgrade our holding. We will do similar upgrades and downgrades with holdings like KJx and others.

One more issue to take into account is the expected suit quality of the opponents' suit. There is a subtle difference between an opening bid and an overcall. An opening bid is dictated by a set of rules from our system (and can be a suit of any quality) while an overcall is a choice that the opponents made. An overcall (especially vulnerable) will tend to be a better suit and we can be more confident about our re-evaluation of positional values.



Fits

The positional values are an important re-evaluation when the opponents bid. But we want to make use of more than just the opponents' honors – we want to think about the opponents' length (and distribution.) If the opponents bid one of our side suits then we can imagine partner as likely short in that suit. This information helps us visualize where we might find a fit with partner's cards.

In addition to helping us find a fit with partner, visualizing the opponents' hands helps us count the number of losers we might have in the opponents' suit. Holdings like three small (xxx) are horrible (often lead to losing the first three tricks.) Other holdings like Qxx or Kxx (poorly positioned) can lead to a large number of losers as well.

Conclusion

There are many things that we need to take into consideration when the opponents bid. It is important for us to learn to make use of the information provided to us by the opponents. We want to use their bids against them. We will use the information they provide to help us visualize the way the four hands fit together around the table. Expert Hand Evaluation involves collecting this information and using it to “predict the future” of the way the play will go. Being able to understand what will likely happen in the play will lead to far better bidding!