

LESSON – Using Losing Trick Count for determining whether to bid game in a SUIT contract by MARVIN 12/4/12

CONCEPT – In its most simplistic form, the Losing Trick Count (LTC) is a hand evaluation method that can be used in conjunction with point count to judge how high to bid. In this lesson, we will explore its use to determine whether or not we should bid game in a **suit** contract. This methodology also has application for slam bidding, preempts, cue bidding, negative doubles and other bidding actions. But, those won't be covered in the short time we have here. The objective of this lesson is to introduce the concept and whet your appetite for further exploration of this tool.

LTC provides a tool for determining if a game contract is appropriate once a **trump fit** has been determined. The LTC formula is as follows:

- 1 Count your losers
- 2 Add partner's losers
- 3 Subtract the total from 24

The result is the Losing Trick Count and is the **TOTAL** number of tricks that the partnership can expect to win most of the time, if suits break normally, half of your finesses win and you get a bit of luck.

The rules for counting losers in your hand are as follows:

- 1 Count losers only in the top 3 cards in a suit;
- 2 No suit can have more than 3 losers;
- 3 With 3 or more cards, count the A, K and Q as winners; anything lower is a loser;
- 4 With 2 cards in a suit, count A and K as winners, anything lower is a loser;
- 5 With 1 card in a suit, count the A as a winner; anything lower is a loser;
- 6 Also, count unsupported queens as 2 ½ losers (Q64 – 2 ½ Losers; QJ3 has only 2 losers)

The following examples are for clarification:

Suit	Losers	Suit	Losers	Suit	Losers	Suit	Losers
AKQxx	0	AQxx	1	Q95	2 ½	Void	0
AKxxx	1	Jxxxx	3	Kxxx	2	AKQx	0
Axxxx	2	xx	2	Qx	2	KJ3	2
Kx	1	K	1	KQ	1	J654	3

In general, the following is a simple working guide for opening hand strength and estimated losers:

Points	Strength Description	Expectancy
12-15	Sound Minimum Opening	7 losers
16-18	Strong Opening	5-6 losers
19-21	Very Strong Opening	4-5 losers

Responder strength and estimated losers:

6-9	Simple Raise	9-10 losers
10-12	Limit raise/Invitational hand	8-9 losers
13+	Game force raise	7 or less

So how does this work?

If you have support for your partner's suit, your decision to go to game or play in a partial game should be based on the estimated losers your partnership has. With 15 or more losers, you belong in a partial game, as you only have 9 winners. With 14 or fewer losers, you have 10 or more winners and should be able to bid and make a game or better.

EXAMPLES:

1 NORTH	2 NORTH	3 NORTH
♠ 82	♠ A62	♠ A952
♥ AQ765	♥ 83	♥ Q8
♦ AQ743	♦ KQJ8	♦ AK8
♣ 8	♣ A853	♣ 9842
SOUTH	SOUTH	SOUTH
♠ 9643	♠ KJ987	♠ K873
♥ K942	♥ ---	♥ J9
♦ 82	♦ 753	♦ QJ95
♣ A42	♣ KJ742	♣ AJ7

Final Note: Balanced hands generally have more losers than unbalanced hands. The use of LTC leads to bidding and making more game bids and less overbidding when game is not makeable.

REFERENCES: [Losing Trick Count](#), by Jennifer Jones
[Losing Trick Count, Vol. 2](#), by Jennifer Jones
[The Modern Losing Trick Count](#), by Ron Klinger

ANSWERS --

- 1 In hand 1, the partnership has 19 high card points and a combined total of 14 losers (**N-5; S-9**). Using LTC, we subtract 14 from 24, and we expect to take a total of 10 tricks. A bid of 4 hearts is very makeable with this combination of cards. Expect to lose 2 Spades, and 1 Diamond with any luck. I won't go into the bidding, but there are numerous ways to get there. **SAMPLE BIDDING** 1H – 2H; 4H.
- 2 In hand 2, the partnership has a total of 22 High card points, and a combined total of 14 losers (**N-7; S-7**). Using LTC, we expect to take 10 tricks. Expect to lose 1 Spade, 1 Diamond and 1 Club. If you are lucky, you may lose only 1 trick! **SAMPLE BIDDING** 1D – 1S; 1NT – 2C (NEW MINOR FORCE) ; 2S – 4S!
- 3 In hand 3, the partnership has a combined total of 25 high card points. Using LTC, we have 16 losers (**N-8; S-8**) and can only expect to win 8 tricks. We will probably lose 1 Spade, 2 hearts, and at least 1 club. **SAMPLE BIDDING** 1C – 1S; 2S – PASS?? OR 1C – 1S; 3S - PASS??