

## LOSING TRICK COUNT

Accurate bidding is one of the secrets to success in the game of bridge. The **Losing Trick Count (LTC)** method of hand evaluation greatly increases one's ability to more accurately place any contract. **The Losing-Trick Count (LTC) is an alternative, or supplement to the high card point (HCP) method of hand evaluation, used because shape and fit are of more significance, and oft times more accurate, than HCP in determining the optimum level for a makeable suit contract based upon a Partnership's combined holdings.**

The LTC augments the HCP count method of assessing the number of tricks a Partnership is likely to win. Take the following as an example: Most players, following a 4 Spade rebid by opening Partner would pass out this cold 6S, 25 HCP hand.

<u>Opener (Partner)</u>	<u>Responder (You)</u>
1D	1S
4S	??
AQJX	K10XXXX
XX	X
AKJXX	XX
KX	AXXX

One must **not** envisage the **LTC** as **replacing** point count. It is used in **coordination with point count** in order to elicit a more accurate guide as to the potential of the Partnership's combined holding. When considering using the **LTC**, one must consider the following constraints:

- 1) It is **not** applicable when considering a No Trump Contract.
- 2) It is applicable **only after** a trump fit has been established.
- 3) It is quite unsuitable for misfit hands where no fit exists.

### The LTC Formula

- A. Count your losers
- B. Add Partner's losers
- C. Deduct this total from 24
- D. The answer is the number of tricks a Partnership can expect to win

The **LTC** operates by deducting the computed losing tricks from the maximum possible total of twenty-four. Why deduct the total losers between both hands from 24? Since the maximum number of losers you count in any one suit is three (3); and since there are as many as four (4) suits in each hand, Partner's and yours;  $3 \times 4 \times 2 = 24$ . Therefore: **LTC = Maximum losers (24) minus Computed Losing Tricks = Tricks anticipated winning.** The **LTC** does **not** guarantee that one will, in fact, make the number of anticipated tricks. It represents the number of tricks one will win most of the time assuming the suits break normally, and half of one's potential finesses work. Calculations within the **LTC** require two (2) stages. They are as follows:

## A. CALCULATING YOUR LOSERS

- 1) Count losers **only** in the first three cards of each suit. The 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, etc. cards in any suit are assumed to be winners. **There are never more than three losers in any suit, and there are never more losers in a suit than the number of cards held within that suit.** As ones HCP's increase, the losers decrease. As ones HCP's decrease, the losers increase. The more unbalanced the hand, the fewer the losers. The more balanced the hand, the more the losers.
- 2) The basic method assumes that: an Ace will never be a loser, nor will a King in a 2-card or longer suit, nor will a Queen, if coupled ("**guarded**") with another honor in any 3-card or longer suit. Thus:
- 3) **A 3-card Suit** - AKQ = 0 losers, AQX or KQX or AJT = 1 losing trick, AXX, or KXX = 2 losers, and QXX (unless is trump suit, or a suit supported by Partner, or XXX = 3 losing tricks.
- 4) **A Doubleton** - AK = 0 losers, Ax, AQ, KX or KQ = 1 loser, XX = 2 losing tricks.
- 5) **A Singleton** - other than an A = 1 losing trick.
- 6) **A Void** = 0 losing tricks.
- 7) **An unguarded Q** (Ex: QXX) is considered as **one-half a loser**; a guarded or supported Q (Ex: QJX or AQX or KQX), is not counted as a loser; i.e., any Queen should be counted as a winner if it is supported by another honor.

## B. ASSESSING PARTNER'S LOSERS

Partner's losers may be determined through knowledge of Partner's strength as revealed through his/her bidding. If you can tell how strong Partner's hand is one can calculate his/her losers. A simple **calculation of Partner's losers** based upon strength would be as follows:

- a) Support for your opening bid with 6-10 HCP's, a **Constructive Raise = 9 Losers**
- b) Just below a normal opening count with 10-12 HCP's, a **limit raise** with 10-12 HCP's, or a weak opening 2-bid = **8 Losers**
- c) A sound minimum **opening bid** with 13-15 HCP's, or a Take-out Double = **7 Losers**
- d) A **strong opening bid** with 16-18 HCP's, or an **opening 1-NT** with 15-17 HCP's = **6 Losers**
- e) A very strong opening bid evidenced by a **jump-shift** re-bid holding 19-21 HCP's = **5 Losers**
- f) An **strong opening "2C"bid** holding 22+ HCP's = **4 Losers**

## LOSING TRICK COUNT ADJUSTMENTS

- a) Subtract 1-Loser if there be a 10-card fit or longer
- b) The above is a broad overlook at the LTC. It is based upon a generalized raw count as indicated in the above-listed reference examples. Adjustments must be made in order to be even more accurate; such as adjustments and refinements to super-trump fits, the quality of trump support, presence or absence of controls and cover-cards, just to name a few. A furtherance of understanding of the LTC can be achieved by reading Ron Klinger's "**The Modern Losing Trick Count**", and Marty Bergen's "**Points Schmoints**", & "**More Points Schmoints**."