

## Dr. Baloney Bill's Tips\*

### Topic: Losing Trick Count (LTC)

Why learn it? It gives you a much more accurate tool for measuring the trick-taking potential of your partnership than simply relying on high card points.

How do you determine the LTC of your hand?

- Well, you count the "losers" in each of your suits. Typically, you are looking for cards other than the Ace, King and Queen in a suit.
- You may have no more than:
  - 3 losers in any suit possessing 3 or more cards
  - 2 losers in any suit possessing 2 cards
  - 1 loser in any suit possessing 1 card
  - 0 losers in a suit with zero cards (void)

For examples, two hands are shown below, with spades noted first, then hearts, then diamonds, and then \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank, please)

A K 5    9 7 3    K 8 6    A 9 7 5

Look at the spade suit first. The Ace and King are not losers, but the 5 is. You have a losing trick count (LTC) of 1 in spades. How many losers in the heart suit? \_\_\_\_\_. In diamonds? \_\_\_\_\_. LTC in clubs is calculated a little differently. Anytime you have more than 3 cards in a suit, consider only the top 3 cards (in this case, the A 9 7). Club LTC = \_\_\_\_\_. To determine the losing trick count in your hand, add up the LTC in each suit to arrive at a total. In the example above, your losing trick count is: \_\_\_\_\_

K T 5 3 2    9 6 4 3    A K Q    Q    Your LTC\* is: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Your singleton clubs queen is a losing trick; opponents' Ace or King will take it.  
Then again, partner may have the Ace and King, but you don't know that.  
A suit such as Q 9 or Q 5 has a LTC of 2.

*I adjust my LTC based on the number of 9s, 10s, Js and Qs in my hand – more on that at another time.*

So why is LTC important? The lower your losing trick count, the better your hand is!

Here is a hand that I held at the Lone Star Regional in Houston Texas:

A Q 10 9 8 7 6    8 6    K Q 7 6    My losing trick count was: \_\_\_\_\_

You might choose to open this hand \_\_\_\_\_.

I opened \_\_\_\_\_. We ended up in a \_\_\_\_\_ contract and made a \_\_\_\_\_.

OK, some applications of LTC...

### **Help Suit Game Try**

Help suit game try is useful after a constructive raise in one of the major suits, e.g. Partner opens one spade, and you bid two spades. In the 2/1 system of play, this tells partner that you have exactly 3 spades and 8-9 points. With exactly 3 spades and just 6-7 points, you would likely bid 1 NT (forcing or semi-forcing), then bid spades at your next opportunity.

After your constructive raise, if opener (partner) is interested in game only if you have "support" in another suit, e.g. clubs, partner will bid that suit at the 3-level. "Support," using LTC, implies 0-2 LTC in the club suit; e.g. if you have the AK of clubs or the 2 and 3 of clubs, each fall within the range of 0-2 LTC. With this support, bid game. If your clubs are 9 8 7 or 6 5 4 3 2, your LTC is 3, so sign off at 3 spades.

### **Limit raises**

Most bridge players will respond with a limit raise with 10-12 points and 3+ trump. Some only employ it with 3 trumps, using Bergen or other conventions to inform partner. I've seen some very poor limit raises and usually know that opponents will likely fail in their contract when dummy is displayed.

Improve your success with limit raise hands using LTC. Ignore your point count! Simply count your trump support (3 cards, 4 cards...), and your hand's LTC. With 7 LTC and 3 trump, that's good enough for a limit raise. With 8 LTC and 4 trump, that's good for a limit raise. Don't ever employ a limit raise with more than 8 LTC. Don't ever with 10-12 points, 3 trump and 8 LTC...

### **Opening bids**

You are typically safe opening one spade with 7 LTC, even if you have only 9 or 10 points. This, in a sense, is a pre-emptive bid, making it more difficult for opponents to communicate. Yes, it may fool your partner, as well, unless partner knows you may do this a times. Typically, follow up bids will let partner know your HCP.

### **Two club opening bids**

Well, you heard about my opening bid at the Lone Star Regional and the result. So, consider opening 2 clubs with fewer than 22 points. Again, work with your partner to agree on how few points that might be. Just know that a 4 LTC hand is quite powerful, if YOU land the contract, regardless of your HCP. I've had dozens of 4 LTC hands and a couple of 3 LTC hands. You will see a bid smile on my face when I pick up these hands despite my attempt to suppress it.