

The Losing Trick Count (part 1)

Hand Valuation

- 1 The High Card Point count is a common method of evaluating a hand. The system counts 4 points for an Ace, 3 for a King, 2 for a Queen and 1 for a Jack. The number of these high card points (HCP) is best used to *estimate* the number of tricks that can be *expected* in NT contracts.

1NT 21-22

2NT 23-24

3NT 25-26

4NT 27-29

5NT 30-33

6NT 34-35

7NT 36-40

NT hands are often balanced. Unbalanced hands are better played in a suit contract when distribution is as important as HCP when valuing the hand.

The losing trick count is an alternative method of hand valuation that determines how many tricks can be made in a suit contract, when (**and only when!!**) at least an 8 card suit fit has been established.

- 2 The **Losing Trick Count (LTC)** has been much revised and appears in several forms. That described below is the method popularized by Harrison-Gray (c 1950).

The system attempts to value a hand in terms of shape and fit, rather than in terms of HCP, to determine the optimum level for a suit contract.

- 2.1 Losers are counted in each suit as follows:

- In a 3 card suit or longer, count 1 loser for each missing Ace, King and Queen
- In a 2 card suit (doubleton), count 1 loser for each missing Ace and King
- In a 1 card suit (singleton), count 1 loser for each missing Ace
- In a 0 card suit (void) there are no losers

There are never more than 3 losers in any suit.

- 2.2 The total number of losers in the two hands is subtracted from 18 to determine the optimum level for the contract.

7 losers + 9 losers = 16 losers, therefore contract at the 2 level.

7 losers + 8 losers = 15 losers, therefore contract at the 3 level.

5 losers + 9 losers = 14 losers, therefore contract at the 4 level.

6 losers + 7 losers = 13 losers, therefore contract at the 5 level.

Count your losers:-

Void:	losers
x	loser
A	losers
x x	losers
Ax	losers
Kx	losers
AKx	losers
Axx	losers
Kxx	losers
Jxx	losers
x x x x	losers
QJx	losers
Q	losers
K	losers
KQ	losers
KQJ	losers
AQJ	losers
AJx	losers
x x x x x	losers
Qxx	? losers ***

*** With a holding of Queen-x-x, count three losers in the suit unless:

1. that suit is the trump suit.
2. that suit has been bid by partner.
3. the Queen is followed by the Jack of the same suit.
4. the Queen is supported by an Ace in another suit that is not the trump suit.

1	♠ Q x x x ♥ A x x ♣ x x x x ♦ K x	2	♠ Q x x x ♥ A x x x x ♣ x x ♦ K x	3	♠ Q x x x ♥ K x x x ♣ Q J x ♦ K x	4	♠ J x x x ♥ A J x ♣ Q J x x ♦ K J
	1S --- ??		1S --- ??		1S --- ??		1S --- ??

Partner opens 1S based on LTC – count your losers and decide what to respond.

3 Bidding using LTC with an immediate fit.

3.1 Open one of your 4 card suit or longer if you have:-

- No more than 7 losers and
- A sound rebid.

3.2 Responder places opener with 7 losers and with a known fit (four card support)

With 7 losers bids 4 of the suit expecting to make the contract	(18-(7+7))
With 8 losers bids 3 of the suit expecting to make the contract	(18-(7+8))
With 9 losers bids 2 of the suit expecting to make the contract	(18-(7+9))

3.3 Opener now knows that the partnership has a trump fit and knows how many losers partner holds. If Opener has just 7 losers they should pass but if opener has fewer than 7 losers, they can rebid the suit at the optimum level. For example:-

With 6 losers raise responder's 3 bid to 4	(18-(6+8))
With 6 losers pass responder's 2 bid	(18-(6+9)) *

* No point raising to 3 level at duplicate (unless forced by opponents bidding) because 2S making 9 tricks and 3S making 9 tricks both score 140. At rubber it's worth bidding 3S if you need to.

LTC is at its most reliable in predicting low level contracts and is not likely to let you down at game level.