

Losing Trick Count – part 2

By Jennifer Jones

Should I invite game with this hand? What should my rebid be after partner raises my suit? These are common questions. When you find yourself faced with these decisions, pause and count your losers. This will give you the answer.

Losing Trick Count (LTC) does not replace point count. Rather, it is used as an adjunct to the point-count system when a trump fit comes to light. Last month's article explained how to count losers.

We have seen that a minimum opening bid generally has seven losers and that a seven-loser hand opposite a seven-loser hand should produce 10 tricks: $7 + 7 = 14$, which, subtracted from $24 = 10$, the number of tricks the partnership should be able to take.

As the responder, if you have support for opener's suit, base your response on how many losers you have. With nine or more, make a simple raise. With eight, invite game with a limit raise. With seven, make a game force. With six losers, consider bidding slam and with five or fewer, head toward slam.

What would you bid with these hands after partner opens $1\spadesuit$?

A) $\spadesuit KQ86$ $\heartsuit A10$ $\diamondsuit J32$ $\clubsuit J865$

B) $\spadesuit KQ86$ $\heartsuit 10$ $\diamondsuit J743$ $\clubsuit J865$

The first hand has 11 HCP and the second only 7 HCP, but they both have eight losers. That makes them game-invitational hands, so make a limit raise — $3\clubsuit$ if that's how you do it.

Now let's look at it from the point of view of opener, who is often in a position to place the contract once partner responds. Opposite a limit raise, showing eight losers, opener should pass with a seven-loser hand, bid game with a six-loser hand and

explore slam with a stronger hand.

How should opener proceed with these hands after a limit raise?

C) $\spadesuit AJ753$ $\heartsuit J6$ $\diamondsuit KQ8$ $\clubsuit A73$

D) $\spadesuit AJ753$ $\heartsuit 86$ $\diamondsuit KQ86$ $\clubsuit A7$

Opener should pass with hand C (seven losers), but should bid game with hand D (six losers).

Interestingly, hands B and D combine for a 21-point game that makes, while hands A and C combine for a 26-point game likely to fail.

Let's look now at single raises that show nine or 10 losers. Here is a typical $2\heartsuit$ response to a $1\heartsuit$ opener:

$\spadesuit 94$ $\heartsuit QJ62$ $\diamondsuit 8752$ $\clubsuit A95$

Looking at it again from opener's point of view, how should opener proceed with these hands after a single raise?

$\spadesuit 105$ $\heartsuit AK10973$ $\diamondsuit 4$ $\clubsuit KQ82$

$\spadesuit Q5$ $\heartsuit AK1097$ $\diamondsuit AK7$ $\clubsuit J84$

Although the first hand has only 12 points, it has five losers. As game is a strong possibility, opener should make a game try.

The second hand has more points (17) but seven losers, so opener should pass $2\heartsuit$.

Here's a hand my partner held recently in a local team game. I opened $1\spadesuit$ and she responded $1NT$. When I rebid $2\heartsuit$, she had a decision:

$\spadesuit 6$ $\heartsuit AJ109$ $\diamondsuit J98763$ $\clubsuit 52$

Although she had only 6 points, she counted her losers (8) and realized her hand was worth an invitation, so she raised to $3\heartsuit$. I held:

$\spadesuit AK953$ $\heartsuit K8652$ $\diamondsuit A4$ $\clubsuit 4$,

a powerful five-loser hand, so I had an easy $4\heartsuit$ bid and we reached a great 20-point game.



While some of these examples may seem dramatic, using LTC will help you refine your hand evaluation so as to more confidently bid the games that make and stay out of the ones that don't.

To learn more, visit the author's blog site: jennbridge.blogspot.com. □

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