

The ABC of Bridge
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Those of you who have been reading the series of articles entitled “The ABC of Bridge” know that I am a fervent advocate of using Losing Trick Count (LTC) to assess the trick taking potential in a SUIT contract. I have suggested attributing specific LTCs to opening bids, forcing raises, limit raises, and constructive raises. Many of the previous articles have focused on using LTC to get to a game or a slam. Sometimes LTC is helpful in staying out of trouble. Examine the following hand, played at a social duplicate in my condo.

North:

♠ AQ106

♥ 85

♦ AQ94

♣ 1075 -

(LTC = 7 - Janis)

South:

♠ KJ75

♥ AQ106

♦ 973

♣ Q4

(LTC= 8 - Dave)

Our Auction:

N	S	E	W
1NT*	P	2♣	P
2♠	P	P!	P

* 12-14 HCP

Here is how Losing Trick Count played a role in the bidding. South’s LTC of 8 required an LTC of 6 or less in North’s hand to make a game of 10 tricks in spades. Remember the math: $8 + 6 = 14$ and $24 - 14 = 10$ winners. North’s weak NT opener most often has an LTC of 8 and once in awhile an LTC of 7. As South, I believed the other South’s would likely drive to a game, which had a high likelihood of failing. My assessment was correct as the other declarers went down one or two tricks. Janis won 9 tricks as one red King was onside and the other was not.

Had we not been playing weak NT openers, the auction would have gone as follows:

1♦	P	1♥	P
1♠	P	3♠	P
P	P		

Here the 3♠ bid is an invitation showing an LTC of 8 and asks the opener to bid a game with a 6 loser hand or better.

The following hand illustrates how Losing Trick Count can guide a partnership into exploring for a slam. You are South and hold:

♠ -
♥ Q10865
♦ AK74
♣ AK62

You open 1♥ (with an LTC of 4) and your partner responds 2NT which is a forcing raise showing at least 4 pieces of trump, an LTC of 7 or lower, and in your partnership agreement, requires you to bid the cheapest first round control. Complying with your partnership agreement, you dutifully bid 3♣. Partner now bids 3♥ which clearly denies any outside first round control. Time for some math - your LTC of 4 plus partner's worst case LTC of 7 adds to 11 and $24 - 11 = 13$ winners. You recognize that as long as partner holds both the AH and the KH, a grand slam in hearts is virtually assured. What do you bid? Of course you said 5NT, the grand slam force and happily pass your partner's 7H bid.

Partner's hand was:

♠ KQJ3
♥ AKJ97
♦ 2
♣ Q43

I held this hand and felt that my LTC of 5 put us in a definite slam zone and the best way to explore slam was to bid a forcing raise (2NT) as opposed to a 1♠ response. I'll leave it to you and your partner to arrive at a 7♥ contract following a 1♠ response.

Bottom line is to Always Be Counting and use Losing Trick Count in both hand evaluation and bidding. When you pick up your hand and count your cards to make sure there are exactly 13 cards, you should get into the habit of counting your LTC as well as HCP and quick tricks - EVERY HAND!