

ABC of Bridge

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Hand evaluation is critically important to having the partnership arrive at the optimal contract. Hand evaluation begins in a static fashion and often morphs in a dynamic fashion.

The ABCs entail Counting, Communicating, and Curiosity. Let's see how hand evaluation is fundamental to the first two Cs. Assume that your system requirement to open one of a suit in first or second seat involves the rule of 20, 2 quick tricks, and a losing trick count (LTC) of 7 or less.

At match points and equal vulnerability, you hold, as dealer, the following North hand:

♠ 109642
♥ K98
♦ AJ4
♣ K4

The rule of 20 fails as 11 HCP plus (length of two longest suits) equals only 19. While there are 2 Quick tricks, the LTC exceeds the required 7 to open. Thus Pass is the disciplined bid in first seat. The auction proceeds with East passing and South opening in third seat, 1♠.

If West passes, how should North bid his hand? If the partnership uses Drury (single or double barreled), North can use this convention to communicate an invitational spade raise. Non-Drury Norths can offer an invitational limit raise of 3♠, showing an LTC of 8 with at least 4 card trump support.

The ball is now in South's court. South, with his 13 HCP and 7 loser hand does the basic math inherent in the Losing Trick Count thesis. $7+8=15$ and $24-15=9$ likely winners in a spade contract. South passes the limit raise and expects to make the 3♠ contract.

Suppose however, West in fourth seat, overcalls the 1♠ opening bid with a 2♥ overcall. Should this new information impact North's next call? Emphatically YES!! Hand evaluation has just transitioned from static to dynamic status. North recognizes that his holdings in hearts, diamonds, and clubs are more valuable with the presumed knowledge of where the defensive strength resides.

If the partnership uses Drury, North should use that convention and make sure the partnership gets at least to a 4♠ contract. Non-Drury Norths should just jump to 4♠ as the non-spade holding is fully working and the fifth spade is a bonus. One final thought is that at IMPS, North is best served to jump to 4♠ as that is likely to be the contract at the other table and avoiding an IMP loss tips the balance to a game contract. The South hand: ♠ KQJ53 ♥ J5 ♦ Q4 ♣ A653.