

THE LOSING TRICK COUNT – THE BASICS

The point count is only an estimate. In particular, queens and jacks (“quacks”) are overvalued, and aces and kings (“pointy stuff”) are undervalued. Other metrics can help you assess a hand more accurately.

I have found something called the **Losing Trick Count** to be particularly helpful in finding light games and slams that the point count might miss.

This is how it works:

1. In working out the loser count of your hand, you look at the first 3 cards in each suit. Any card other than the AKQ of the suit counts as one loser. So:

- (a) AKQ76 is no losers
- (b) KQ2 is one loser
- (c) K876 is 2 losers
- (d) 9643 is 3 losers

2. If you have only 2 cards in a suit, any card other than the AK is a loser. So:

- (a) AK is no losers
- (b) A6 is one loser
- (c) 54 is 2 losers

3. If you have a singleton, anything other than the ace counts as a loser.

4. Where the queen is not supported by the A or K, count Qxx as 2 ½ losers, unless the J or 10 is held.

So, looking at the hand:

S AK765	=	1 loser
H 1094	=	3 losers
D KQ7	=	1 loser
C 86	=	2 losers

		7 losers

When you know the number of losers you have and know the number of losers partner has shown from his/her bidding, you add the 2 together and take the result away from 24. This will give you the number of tricks you can make.

For example, if partner has opened the bidding (at least a 7 loser hand) and I have the above hand of 7 losers, I know $24 - (7+7) = 10$ tricks and we are in the game ballpark.

But how do know how many losers partner has? The following point counts or bidding ranges roughly correspond to the number of losers partner has:

6-9pts, minimal response =	9 losers
10-12pts, invitational hand =	8 losers
12-15pts, minimal opening =	7 losers
16-18pts, stronger opening =	6 losers
19-21pts, very strong opening =	5 losers
22+pts, game force opening =	4 losers or less

The loser count is only strictly valid (and most accurate) when you have a suit fit.

However, prior to a suit fit it can give you a ballpark idea of where you should be bidding the hand to. For example, if my partner opens with a 1 level bid (at least a 7 loser), and I have a 5 loser hand, $7+5 = 12$ and $24 - 12 = 12$ tricks and I am aware we are in a possible small slam zone.

If there is no suit fit or the hands are very misfitting, then the loser count is likely to be inaccurate and too optimistic. If you have a lot of quacks, the Losing Trick Count can also be inaccurate and too optimistic.

The suits:

A98

Q108

are both "2 losers" but while the ace almost always will be a winning trick, the holding Q108 might not win any and be 3 losers.

The Loser Count is most accurate when you have a suit fit and lots of pointy cards.

	♠ AQJ ♥ J8753 ♦ AK10 ♣ 53	
♠ 92 ♥ A10964 ♦ 972 ♣ 1042	♠ K10876543 ♥ - ♦ 54 ♣ AK7	♠ - ♥ KQ2 ♦ QJ863 ♣ QJ986

N	E	S (Me)	W
1H	3C (1)	3S	P
4S	P	5C (2)	P
5D (2)	P	6S	P
P (3)	P		

- (1) Showing 5+/5+ in the minors
- (2) First or second round control
- (3) After a lot of thought!

When partner opens (at least a 7 loser hand), my South hand is currently worth 10 HCPs + 4 points for the 8 card spade suit = 14 points. So I will probably be propelling this hand to game in spades, though if partner keeps repeating hearts it could signal a misfit and I might have to tone down my optimism.

Once partner raises 3S to 4S showing the fit, the hand revalues upwards sharply. According to the point count, the hand is worth 10 HCPs + 5 points for the heart void + 1 point for the diamond doubleton = 16 points. This suggests we are not in slam territory (12 points minimum for partner + 16 for us = 28 and not the 33 we need for small slam).

However, the losing trick count says our hand is a 5 loser opposite an opening hand (at least 7 loser) so $24 - (5 + 7) = 12$ tricks. The loser count is likely to be more accurate here as we have a big trump fit and lots of pointy stuff (aces and kings).

The problem with my hand is there could be 2 diamond losers off the top. So I bid 5C a **Control Bid**. This says I have first round control (ace or void) or second round control (king or singleton) in clubs and am interested in slam but have a control problem in another suit. Partner bids 5D showing first or second round control in that suit, and I know we won't lose 2 diamonds straight away and am happy to bid 6S

Partner finally has a long think about bidding 7S. I have just bid 6S missing SAQJ which partner holds and with 2 losers in diamonds and partner has DAK. A 7S bid would not have been unreasonable.