

## Keep on Counting

(Friday mini-lesson – 1 November 2019)

Continuing a theme that I covered in a mini-lesson a few weeks ago, it's very, *very* important to keep counting high card points throughout the play of the hand. After the following bidding:

<i>West</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>You</i>
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♣
Pass	3♣	All Pass	

You, as South end up as declarer with the hands below:

♠ T 8 7  
♥ 9 6 5  
♦ A K  
♣ K 7 4 3 2

♠ A K Q J  
♥ 8 7 4 2  
♦ J 9  
♣ Q 6 5

West leads the J♥. East wins with the Q♥ and cashes the A♥ and K♥ (everyone following), then shifts to a ♠. How should you continue?

You've lost the first three tricks and now can only afford to lose one ♣ trick - notice your *very poor* spot card holding in the suit. What do you *need* to happen to avoid more than one loser? Clearly you need a friendly 3-2 trump split *and* one opponent to hold specifically ace-doubleton.

**Which opponent is more likely to have that distribution?** If you've been doing your HCP counting you know that East started with 9 HCP in the ♥ suit – and East passed in 3<sup>rd</sup> seat. So clearly you can deduce that West must have the A♣. This points the way for you. At trick five, lead a low ♣ towards dummy's K. When this wins, as you knew it would, return a low ♣ and play low from your hand. When West's A♣ appears, give yourself a pat on the back for thoughtful play. Here are all four hands:

	♠ T 8 7	
	♥ 9 6 5	
	♦ A K	
♠ 6 4 3	♣ K 7 4 3 2	♠ 9 5 2
♥ J T 3		♥ A K Q
♦ Q T 6 5 2		♦ 8 7 4 3
♣ A 8	♠ A K Q J	♣ J T 9
	♥ 8 7 4 2	
	♦ J 9	
	♣ Q 6 5	

Here's a very similar problem, where counting HCP steers you towards the best play.

The bidding goes as follows:

<i>West</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>You</i>
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

West leads the three top clubs against your 4♠ contract, and here are the hands.

	♠ Q T 9 4	
	♥ K J T 9	
	♦ A 2	
♠ 8 5 2	♣ T 4 3	♠ 7
♥ ? 5		♥ ? ? 6 3 2
♦ 9 7 4 3		♦ 8 6 5
♣ A K Q 6	♠ A K J 6 3	♣ 8 7 5 2
	♥ 7 4	
	♦ K Q J T	
	♣ J 9	

You ruff the third ♣, draw trumps in three rounds, then cash your four ♦ tricks, discarding two low ♥s from dummy.

You can only afford one more loser and now it's time to bite the bullet and lead ♥s and make a decision on what to play from dummy. Clearly, if *both* the missing A-Q are in the East hand sitting over your K-J in dummy, there is nothing you can do and you'll just go one down and move on to the next hand.

But if the missing ♥ honours are split, then you theoretically have a pure guess whether to play the K or the J from dummy after leading low from your hand.

Do you finesse dummy's jack or go up with the king? Why?

From the first three tricks you learned that West started with 9 HCP in ♣s – and passed in first seat. Obviously, **West does not have the A♥**, but there is hope he might have the Q♥. So call for the jack from dummy. When West has to win that trick with the ace, you are home.

**Summary:** If you really want to elevate your game many levels, keep a continual track of the high-card points played.