

## More on Counting

(Friday mini-lesson – 3 January 2020)

Continuing a theme that I have covered in recent mini-lessons over the last couple of months, there is a clear way to improve your declarer play by leaps and bounds. That is, counting the opponents' high-card points. After the following bidding:

<i>West</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>You</i>
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♥
1♠	2♥	Pass	4♥ (All Pass)

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

♠ K 7 4  
♥ T 9 5 2  
♦ J 4 3  
♣ K J T

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

West leads the A♦, followed by the K♦, while East encourages, then a third ♦ to East's Q. East shifts to the 2♠. How should you continue?

**The most important factor that separates experts from lesser players is counting the opponents' high-card points.** This can be facilitated by an opponent's opening bid, an overcall, *or an initial pass*.

At trick four, win the A♠ (the honour from the shorter side first), draw trumps, play a ♠ to dummy's K, and ruff dummy's last ♠ in your hand. The opponents both follow suit. What have you learned?

West is marked with 10 HCP, the ♦ A K and the ♠ Q J. Because West did *not* open the bidding, this means East **almost certainly** has the Q♣. Play a ♣ to dummy's K, then run the J♣ back, playing low if East plays low.

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

Example 2. The bidding goes as follows:

<i>West</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>You</i>
		Pass	1♠
Pass	2♦	Pass	3♦
Pass	4♠	All Pass	

West leads the 10♥, and East wins three tricks in the suit with the J, K, and A, then shifts to the Q♣. How would you continue?

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

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

You have lost the first three tricks, have no losers in the other two side suits and one potential loser in trumps, where on paper, the percentage play is to finesse the J rather than play for the drop.

But you have seen East produce 10 HCP, the ♥ A K J and the Q♣. And given that lead of the Q♣, you can place him with the J♣ as well, bringing his total to 11. Thus East **cannot** have the Q♠, otherwise, he would have opened the bidding as dealer.

Therefore, reject the percentage play in ♠s and cash the top two honours, hoping that West has Q-doubleton.

If he does, your contract is home and you have played brilliantly. If he doesn't, partner has overbid again!

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

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