

## BIDDING 2 – HOW HIGH SHOULD I COMPETE TO?

When you are in competition with the opposition for the contract, something called the “Law of Total Tricks” helps tell you how far it is sensible to push things. The “Law” was first proposed back in the 1950’s, but only became widespread knowledge with the publication in 1992 of Marty Bergen’s book, “To Bid or Not to Bid: The Law of Total Tricks”. The “Law” reads:

The total number of trumps in their best trump fit + the total number of trumps in our best trump fit = The total number of tricks they can make in their fit + the total number of tricks we can make in our fit.

Be aware that the “Law” doesn’t always hold and that the “Guide of Total Tricks” might be a better description.

What does that all mean for practical purposes?

**If you have an 8 card trump fit:** It’s usually safe and effective to bid 2 over 2 (eg 2H over an opposition 2D), 3 over 2 (eg 3C over an opposition 2S bid), but NOT 3 over 3 (eg a 3H bid over a 3D opposition bid).

**If you have a 9 card trump fit:** It’s usually safe and effective to bid 3 over 3 (eg a 3H bid over an opposition 3C bid) but not 4 over 3 (eg a 4 diamond bid over an opposition 3S bid).

**If you have a 10 card trump fit:** It’s usually safe and effective to bid to the 4 level IF ONE OF OUR HANDS HAS A SHORTAGE (a singleton or void). With no shortage, the 3 level is usually the limit.

Let’s look at an example:

		S AQJ75		
		H 654		
		D AQ8		
		C 54		
	S 3	N		S K2
	H KQJ32			H A1098
	D KJ4	W     E		D 1096
	C AQJ9			C K1072
		S		
		S 109864		
		H 7		
		D 7532		
		C 863		
N	E	S	W	
1S	P	4S!	?	

Despite the absence of any points, South with a singleton and knowing there is a 10 trump spade fit should bid this hand straight to 4S. This puts EW in a difficult position. If they bid 5H, they are one down (SA and DAQ). If they double for penalties, NS lose 5 tricks (SK, HA, a diamond and 2 clubs) for -300 non-vul or -500 vul. This is a gain against the heart game that EW have for -420 non-vul or -620 vul, except where NS are vul and EW are non-vul.

Let's change things slightly:

	S AQJ75	
	H 654	
	D AQ8	
	C 54	
S 3	N	S K2
H KQJ3		H A1098
D KJ42	W    E	D 1096
C AQJ9		C K1072
	S	
	S 109864	
	H 72	
	D 753	
	C 863	

The hands are very similar, but this time South has no shortage. If NS attempt 4S again, they will be 3 off (SK, HAK, a diamond and 2 clubs) for -500 non-vul or -800 vul. Too much against a -420 for a non-vul game or -620 for a vul game, **EXCEPT** where they are non-vul (-500) against vul (-620).

Thus, where you have a 10 card trump fit but no shortage, the 3 level is usually as far as you can safely push things.

Remember the Law of total tricks is a **GUIDE**, not a law of nature.

Things that indicate you might be able to push a little higher than the law says:

1. Shortage in the opposition suit (but be wary because partner might have a stack!)
2. Favourable vulnerability,
3. Well placed cards

Things that indicate you might not want to push up to what the law says:

1. A stack of opposition trumps or good cards in the opposition suit,
2. Unfavourable vulnerability,
3. Badly placed cards.