

Losing Trick Count

Rationale

Most players are familiar with the Goren point count system where A = 4; K = 3 etc. When a fit is found, shape points are added for the 9th and subsequent trump, 5 for a void, 3 for a singleton and 1 for a doubleton. Points are deducted for an aceless opening hand, QJ doubleton etc.

Not surprisingly, this is not the only way of valuing hands. This lesson focuses on the Losing Trick Count (LTC). Under this system, when a fit is found, you add your LTC to partner's LTC and subtract the answer from 18. This gives the level to which you should bid. e.g. You have a 6 loser, partner says he has an 8 loser. $8 + 6 = 14$; $18 - 14 = 4$. So, you can bid to the 4 level.

This is how you find your LTC

• Looking at only the top 3 cards in each suit, add one loser for each of the A, K and Q which are missing.

♠K3 1 loser. Only Ace is missing
♥AQT94 1 loser. King is missing
♦A72 2 losers. K & Q missing
♣873 3 losers. A, K and Q all missing
We say this hand is a $1 + 1 + 2 + 3 = 7$ loser Open 1H

♠A94 2 loser
♥J86 3 loser
♦K6543 2 loser
♣Q4 2 loser A & K are missing

We say this hand is a $2 + 3 + 2 + 2 = 9$ loser
Respond just 2H with this hand being a 9 or 10 loser. See the note below.
Opener adds his 7 loser hand to partner's at best 9 loser. $7 + 9 = 16$; $18 - 16 = 2$ level is quite high enough. Notice that 4H has no hope and 3H is scary.

Further Notes

- Add one loser for an aceless hand if opening or as responder for marginal decisions.
- An ordinary opening hand is usually a 6 or 7 loser. A strong hand worthy of a jump rebid should be a 5 loser. A 4 loser warrants bidding to a major suit game
- A single raise of opener's major should be a 9 or 10 loser.
- A jump raise of opener's major is an 8 loser.
- A game raise of opener's major should be a 7 loser.
- Some 12+ HCP hands are 8 losers. If you are RESPONDING with such a hand, don't make an invitational bid and risk missing game. With an opening hand each, there are compensating values as suits fit together to reduce the number of losers
- If opener shows a six card suit and you plan to raise with a doubleton, don't reduce your LTC because of a doubleton trump! Two trumps can never be better than three!
- Use RKC Blackwood to check that the opponents don't have two aces to cash when LTC tells you to bid slam!
- We say that the LTC system is quite "robust" .i.e. It works on a surprisingly large number of hands. It is certainly a better indicator than "points" when it comes to distributional hands.

• A weak Two Bid typically is a 7 or 8 loser hand. Devotees to LTC incorporate this into their requirements for an opening bid of 2M. Responder can then decide whether to bid game (6 loser), invite game (7 loser) or pass (8 loser)
Try bidding these hands using LTC and judgment. In each case, West is dealer.

♠KQ ♠A94 1H 2H
♥AQT94 ♥J86 3H 4H
♦A72 ♦K6543
♣K73 ♣Q4

17 HCP & 6 losers? The hand is too good for that. Make it a 5 loser and invite game. Responder sees open as a 5 loser. $5 + 9 = 14$; $18 - 14 = 4$ H

♠K7 ♠632 Responder has a
♥AQT94 ♥J7532 10 loser. In theory
♦972 ♦4 we bid 1H – 2H.
♣AJ7 ♣8542
The weak freak is too much to resist! Bid 1H – 4H
Let's see them find their spade game now!

♠7 ♠632 1H 3H
♥AQT94 ♥K97 4NT 5D
♦AQT87 ♦K2 6H
♣A9 ♣KT864 Responder doesn't
need to add a loser for an aceless hand since he is
not evaluating for game. $8 + 4 = 12$; $18 - 12 = 6$ H
Would you get to it using "points" – I doubt it.

♠AK83 ♠QT64 1C 1H
♥K87 ♥AT64 1S 3S
♦T9 ♦532 pass
♣A532 ♣K7

Responder gives a limit raise (8 loser). Opener with a 7 loser declines. $8 + 7 = 15$; $18 - 15 = 3$

♠K7 ♠A95 1H 2C
♥AQT94 ♥K87 2NT 3NT or 4H
♦A64 ♦K73
♣J72 ♣Q864

Despite responder holding an 8 loser, he decides not to make the limit raise. This would make 3H the final contract. 3NT is cold while 4H has fair chances.

♠84 ♠AQ73 2H 3H
♥AK9765 ♥J82 4H
♦T642 ♦K7
♣6 ♣AT74

2H opening promises 7 or 8 losers.
This pair play 3H as invitational showing a 7 loser.
Opener calculates $7 + 7 = 14$; $18 - 14 = 4$ H

♠QT765 ♠AK 1D 1H
♥3 ♥A9874 2S¹ 3C²
♦AQJ943 ♦K75 3S³ 4NT⁴
♣A ♣K64 5S 6D⁵

¹A 4 loser and well worth showing as a powerhouse.
²4th Suit Forcing. ³the 5th spade confirms 6 diamonds.
⁴RKC in spades. ⁵Without knowing DQ, 6D is enough