

Counting Losers

Everybody will be aware of the point count means of evaluating your hand (well by now I hope). 4 for an ace, etc and extra pts for length but not shortages (until a fit is found). When I started learning you needed 13 HCP (high card points) to open the bidding at the 1 level (below 1NT). Nowadays people open with less on my system card it says 9 pts (with a shapely hand).

However, there are other ways to evaluate a hand. Counting losers is one of them.

Consider;

♠ KQJT987654

♥ 5

♦ 4

♣ K

Would you open 1S, 2C or 4S or Pass?

I hope that you would instinctively see that this is a strong hand and that if partner only has 12 points in the form of three aces to make 12 or 13 tricks. In your mind you will have realised that this hand can only lose 4 tricks to the 4 aces. And there fore it is too strong for 4S or a pass and not strong enough for 2C (not enough quick tricks).

More borderline hands are more difficult to evaluate.

♠ J8765

♥ KQ4

♦ A43

♣ Q2

Would you open this hand for instance? Some would open this hand; some wouldn't. Those of you that follow the point count probably would; 12 points +1 length and with 5 spades you would open 1S. This hand is clearly marginal. The Q♣ is suspect and your main suit is rubbish.

Let's count the losers.

Here is how:

1. Count losers only in the first 3 cards of a suit the rest are winners.
2. With 3 or more cards in a suit the A,K and Q are winners anything lower is a loser.
3. With 2 cards in a suit the A or K is a winner anything lower is a loser.
4. With one card in the suit the A is a winner and anything lower is a loser.

So, in the above hand there are;

3 losers in Spades. (J87)

1 loser in Hearts (4)

2 losers in Diamonds (43)

And 2 losers in Clubs (Q2)

This hand is an 8 loser hand. Most opening hands are 7 losers. Maybe it is best to pass with this hand.

Counting losers is often useful when the hands are on the cusp of the ranges i.e. 5-6pts,11-13 pts, 15-16 pts and 21-22pts. They can also give an indication as to which level do you want to stop at, especially in a suit contract with a fit. Your partner invites you to game with 3 hearts. Do you go on to 4 hearts or wimp out and stop?

In any given hand the total possible losers is 12.

- ♠5432
- ♥432
- ♦432
- ♣432

This hand has 12 losers because the 2 of spades is regarded as a winner (good luck with that!). Between the two hands there are 24 losers. It follows then if you count the losers in your hand and add it to your partner's losers take it away from 24 you will be left with the tricks you should take in that hand. (It doesn't always work, of course but then either does the point count).

How do you know how many losers does partner have?

An opening bid of;

2♣ generally is a **4 loser hand**.

1 of a suit followed by a jump shift (1♠ – 1NT - 3♣; 18+ pts) generally is a **5 Loser hand**.

1 of a suit followed by a reverse (1♣ - 1♠ - 2♥; 16-18pts) generally is a **6 Loser hand**.

1 of a suit and jumping in his suit or responder's suit (1♥-1♠-3♥, or 1♥ - 1♠ - 3♣; 16-18pts) is also a **6 loser hand**.

1 of a suit followed by a simple raise or 1NT is a **7 loser hand**.

Pre-emptive bids (2♠, 3♦ or 4♠) are **9 loser hands**.

Responder will show;

A single raise (1♠-2♠; 6-9 pts) will be a 9 loser hand.

Bidding 1 NT (1♣ - 1NT; 6-9 pts) will be a 9 loser hand

A jump raise (1♠-3♠; 10-11pts) will be an eight loser hand.

Here are a couple of examples.

Bidding

	Partner	You
1.	1♠	2♠
	3♠ (invitation 16-18 pts) 6 loser	♠ K32 ♥ AQ32 ♦ 542 ♣ 542 PASS! 9 loser hand 24-(9+6) = 9 tricks available
2	1♠	2♠
	3♠	♠ K32 ♥ AQ532 ♦ 42

		♣ 542 Bid 4♠ 8 loser hand 24-(8+6) = 10 tricks available
3.	1♣	1♥
	2♥ (12-15pts) 7 loser hand	♠ K32 ♥ AQ532 ♦ 42 ♣ 542 Pass 8 loser hand 24-(8+7) = 9 tricks available
4.		1♣
	1♥	♠ J32 ♥ AKQ532 ♦ K4 ♣ Q2 Bid 2♥! 7 loser hand 3♥ would show a 6 loser hand
5.		1♣
	1♥	2♥
	3♥ (10-11 pts) 9 loser hand	♠ J32 ♥ AKQ532 ♦ K4 ♣ Q2 Pass!! 7 loser hand 24-(9+7) = 8 tricks available Not easy to do, I admit

Happy Counting