



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(330) Counting Points - After Partner Bids

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Level: 1

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General

High card points are a good starting point for evaluating our hand, but we can do better. Adding adjustments for length points and poorly located honors (before the auction begins) is a good way to improve our evaluation, but we should not settle for that being good enough. We should continue to adjust how we measure the playing strength of our hand as we get more information from the auction. Using the information from the auction to re-evaluate our hand is a skill that we must practice. One important time when we make use of this re-evaluation skill is when we get information from partner about their hand. Let's take a look at how we re-evaluate our hand making use of the information that partner has given us.

Location of Honors – Honors in Partner's Suit

When we have honors in our long suits, they help set up the little cards in those suits and make it easier for us to take tricks. When our honors are in our shorter suits, they do not set up our little cards (they only take their tricks). But when partner opens a suit, we need to re-evaluate our honors, especially those in the suit that partner has bid.

We now reconsider the value we give to these points in points in partner's suit – we upgrade! We visualize these points as being a part of (atop) partner's long suit. Thus, we need to upgrade these points as if we were adding length points to partner's hand. The more points we have in partner's suit, the easier it will be to set it up and thus the more we need to upgrade. It is also important to note that when we have lots of points in partner's suit, we know the suit is setting up well and partner does not. That means that partner will be conservative and frequently underbid. Since we know that our side is likely to take more tricks than normal, it is our responsibility to upgrade our hand and bid more aggressively for our side.

Example 1

♠ KJ

When we have a holding like this, our ♠ holding before the auction begins is worth less than 4 points (3-3.5 points). But if partner opens the bidding 1♠, then the value of these 4 HCP goes up to at least 5 total points.



Another thing to consider is what types of honors in our hand are best. Aces and Kings are generally the best type of points (the ones that are most likely to take tricks), but we also want to reconsider our other values (Queens and Jacks) as we learn more information about partner's hand. Specifically, our Queens and Jacks are valuable in our long suits or in partner's long suits, but Jacks are far less valuable in our or partner's short suits (and thus we slightly downgrade them).

Fits

Having honors in partner's suit is an excellent reason to upgrade. When we are re-evaluating our hand after partner bids, there is another aspect of our hand that is at least as important as the location of our honors – the size of our fit! A fit is having at least 8 cards in a suit, between our hand and partner's. A common bridge saying is "*Fit is King!*" for good reason. The larger fit we have, the more tricks we can take on offense, often even with very few HCP. Many of our modern bidding tools are designed to help us look for fits and to determine the size of our fit more accurately. The larger our fit, the more points we will add to our hand when we are re-evaluating. Conversely, when we have a misfit (shortness in partner's suit) we will subtract points from our hand and be more conservative.

When we have a fit and are likely to play in a suit contract (not headed towards 3NT), then we have an additional adjustment we can make to our hand – these are called "*shortness points*", "*support points*", or "*ruffing values*." To upgrade for these shortness points we need to have the following aspects to our hand:

- A fit with partner.
- Shortness in a side suit.
- Be the short side of the trump fit (In a 4-4 fit both sides count as the short side.)

Once we have all of these items, we can upgrade our hand. We usually add these support points to our hand as:

- 2 points for a singleton
- 3 points for a void

Example 2

♠ A84

♥ 98542

♦ 3

♣ KQ98

If partner opens 1♠, we re-evaluate our 9 HCP and upgrade to 11 total points. We make a limit raise (either by jumping to 3♠ or starting with 1NT and later bidding 3♠).



But as our fit becomes larger, we gain more ruffing values and need to add even more support points. This is especially true for voids and singletons. Thus, in 9+ card fit situations, many players add points as follows:

- 3 points for a singleton
- 5 points for a void

These adjustments to our HCP are just approximations of the playing strength of our hand, because the actual usefulness of our shortness will vary based on partner's holding in our short suit. (The more points partner has there, the worse the hand is likely to play.)

Note: Splinters are an extremely useful tool in modern bidding because by showing our fit, shortness, and values. we allow partner to more precisely re-evaluate our hands.

Example 3

♠ A983

♥ T976

♦ 5

♣ AQT2

When we picked up this hand, we have only 10 HCP (and no adjustments). But if partner opens the bidding 1♠, then with our 4-card ♠ support, 2 Aces, and singleton, we have plenty of points to force to game. We can jump to 4♦ as a splinter, showing our game forcing values (10 HCP and 3 support points) with 4+card ♠ support and singleton or void in ♦.

Conclusion

The most important thing we need to remember is to keep listening to the auction. Taking into account partner's shape is a very important part of proper hand evaluation. Try to determine partner's primary suit, secondary suit, shortness, and visualize their hand (or make an educated guess). Remember it is not just our hand that is going to be taking tricks, it is both of our hands fitting together. Work on your visualization and picture the way the two hands fit together to improve your hand evaluation.