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Counting While You Play the Hand Notes

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Counting as Declarer

Counting is a lot of work. There are so many different things that we could spend our time counting on any given hand (HCP, distribution of a suit, distribution of an opponent's hand, all 52 cards, etc.) How do we know which is the most important to focus on? Do we have enough mental energy to count all of the things that we should?

The short answer to this last question is No! When you first start counting you will not have enough mental energy to count all of the things you wish you could. But that is ok! When you start to play a hand you already have a lot to think about -- Winners and/or losers and planning for how to proceed. How is spending energy on counting other things supposed to help? How much energy should we spend on it?

Goals for Counting

Before we can see the answer to the above questions, let's try to understand what we want to accomplish. The reason for counting is to arm ourselves with valuable information (dig it up from the table) so that when we have to make a choice between certain lines of play, we can do better than just guess.

We want to arm ourselves with this information early in the play so that we can make "long term plans" and use this information (that we discover or infer) to shape our play options. Some information we may need to determine at trick 1 or 2, in order to make good choices, while other "guesses" may not need to be solved until the very end of the play. Our goal is become educated at the moment in time (the trick) that we need to be in order to make a decision.

Effort

Since we do not have an infinite amount of time and an infinite amount of brain power, a key part of counting is going to be figuring out what we should be focusing on for a particular hand. As a defender, Bob Hamman constantly asks himself, "What the hell is going on?" As a declarer, you should be asking yourself something similar -- "What in the world am I supposed to figure out?" If you can answer this question, then you will apply your energy in efficient and effective ways. Then we can try to figure out what we can count to help us "figure this out". That is the goal of counting, to help you answer the important question(s) on the hand.



What Should We Count?

When we declare, there are many things that we can spend our time counting.

- RHO's HCP
- LHO's HCP
- Distribution of the Club Suit
- Distribution of the Diamond Suit
- Distribution of the Heart Suit
- Distribution of the Spade Suit
- RHO's Shape
- LHO's Shape

Counting a Suit

- 1 to 13
- The Outstanding Ones
- Patterns
 - 4333, 4432, 4441
 - 5332, 5422, 5431, 5440
 - 6322, 6331, 6421, 6430
 - 7222, 7321, 7330, 7411, 7420, 7510, 7600

Which Suit to Count

- Trump Suit – “Don't forget the one they trumped in with...”
- Suits missing an honor (Queen or Jack)
- 7-card Fit (4-3 fit)

Counting a Hand

- Put the *Patterns* together to picture the hand.

Counting HCP

- Our HCP
- Their HCP
- How are these HCP divided?
- Using the Auction?
- Did they open the bidding?
- Placing Honors