

Bridge Theory for the Practitioners

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17. Loser Count Math: Part II

In a previous column I introduced you to counting losers. In this column I will show how the loser count math can help you to bid game where the point count might be off and stay out of game when the point count might indicate otherwise.

Before I continue though, I want you to note two very important points:

- 1) Point count method does not work well in suit contracts but works very well in notrump contracts.
- 2) The loser count principle works very well in a suit contract with a fit.

The Principle of Loser Count: Expected Number of Tricks in a SUIT contract with a fit = 24 - (number of Losers in your hand + number of Losers in partner's hand)

(The reason it is 24 and not 26 is that some Losers are double counted when the hand is played out and must be discounted properly)

Categories of Opening Hands for opening 1 of a suit:

Below Minimum Opening Hands	8 losers or more
Minimum Opening Hand	7 losers
Better than minimum opening	6 losers
A Strong Hand	5 losers

Notes:

- With a 8-loser hand do not open 1 of a suit in first or 2nd chair; you might consider opening weak-2 but more on that in a later column. You might open an 8-loser hand 1 of a suit on third chair.
- Consider opening 2C with strong hands with 4 or less losers; more on that in a later column as well.

Categories of Responder's Hands when partner opens 1 of a suit and you have a fit:

For a specific example, consider that partner opens 1S and you have at least 3 spades and considering between pass, 2S, a limit raise by your method, or a game forcing auction.

Pass	10+ losers
Minimum raise	9 losers
Limit raise	8 losers
Game Forcing auction	7 or less losers

Revisit the Loser Count Principle:

1. Opener has a minimum hand = 7 losers
 - a. Minimum raise = 9 losers; tricks you can make = $24 - (7+9) = 8$ i.e. 2S is making.
 - b. Limit Raise = 8 losers; tricks you can make = $24 - (7+8) = 9$ i.e. 3S is making.
 - c. GF = 7 losers; tricks you can make = $24 - (7+7) = 10$ i.e. 4S is making.

2. Opener has a better than minimum hand i.e. 6 loser hand

Responder bids 2S i.e. 9 loser hand and you can make $24 - (6+9) = 9$ tricks. Thus there is room for a game try and if the two hands fit together game might make. So make a game try showing shortness or the absence of it (more on a very sophisticated yet simple game try structure in a future column as well). Responder might accept the game try by bidding 4S or reject by bidding 3S.

3. Opener has a strong hand i.e. 5 loser hand

Responder bids 2S i.e. 9 loser hand and you can make $24 - (5+9) = 10$ tricks. Now, you should put the contract immediately to game level either by bidding 4S if there is no shortness or by making a “game try” to check out whether responder has any shortness. And yes, more on that will be presented in a future column.

More General Examples of Loser Count Principle:

1. If the bidding goes say

1C 1H

and you have a H fit, you would bid

2H = 7 losers, minimum opening

3H = 6 losers

4H = 5 losers

Let's say responder has a minimum hand with 9 losers. Then

- when you bid 2H you expect to make $24 - (7+9) = 8$ tricks
- when you bid 3H you expect to make $24 - (6+9) = 9$ tricks
- when you bid 4H you expect to make $24 - (5+9) = 10$ tricks

2. You open (or overcall) 1S and partner shows a limit raise (meaning partner has 8 losers)

- You should sign off in 3S with a minimum hand (i.e. 7 losers) as you expect to make $24 - (7+8) = 9$ tricks
- You should bid game with a 6 loser hand as you expect to make $24 - (6+8) = 10$ tricks
- You should probe for slam with a 5 loser hand (you would open 1S with this hand but rarely would overcall 1S --- rather double and then bid S later to show such a strong hand) as you see $24 - (5+8) = 11$ tricks.

Specific Example of Loser Count Principle:

You open 1S with

AK765 Q75 KQ82 9

Only 14 count but a great hand with 5 losers only.

Partner bids 2S typically showing 9 losers. You are in the game region with $24 - (5+9) = 10$ tricks at least. Make a game try to show that C shortness. For example if partner has a minimum hand like

Q82 KJ32 J97 T84,

game is likely.

Extra! Extra!

Now here is something extra for you that even many real experts do not know. Mel Colchamiro wrote about this briefly in a Bridge Bulletin column several years ago and I have confirmed it with my simulations. If you have a 5422 shape hand, loser count math goes wrong often as there could be too many quick losers. So if you have a 5422 shape hand go over the loser count math first and then see where the cards are in the short suit or long suit and then decide for yourself.