

Article 18 Counting in Defence HCPs and Shape – 4

These articles are based on lessons of Andrew Robson, one of the UKs best teachers and players.

1. Counting Opponents High Card Points

Counting High Card Points is also useful in defence, particularly after dummies hand goes down. With 40HCPs in the pack, if declarer opens 1NT then you can very accurately determine to within 2 points your partners point holding once dummy goes down

Take Hand 1 below: (again if you don't find it easy to understand from the lay-out, take out a pack of cards and try that technique)

Dealer: North

♠ KQ J109

Vul: Neither

♥ AKQ

♦ 762

♣ J7

♠ A2

♠ 7543

♥ 93

♥ 108742

♦ Q9853

♦ J4

♣ KQ102

♣ A3

♠ 86

♥ J65

♦ AK10

♣ 98654

Bidding

S	W	N	E
		1♠	p
1NT	p	2NT	p
3NT	All Pass		

Lead: ♦5

Leading 4th highest against NT, this is covered by ♦2, ♦J and ♦K. Declarer then leads ♠6.

Start thinking about HCPs. Declarer had shown 6-8(perhaps 9) HCPs with a 1NT overcall and since converting 2NT to 3NT suggests that declarer has the

upper range but ≤ 9 HCPs. Having won the first trick with $\spadesuit K$ it suggests that he has $\spadesuit AK$. If E had the $\spadesuit AJ$ then he would have won the trick with the $\spadesuit A$. Hence S has $\spadesuit AK$ and hence cannot also hold the $\clubsuit A$ and have ≤ 9 HCPs.

So take the $\spadesuit A$ and switch to $\clubsuit 2$ showing you have high honour/s. East should take the $\clubsuit A$ and return the $\clubsuit 2$ for partner to win $\clubsuit KQ10$ **putting the contract one off.**

As West you can look at dummy and see that N/S can make four $\spadesuit s$. $\heartsuit AKQ$ and $\spadesuit AK$ – enough to make game – so you must make your tricks outside these suits, so you must switch to clubs ASAP to have any chance of putting the contract back and fortunately you hold the correct cards.

2. Counting in Defence- Determining Shapes

During bidding your partner and declarer often give information about their shape and from your own hand's shape you can determine the fourth hand's shape. Adding the three shapes that you know from 13 gives you the 4th hand.

Say partner overcalls $1\spadesuit$ then he is showing 5 spades; you have 2 and dummy has 3, therefore you have a fair idea that declarer has 3.

Suppose declarer bids $1\heartsuit$ and subsequently rebids $2\diamondsuit$ then he probably has 4 diamonds, you have 3 diamonds and dummy has 2 diamonds, therefore partner probably has 4 diamonds.

Hence by assessing the shapes of the bid hands and dummy you can determine the probable shape of the two hidden hands.

Take Hand 2 below: (again if you don't find it easy to understand from the lay-out, take out a pack of cards and try that technique)

Dealer: South

♠ KQ5
♥ KJ
♦ KQ52
♣ Q1087

Vul: None

♠ 943
♥ A9862
♦ 10
♣ A952

♠ 76
♥ Q10754
♦ J9763
♣ 3

♠ AJ1082
♥ 3
♦ A84
♣ KJ64

Bidding

S	W	N	E
1♠	p	2♣	p
3♣	p	4♠	p

Lead: ♣A

Why lead the ♣A?

You know the ♣ shape even before dummy goes down.

You have heard dummy and declarer both show four clubs and you also have four, therefore dummy only has one.

You could be tempted to lead your singleton ♦10 but better to lead ♣A and then ♣9 giving your partner a ruff and your ♣9 is a suit preference signal (high card indicating to come back the higher of the two outstanding suits other than trumps, ♥s). East ruffs and returns the ♥4 asked for with west winning the ♥A and giving east another ♣ ruff to put the **contract one down**.

3. Counting in Defence – Declarer's tricks

Counting declarer's potential tricks helps your defence, particularly in NT contracts.

If you see that declarer can make his contract in three suits then the only chance of defeating the contract is the fourth suit.

This hand and bidding option illustrates the point:

Dealer: North

♠ AK
♥ K876
♦ Q2
♣ KJ1095

Vul: None

♠ J8
♥ Q94
♦ J10975
♣ A84

♠ Q732
♥ AJ102
♦ 86
♣ 762

♠ 109654
♥ 53
♦ AK43
♣ Q3

Bidding

S	W	N	E
		1♣	P
1♠	P	2♥	P
2NT	P	3NT	All Pass

Lead: ♦ J

As West you lead ♦ J and dummy's ♦ Q wins.

On trick 2 declarer leads the ♣ 5 to the ♣ Q and win with the ♣ A.

What do you do now?

Count declarer's tricks. Dummy has two ♠ tricks and now has four ♣ tricks and since the ♦ Q held has ♦ AK for has nine tricks to make the contract without anything in ♥s.

You therefore must try to make four ♥ tricks without letting declarer back in. Your partner will require to have ♥ AJ10x to put the contract back, so play for that and lead the ♥ 9, *not* ♥ Q, Bingo!! It holds, then lead the ♥ Q which also holds and the ♥ 4 through dummy's ♥ K8 to partner's ♥ AJ to put the contract one down.

NB Only the ♥ 9 works because if you lead the ♥ Q and dummy ducks, then partner must give dummy the 4th heart trick,