



Losing Trick Count – part 1

By Jennifer Jones

Are difficult bidding decisions causing you stress? Would you like a “magic formula” to give you the right answer most of the time? Then the method of hand evaluation known as Losing Trick Count (LTC) is for you!

LTC is more about the proper evaluation of fitting hands and distribution than about high-card points. It’s the reason why some 19-point games make and some 26-point games fail, and it will help you make the winning bid. Plus, you can use it on your own, even if partner has never heard of it!

This article introduces counting losers, explains how it works and shows how to apply it in some common situations. Here is the formula:

1. **Count your losers**
2. **Add partner’s losers**
3. **Deduct the total from 24**

The answer is the LTC. This is the number of tricks the partnership can expect to win most of the time — *i.e.*, if suits break normally and half of your finesses win. *It should only be used after a partnership fit is established during the bidding.*

Counting losers

1. Count losers only in the first three cards of each suit. *There are never more than three losers in a suit*

and never more losers than there are cards.

2. With three or more cards in a suit, count the ace, king and queen as winners; anything lower is a loser.
3. With a doubleton, count the ace and/or king winners. Other cards are losers. With a singleton, only the ace is a winner; anything else is a loser.

Examples: ♠A K Q 5 4 has no losers; ♠K 5 4 has two losers; ♠A K 5 4 3 has one loser; ♠K 5 has one loser; ♠7 6 5 4 3 has three losers; ♠J 5 4 has three losers; ♠K Q 5 has one loser; ♠Q 5 has two losers. Are you getting the picture?

Applying LTC

Losing trick count can be used in many situations, but this month we’ll look at raises after partner opens the bidding with one of a major.

A normal minimum opening hand contains seven losers:

♠A K 9 7 6 ♥A 7 6 4 ♦Q 3 ♠8 7.

If partner also has seven losers, the total number of losers is 14. Subtracting 14 from 24 is 10: the number of tricks the partnership can expect to win. So if partner opens the bidding and you have a seven-loser hand with a fit, you should make a forcing bid and head toward game.

An invitational hand contains eight losers, a hand such as:

♠8 7 6 5 ♥K 8 ♦K 9 6 5 ♣A 5 4.

If partner opens and you have an eight-loser hand with a fit, invite! Don’t worry too much about high-card points. Your eight losers plus partner’s seven losers equals 15, which, subtracted from 24, equals 9 — not

enough for game. Partner will pass with a seven-loser hand and bid game with a better than minimum (six-loser) hand.

What would you bid with these hands after partner opens 1♥?

♠A J 7 6 4 ♥K Q J 6 ♦J 8 ♣9 7

♠A 8 7 6 4 ♥K Q 9 6 ♦8 5 ♣9 7

While the first hand has 12 HCP and the second only 9, they both have seven losers. That makes them both game-forcing hands, so make a game-forcing bid such as Jacoby 2NT.

Both hands can be expected to produce 10 tricks opposite this minimum seven-loser opener:

♠9 2 ♥A 10 7 4 3 ♦A K 10 4 ♣Q J.

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